



Lamp Lit

summer 2026 21

LampLit

Summer 2026, Issue 2.1

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Editors: Jaime Lilley & Michael C.

Cover Image: Forest Window by crazyjane

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Summer plums, digital photograph

A Letter from the editors

Dearest contributors and readers,

One year ago, we launched Lamp Lit. We wanted to engage with a community of people who make art. We wanted to see what we could learn from reading and trying to choose work we love, and we wanted to share it. We wanted to prove that even in times that seem dark, good things do happen.

This first year of Lamp Lit has been such an incredible experience for two artsy friends, who live half the world away from each other! Neither of us knew how to do this when we started but we committed to learning. Every part of Lamp, from the promotions to the features, to the layouts and the arrangements, has been a journey of discovery and a labour of love and collaboration, both with each other and also with you.

We are so proud of this magazine! Each issue is so different, and filled with the beautiful things that surprised and delighted us. The tone and themes have come from our wonderful contributors, and the process of letting each issue reveal itself to us, organising the poems in an order that speaks, and listening to what it has to say, finding where all the desire lines connect, has been a continually surprising pleasure and privilege. We are so grateful.

To everyone who submitted, our families and friends, and to everyone reading, thank you. Thank you for making art you love, and trusting us to share your work. Here's to the next year!

Thank you for joining us here in the lamplight.

Jaime & Michael



Encinitas, Digital Photograph

Biomimicry

many nights
we walk

late down
a corner street,

leaf litter
glinting

like the lean backs
of needlefish.

from these
stomatal windows:

table noises, tin snare
imitating

subterranean
chatter—

mycelium in
the city's basement.

already, steel
buildings borrow

from phyllotaxis,
learn self-shade.

through the glass
we glimpse lives

in fragments: a mother
bathing, a man asleep

and outside,
leaves unfurling—

strips of
crinkly pavement:

ant lines, lacewings,
natural traffic.



Sea birds, Digital Photograph

diminished 7th for a boxcar boy

book bound in blue of abandoned children making the best
of an empty car, chipped dishes, a scrubbing sand

kept milk cold in a stream near that industrial yard plague
playground near dad's paint shop cable spools a domain

for spiders who haven't frightened me since the pox
a special relationship practically totemic like the illusion

(arrived as a dream of a dangerous friend to whom I might
speak when in twilight and doubt none but Spider got me)

of a tidy household of kids queued for the next stop but mom
& dad were pulled down to drink often feverish melancholy

& me Going Places calls to mind stories grandma whispered
about tramps fagbashed yet unable to abandon The Life

they couldn't give up sleeping as if free in empty cars
as if free as if free my guides' only choice to get on with it

or off of my life on rails freight rivets pocked up with old
holes chasing just another faraway train's plangent hoo

Dog's Teeth

The dog brought home and left on the front step
the severed leg of some animal—dropped it
on the mat in front of the front door and sat,

stub tail wagging, anticipating praise. She never
roamed far and so the leg and the body
it came from, which must have been the kill

of some creature fiercer than this
particular dog, could not have been far
from the house—in the scrap of woods between

our house and the neighbor's, in the wetland
between our house and route sixteen. When we first
moved to this house and its meager woods,

a year before the puppy who was this dog
ever came to be, I'd wake in the night to the voices
of coyotes, sure that they were women or children

screaming, and in the morning my parents told me
not to be afraid. A decade on, the bloodied leg
of maybe a deer is found and carried in the teeth

of a spaniel who couldn't weigh more
than forty pounds, dropped by this same dog—
finder, opportunist—on the top step

of the front porch, and I am the one to discover it,
to turn and see my proud dog show her teeth.

The Sleeves

The newly risen sun.
We are sitting on the balcony.
His sleeves—are the blossoming branches of dangerous plants.

Every thread is someone's life,
every *word*.

Poppy buds crack open and unfurl
with crumpled petals.
Lupines spread along the forest edge,
mercilessly claiming territory.
And ominous hares slip unseen across the glades.

In our silence there is warmth,
as in summer languor,
as in the scent of herbs.

I wander through the wilds,
through red-flowering thickets.



Rowan, hand-drawn, paper & liners

Calf Season

There is one end to bring to life
a girl: clearing her throat of mud.
She tolerates milk, he claims. You
say outright no, more feeling

than fact. The open sky radiates.
You have not stopped speaking
for nights. What is the opposite of
the cat has got our tongues?

Face to face on a bare mattress,
outside in: collapsed lungs, silent
ribs, an unbeating heart. You agree
to talk about where disinterest aims.

The truth is your love is mineral,
is in fact anything but animal.

In This Now

She's a tiny one, babbling while her fingers float on unseen currents, underlining her stories in gestures only she can understand. She's a dancer in miniature, gliding through rooms, her elbows never hitting corners, she's never marked by unknown bruises. This child is obsessed with shoes, her own, or yours, any shoe except her father's, her small nose wrinkling at the blackened toes of his work boots that hold tight to the shape of his feet, even when he's gone. This now makes the outside her most favorite place—bitter weather doesn't matter. In the way of little children, she does not feel her frozen cheeks, her dripping nose, her clenched raw hand gripping the first flowers of spring as she pulls them from the half-frozen ground to give to you as a gift. She's the only one, although you wanted many (sometimes life does not grant your wishes). She doesn't seem to notice, though. In this now, she's out there tumbling with the dog, feeding the chickens, racing to the cows as though they are her sisters, calling them all by name. A stretch of never-ending farmland, neat rows of cabbages ready for harvest, and she runs unbroken, the wind throwing tiny tendrils of her hair back into her laughing face. She runs and runs—her knees grubby, her feet pushed into sparkly shoes, the smell of crushed green leaves following on eddies of air spiralling out behind her. She sings—songs her way through homework, chewing on her pencil, tiny rows of teeth-marks, the crunch of No. 2 wood, all the little noises that play hide-and-seek around her as she keeps you company in the kitchen, sitting high on the bar stool, frilly-socked feet swinging back and forth. In this space, she's still afraid of darkness, but only dark indoors—she says the house cries and creaks and worries, and there's a hiding place for monsters in the shadows beneath her bed. Outside she's surrounded by deep black skies filled with stardust animals, as the moon watches over her and the night shadows breathe secrets, landing lightly on her skin. Maybe in this version, the man does not come to dinner at all. Or no, maybe that's impossible, and he comes to dinner always, just as she always says yes to showing him the animals, pirouetting her ballet shoes out into the darkness, bright moon keeping watch, until it can no longer see them as they step inside the barn. But maybe in this version, in this life, in this warp, in this now, maybe this time you stand up and say— *I'll go with you too.*

The Fringe Agreement

(An Unofficial Domestic Document)

WHEREAS

I, a grown woman,
have a fringe,

AND WHEREAS

my husband,
a man with opinions,
does not.

IT IS HEREBY NOTED THAT:

1. The fringe makes me feel
mysterious, artistic,
approximately Parisian.

2. The fringe makes him feel
anxious,
as though my face is obscured,
personally betrayed.

3. He will say,
"It was better before,"
in the same tone
one uses for damp socks,
not tragic, just irritating enough
to mention forever.

4. I will say,
"It's hair,"
which is legally true
but emotionally useless.

5. The fringe will be trimmed
"just a little,"
and will immediately become

a full fringe.

6. He will wait for it to grow out.

I will not.

IN CONCLUSION:

The fringe stays.

The marriage survives.

No further discussion will be entered into
until at least three weeks from now when the scissors reappear.

SIGNED:

Me 

Him 

The Fringe (non-negotiable)



Buttercup, hand-drawn, paper & liners

Cloister

After submersion, drying sun. After first sprouts
of yarrow and sage after rain. After summer after

winter after summer after winter after summer after
winter of frost on manzanita after summer after.

After imprint of claw and pad before passage of tenderfeet
before a gathering basket abandoned. The road

after cart track. Sometimes rats
behind a brick cantina, near, voices accrue –memories

The report of pistols. Then after pegs, mallet, and plumb line,
before enclosure, space between planks, then narrower spaces

between lath, a sight of doors across the road and other
machine wonders. Wood first, then cold mud and trowel.

Wall across from wall, corner squaring
opposite and fall of many boots. A fall, cracked

skull and hot blood
in my cup. –Mine?

Madera columns later and fancy
tile the Lady says is from Seville, itself.

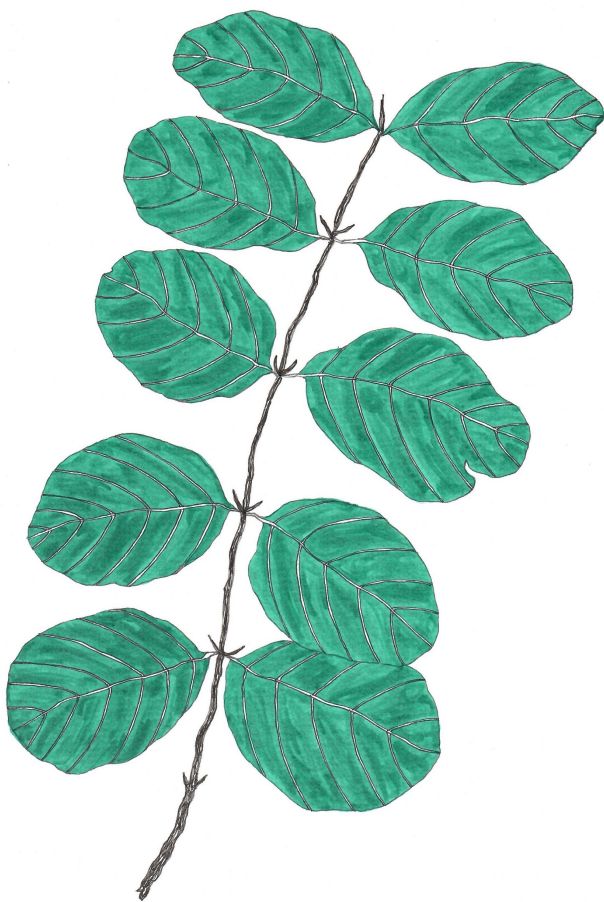
Self. After the fountain, though they do not know
my secret source, before the lemon tree sapling,

then after children arrive, I am painted, adorned.
First holler of a new life comes through as only sound

A sequence of the impecunious follows:
vines wither, paint peels, glass breaks, iron rots in caustic air.

Father's shade hides under the lemon tree, and she,
having discovered my hidden prize,

grows tall, wakes, flowers, bears, tickles me,
asks, "When did you become your walls?"



Honeysuckle, hand-drawn, paper & liners

In the Manner of J F Millet

Atop a terrace in a foreign land
I'm watching the assault of light
as it falls through the elevated mesas
of umbrella pines, washing away
the darkness, illuminating a grove
of lemon trees with their laden boughs
of elliptic fruit suspended like plump,
melting suns and I'm startled to see
a solitary figure within hailing distance
standing in the field below with light
pooling at her heels, perhaps enthralled
by the cloying scents of blossoms just
opening and the irrepressible chatter
of the birds come to fill the empty air,
and I'd like to count her among those
of us who are trying not to outgrow
this moment nor rub it from our eyes,
but rather find the means to stay
immersed within it, breathless before
morning's great reawakening
or calling back some other time
when death and lesser afflictions
seemed as distant as the blue crescent
of sea set beyond the slopes rising
like large, motionless waves behind her.

Still Water

On a night like that, when wild dogs
barked and birds heralded dawn,
I shivered with love.

At last the ice has been broken through,
at last everything has been conquered—
the trees tremble into the distance,
all this is mine—every bird's cry.

Your hair is beginning to turn white.

Kiss me at the water's edge,
in this stillness, among
the lily of the valley, the poisonous
lily of the valley, the poisonous
buttercups, among the weeds and
the delicate wildflowers.

Metaphors

I told my therapist that my father was a burning piano and she wrote something on her clipboard and asked if the piano was in tune. I told her it was more of a feeling. She asked which feeling. I pointed to the window where a pigeon was standing completely still on the ledge like a small gray monument to indecision. She nodded as if that clarified things. At home, my sister was watching a video of a girl explaining how to manifest a better life by screaming into a jar and sealing it with wax. My sister had already filled six jars. The shelf above her bed looked like a apothecary of private disasters. I wanted to tell her that our mother was a lake in winter, that if you walked too far toward the center you would hear the cracking begin beneath you, gentle at first, then definitive. My sister would have called that cringe. She would have posted a reaction clip of a man blinking in disbelief. And maybe she would be right. Maybe comparison is just a way of standing at a distance from the fire and calling it beautiful. My father left on a Friday in October. He took the toaster and one of the cats and his collection of vinyl records from bands that broke up before I was born. I told my friend Walter that it felt like watching a ship leave a harbor in slow motion and Walter said bro that's literally just what happened minus the water. He was eating a sleeve of crackers with the focus of a surgeon. I realized then that I had been decorating my sadness with images to make it presentable, to give it a frame and a small placard on the wall. My mother started watching astrology TikToks and telling us Mercury was in retrograde as explanation for anything broken: the dishwasher, her sleep, the silence at dinner that pooled around our ankles like cold water rising. I stopped making comparisons for a while. I let the things be only themselves. The empty chair was an empty chair. The dial tone when I called my father was a dial tone. It was unbearable. So I started again. I told my therapist the grief was a dog that followed me home and refused to leave, that slept at the foot of my bed with its heavy breathing and its warmth, and honestly, I was beginning to love it the way you love anything that stays.

Frolic

was my first cat and my first
poem, a one-word poem, a kitten with
a gray coat, white paws, one white
cheek, the left cheek, when I was eight,
an only child with no one to play with
at home. So my parents said yes
when Carey Heller's cat had kittens.
Carey's cat, whose name was Frisky, was my first
literary influence, inspiring me to name
my cat Frolic, a name everyone praised
and remembered, and agreed was a great name.
Gambol, it occurs to me now, sixty years on,
which is a synonym of frolic, might or might not
have been an even greater name. The old
revisionist in me, who can't stop picking
at the poems, wonders about that. But the thing is
I didn't know the word gambol when Frolic
was a bounding, frolicsome kitten and I was
a budding, gamboling poet with
one poem under my belt.

Broken

as in broken open
space inside
as in a black hole
leaking light

not embellished
by repair as in
no silken stitches
no gleaming cracks

as in china antelope
childhood totem
botched together
oozing glue

as in twisted
bending reality
binding galaxies
as in dark matter



Olive, In Memoriam, digital watercolor

This Book About Grief

—the one my grieving friend gave me, saying
how good the writing is, how true the ideas—
I'm holding it in my hands now, looking it over.
Myself, I'm not grieving, but maybe I should be
because according to the excerpt on the inside cover,
we're all either grieving or trying to avoid grief,
which is unavoidable. Or so says the author of this book
about grief. But I don't want to read it right now
because grief is depressing, and there's a novel
and a book of short stories I'd rather be reading.
I think I'm going to hold off on this book about grief.
But on second thought, to hold it, to really hold grief
within yourself, means you're also able to hold joy
within yourself. Or so says the blurb on the back cover.

Line of Sight

You stand at the shore of your
last fated mystery. In this line of sight
still waters ripple; lacquered liquid,
you see black-headed mud ducks
scrape the moving heart for fishes.

All that has made sense
in the tiny gaunt arms of trees'
unbudded veins, speak.
Those gentle voices you have heard
in the germane moving of
humus-topped seed beds.

You stand with their children,
eyes toward the end of waters,
their secret, innocent yearning,
their green and noble watching,
their straight-lined reflections
bearing you down.

Cool Autumn's kestrel flight,
harbinger of numb fingers and loins,
pulll the winds, and with gloved hands,
you plant your last song against the sky;
a homeward ballad. In the end,
you trade sweet dogwood for myrrh.

Against all, you have kept the gentle
price of the earth's own peace.
Your eyes alight with the head of waters,
diamonds quicken the surface.

As the sun moves to shade,
the promise of the buds arise
against pale blue and salmon skies.



Weeds, digital photograph

Defining Distance

Dad teaches me to drive by braking hard on purpose, over and over in the empty lot behind Kmart that closed the year I turned twelve. Weeds pushing up through the cracked asphalt. Says it's about muscle memory, the body's need to know a thing before the mind catches up—slam it, Sam, don't ease it—and I slam it, and the seatbelt cuts a hot line across my collarbone each time. A red seam I trace in the bathroom mirror that night. Sixteen, the napkin from the glove box, numbers in his handwriting. 2.1. 1.9. Good, he says, when I get under two. But the other days, the days he doesn't bring the stopwatch, he tells me to floor it down Cattlemen Road, empty at 5 a.m., ninety in a fifty-five, wheat fields blurring into one continuous gold exhale. This is the part nobody teaches, he says. When to go all the way. Most people die average. But only after he checks the rear mirror twice, his mortal fallacy, knee catching the dashboard on his way out.

He takes me to the edge of Horseshoe Bend once. No railing, just red rock falling a thousand feet into a river that looks, from up there, like a vein under skin. Don't lean back, he says. Leaning back is what gets people. You have to stand like you mean it, weight forward, toes over the edge, or your body starts negotiating with gravity and gravity always wins the negotiation.

Two years later he is the one who can't stop anything now, cells doing a hundred and five through him with no exit ramp in sight. The oncologist uses words like aggressive and progression, and I think, absurdly, that these are words my father would have respected, words with velocity in them. I ask him, near the end, if he's scared. He flashes me a weightless grin and tells me to not drive under the speed limit on my way home.



Silver Pickup, digital photograph

The Sky is Smaller

He lives in the 'burbs now, I think. If we talked anymore, I'd tell him how stupid he looks wearing his outdoor vest inside, like I bet he does. I'd make fun of the luxury car I bet he has, picket-fence white, stocked with features he doesn't need and won't learn how to use. I'd tell him he should grow his beard back, and that drinking less doesn't count if he's smoking more. I'd tell him that on his birthday, I get a chicken sandwich with a pickle on the side and ask for the fries extra crispy. And then I toast to him like he can hear it.

Something tells me I won't get to do that this year. The sky's been falling closer and closer. It used to just be rocking waves eroding the coastline. But now the sky falls right onto the shore. Patches of blue are already missing close enough that I can almost see straight up inside. I've looked, I know I have. I just couldn't tell you what I saw. None of us can.

What I would never tell him is that he made the wrong choice. I'd never say that I can't understand why he left. I'd never tell him that I glued our photo onto a milk carton on a particularly boozy, lonely, honest night. The carton's on the book shelf, out of the way, where I can find it.

That day, I was determined to remember what the place behind the sky looked like. We found out early on that you're not supposed to stare at it. Something happens to you if you do. If anyone looked for too long, they wouldn't be able to stop. When that happens, well... They've tried blindfolding people, sedating them, taking them indoors. No matter what, they always find their way back outside, staring behind the sky. No matter what.

If I'm honest, I don't think he did anything wrong. But then, to me, he never could. I want to say that I'm disappointed in him, that I

wish he'd stayed. I want to say that I don't understand how he could leave with her. But the truth is, I'm relieved that he left before all this happened. I'm glad he doesn't have to come with us when we visit Dan at the shore and feed him soup and give him baths and change his clothes and sit by him and have picnics around him while he stands, neck twisted up so he can stare into the hole in the sky.

Sometimes I bring a blanket out and lie next to someone who isn't Dan. Some of them have cuts all up their arms from breaking through windows to get back outside. Some have busted lips and black eyes from people who love them, people who were willing to do whatever it took to keep them from being out here with people like Dan. Sometimes, I lie next to no one at all. It's a funny thing, lying on my back, not being able to look up at the whole sky, having to navigate around the missing parts.

We didn't say anything when he decided to get back with her for the...third? time? We figured it would run its course like a common cold. We weren't paying attention to the signs. Something about her had grown on him. And none of us looked closely enough to see it. He asked us to help him move after their anniversary - not that they had dated consistently for that year. But just that they were still on good terms that week, so they celebrated it. None of us wanted him to leave. All of us came to help him move. Pallbearers, all of us, ferrying bags of clothes and books to each other's cars. The procession lasted two days. And at the wake, he told us nothing was really going to change. He said he'd always be there for us. He didn't say he loved us. That wasn't his way. But he took a picture with us all, one-by-one. Evidence that we were once alive, together, at the same time, in the same room. Evidence that we were friends.

Some nights, I ask Dan if he looked too long on purpose. I tell him I wouldn't be mad if he did. He can tell me if he meant it. Or was it arrogance? Did he think he'd outsmarted the sky somehow? Figured out its tricks? Was it an accident? Is he screaming in there? Telling us how sorry he is? Does he even know he's not here?

I cry a lot to Dan. Tell him things I never told him when I thought he was listening. I mostly tell Dan that we forgive him, and that we miss him. Sometimes, I hold his hands. I tell him he's not alone. For what feels like the shortest of seconds, I look up at the fallen sky.



Linger, Analog Photograph
taken on expired, rainbow-dyed film with a macro lens

About our Contributors:

Julie Benson is a poet, essayist, and occasional dog portraitist, based in the U.S. after years spent abroad. Her writing often focuses quiet voices and on nature, but at times meanders into explorations of memory and place.

Maddy Chang's work has been recognized by the YoungArts Foundation and the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, and has been published or is forthcoming in *Consequence*, *The Eunoia Review*, and *Liti Arts Magazine*. She currently serves as Editor-in-Chief of *Vertigo* and *The Epic* at Lynbrook High School.

crazyjane is a citizen of the world who takes photographs.

Kathleen Cunningham-Casey Has been writing poems for many, many years, some successful, some not so successful, some published. Along with that she has been a child, a young person, a wife, a mother, a business executive, and now, at 77, person that has seen most aspects of life. Her art and some poetry can be seen on Flickr @alicesfurrows.

Kate Efimochkina is a writer and artist. You can see her work in *Stone Circle Review*, *Lamp Lit*, *The Turning Leaf Journal*, among others. She is the founder and editor of *Odd Lobster*.

Caitlin Breen Ehler (she/her) is an elementary teacher and writer living in eastern Connecticut. Her poems have been published in *The Northeast Coast*, *Here: A Poetry Journal*, *wildscape*, *literary journal*, and others. She can be found on Instagram at @runningdowncalliope.

Isabelle Faith is a writer and artist. Her work has been shortlisted for the Bridport Prize and nominated for Best of the Net. She received the Life Story Prize and Spirit of Canada Award from the Consulate General of Canada in Hong Kong & Macao, and studies English dually at Trinity College Dublin and Columbia University.

Zak Girdis is a husband, father and renowned curmudgeon who lives in Encinitas, California, where he grows vegetables, supervised by his feral alley cat, Pickles.

Natalie Harveld is a writer and educator in the UK. She spends most of her time stepping over laundry piles and thinking about metaphors whilst someone asks for crumpets. As an English teacher, she encourages children to

find their voices; as a mum, she sometimes wishes they'd lose them. Instagram: @natalieharveldpoetry.

Paul Hostovsky makes his living as a sign language interpreter and braille instructor in the Boston area. His poems and essays appear widely online and in print. More at: <https://paulhostovsky.com/>.

John Muro is a resident of Connecticut and the author of three volumes of poems. His most recent collection, *A Bountiful Silence*, was published last year. John's professional career has been dedicated to conservation and environmental stewardship, and, not surprisingly, nature remains the principal inspiration for his work. He is a four-time Pushcart nominee, a three-time Best of the Net nominee and he has received multiple commendations for his work. *Acumen*, *Belfast Review*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Delmarva* and *Sky Island* are among the literary journals that have featured his poems.

Kathleen Palmer is a freelance art curator and poet in progress, based in Surrey. She has long seen exhibitions as story-telling in three dimensions. Partly inspired by working with poets in museums, she returned to an early love of writing. Her work has appeared in *The Alchemy Spoon*, *Lamp Lit* and the *Ekphrastic Review*. She can be found on Instagram and Threads as @kathleenpalmer_101.

Jason Stieber is a Cascadian separatist and public librarian in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. He holds an MFA in Poetry from Portland State University. His criticism and poems can be found in *The Portland Review*, *Trilithon*, and *Old Red Kimono*, among others. He has ridden the struggle bus since 2016. He can be found on Bluesky @jasonstieber.bsky.social.

Anna Sun is a writer from Guam. She can be found writing in the middle of parks, restaurants and conversations. She voice acts under the name Rina Sev, and can be found on instagram @sunwords.sevvoice.

John Brixter Tino is a son of a fisherman and is a person with disabilities. He was raised in Perez, Quezon, Philippines. He currently serves as a part-time instructor at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines and is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing at De La Salle University. His writings have received recognition from the Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature and other award-giving bodies in the Philippines. His works have been published in *Red Ogre Review*, *Philippine Star*, *Philippine Collegian*, *Mekong Review*, and *TLDTD Journal*, among other anthologies.

Shannon Wagoner (they/them) is a writer, photographer, and early childhood educator living in Charlottesville, Virginia. More of their work can be found at linktr.ee/shanwagoner and you can find them on Instagram and Substack @shanwagoner.

Terry Ann Wright's poems appear most recently in *Belletrist*, *Suburban Witchcraft*, *SHINE Poetry Series*, *Where Meadows*, *Red Ogre Review*, and *Stanza Cannon*; previously in anthologies by *Cadence Collective*, *Sadie Girl Press*, and *Picture Show Press*; and chapbooks *Mädchen* (2023), which includes the Sappho Prize-longlisted "Juniper Tree," *mad honey* (2018), both by *dancing girl press*, and *Nature Studies* (2015) by *Sadie Girl Press*, whose title poem was her third Pushcart Prize nomination. She spends her days ridding the world of comma splices, one college freshman at a time, and nights planning food-based road trips, reading, and writing. Bluesky: [readteachwrite.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/readteachwrite.bsky.social).

Contributors:

Julie Benson

Maddy Chang

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