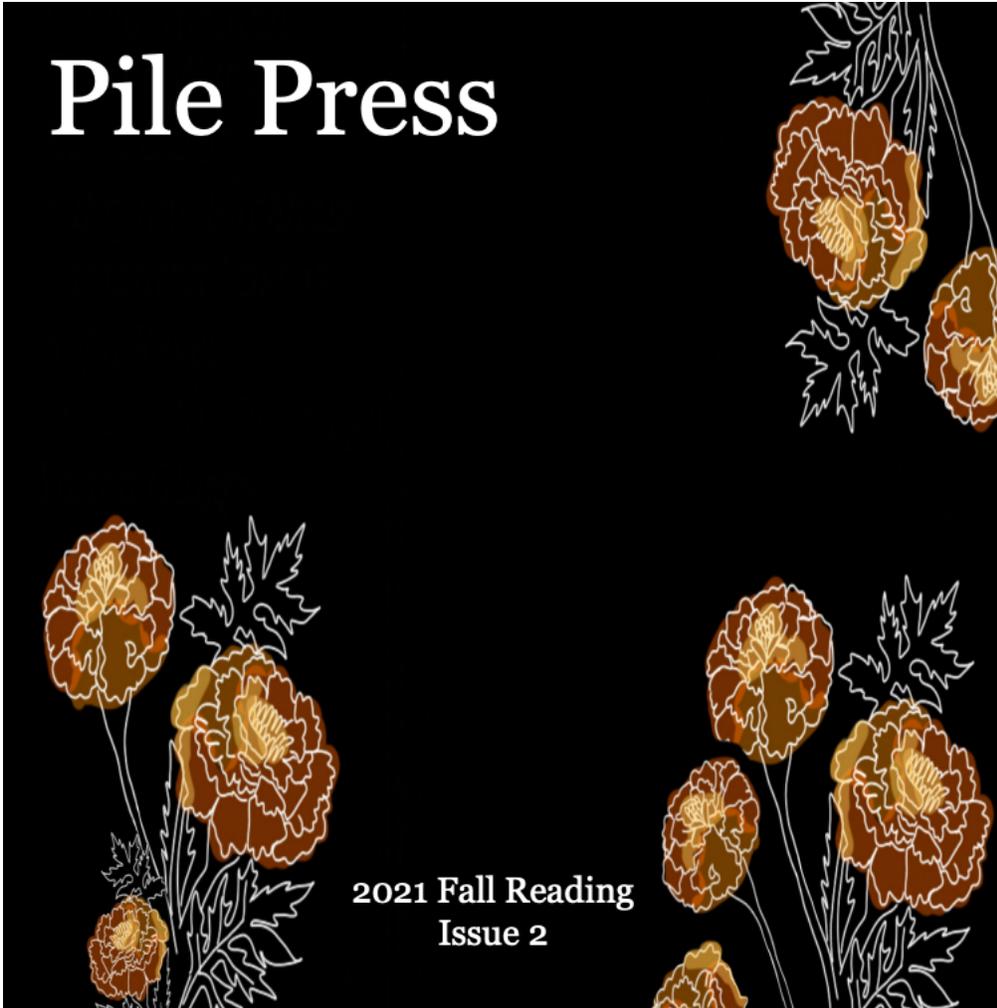


# Pile Press

2021 Fall Reading  
Issue 2



## Contributors

**H**olly Redshaw (she/her) is a 24 year old musician and bassoonist from London. Whilst music might be her every-day form of work and expression, poetry and writing of all kinds remain a deep rooted first love, which she has recently begun to explore again. When not playing the bassoon, she enjoys long muddy runs, experimenting with making her own bread, obsessively knitting socks and reviewing Creme Brûlées on her blog.

**K**aleena Madruga (she/her) received her BA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University and her MFA in Creative Writing from Roosevelt University. She lives in Chicago.

**B**illie Mae (they/them) is a disabled non-binary lesbian artist from NYC who works mostly in illustration and collage. They add a layer of irony, humor, existentialism, abstract thoughts and surrealism to their works. A lot of the issues they face due to their identity has impacted them negatively, but art is their coping mechanism. Their work often depicts things they are anxious, angry, scared, or upset about, such as climate change, lesbophobia, physical limitations and symptoms, and the unrelenting hatred of capitalism.

**G**race Cooper (she/her) is a native Oregonian, currently working towards her bachelor's degree at Colorado State University, where her work has been featured in *The Greyrock Review*, a residency at CSU's Morgan Library, and outside of CSU in *Bella Grace Magazine*.

**S**amantha Lussos (she/her) is a contemporary artist based in Miller Place, NY. She has always been infatuated with digging deeper within her ancestry and taking inspiration from scanned archives to create further collage work. She continues to find heirlooms and memorabilia that keep her inspired to further make photographic commentary based on inherited memories of cultural survival. Her work reinterprets the past based on shared intergenerational experiences and traumas.

**M**elissa Flores Anderson (she/her) is a Latinx Californian, and an award-winning journalist. She was the city editor of the *Weekend Pinnacle* for seven years, and has had news and feature articles published in half a dozen publications. Her work *Not a Gardener* was featured in City Lights Theater Company's *The Next Stage* and *Play on Words* San Jose. She has read pieces in the Flash Fiction Forum and Quiet Lightning reading series.

**M**aia Cassie (she/her) loves all forms of writing, from slam poetry to full-length novels. When she isn't working on writing, she often fills her time with theatre, drawing, volunteering, and environmental activism.

**C**arris Casale (she/her) is a 17 year old photographer from the U.K.

**A**nn Kirkpatrick (she/her) documents her long walks with an inherited Nikon camera. Her favorite subjects are lost pet fliers, movie theater marquees, and funky cars.

**S**ofia Reyes (they/them) is a non-binary lesbian from Panama who is extremely in love and has synesthesia. This poem is a love letter to these two characteristics of theirs and how they reflect on the love and safety they experience in their relationship with another trans person. Their synesthesia has always created very personalized imagery for them to enjoy and experience. Their poem explores the line between intertwined senses and their desire to express them through writing.

**K**at Agudo (she/they) is a non-binary Filipinx playwright, screenwriter, poet, graphic artist, and wedding singer from Austin, TX. Four of their productions have been produced by The University of Texas. They graduated from The Actors Studio Drama School MFA Program in NYC. They focus on mental health, Asian-American experiences, LGBTQ representation, and social media culture, using trauma and comedy.

**A**imee Nicole (she/her) is a chronically ill, queer poet in Rhode Island. She holds a BFA in Creative Writing from Roger Williams University and has been numerous published. For fun, she enjoys attending roller derby bouts and trying desperately to win at drag bingo. Her first collection is forthcoming from Laughing Ronin Press 2022.

**E**mily Moon (she/her) is a transgender poet and her poetry collection *It's Just You and Me, Miss Moon* is published by First Matter Press. Her work appears in or is forthcoming from numerous publications. Earlier publications are under the name Peter Hamer.

## Lemon

Love is simple. It's complicated. Its shape shifts around us.

It was finite and fleeting, forever elusive.

And then I felt you.

You made your presence known in the burning sensation in my breasts and an inexplicable tiredness that engulfed me in the afternoons.

I loved you before first sight, when you were still a world of possibilities,  
A fragile little bug I could lose at any moment.

And I called you little bug to keep from jinxing you out of existence  
Because I knew it would be my fault if you went wrong.

My lemon of a body always letting me down.

But you, you took all the best from the world.  
I discovered your strength in the four four tempo of your heart.

On the way home, after hearing it beat for the first time,  
I saw a man under a freeway overpass with a sign.

I cried and promised to protect you from all the things.

I felt you like a dragonfly rippling across a still pond, a thing that delights you now in the wilderness of our backyard.

Like tiny fingers that tickled me on the inside, and I did not flinch away from the sensation like I usually do.

In the early days with your father, I forbade him from it. "Don't tickle me. I can't bear it. Save it up for the baby we'll have someday."

And now you squeal with delight when daddy holds you upside down and we both descend on your warm belly skin with fingers wagging

I had to learn to share you, but we all know I am your home base.

You were mine alone at the start and I carried you with me through our daily routine.

Our morning drive. Our afternoon walk.

Our dinner and lunch, weekly reports of blood sugar and blood pressure readings, and nightly kick counts.

My lemon of a body kept me on edge.

But you were vigorous and long, stretching your limbs into my lungs and my pelvis.  
Kick, one, two three four.

Your father played Irish songs on his guitar  
And you moved to the melody of each one.

I read out loud so you would know the staccato of my voice,  
its alto sound and its tremble.  
Six chapters from *The House at Pooh Corner*.

You never rested and you still don't,  
Your nap retired at two-and-a-half.

Now we wrestle you into an early bedtime  
So you don't revert to a feral animal at night.

You came into the world sounding like a wolf cub,  
with a howl, an awwwwwooooo  
to announce your presence in the world.

I did not hold you first.

My lemon of a body numb with narcotics and cut open across the belly.  
Your father cut the umbilical cord and looked inside me,  
then held your tiny dark-haired head up to mine.

"He's cuter than I thought he would be,"  
The words that slipped from my lips,  
As though I believed only an ugly thing could come from me.

I touched your soft hand,  
All I could muster after 59 hours in a hospital bed,  
hooked up to multiple IVs,  
magnesium coursing through my veins.

The doctor pricked your heel and said your blood glucose was perfect,  
My most important achievement in life.  
Not the spelling bee, or my master's degree  
But keeping my lemon of a body in check for you.

I looked at your button nose and my body knew what to do.  
Colostrum filled your tiny mouth.  
The body I hated and hid finally had a purpose.  
Modesty fell away as I fed you in front of visitors.

I passed you around to grandparents, and aunts and uncles.  
Love slid from their fingertips into your pores  
As they traced your tiny cheeks and the curve  
of your ear that matched mine.

You came back to me when your most basic need roared out of you,  
Hunger bringing your cries to a crescendo.  
I held you to my chest and my body was full, anticipating your appetite.

"My lemon  
of a body  
numb with  
narcotics  
and  
cut open  
across  
the belly"

Six, seven, eight, nine times a day. Every day.  
For a week. For a month. For a year. For 20 months.

Love is simple. It is complicated. Its shape shifts around us.

I thought falling in love happened once,  
But you showed me it happens over and over again.

The first time you smiled.  
The first time you laughed.  
The first time you stretched a chubby baby hand up toward me,  
Asking to be held without a word.

The first time you leaned your open mouth against mine  
and covered my lips in drool,  
a mimic of all the kisses you had observed for seven months.

When you blew a kiss.  
When you gave a hug.  
Your first teetering steps, holding onto your father's hand for confidence.  
When we taught you sign language for "all done" and "more" for mealtimes  
and you used them during a tickle session.

The first time you said Momma.  
The first time you said I love you.  
The first time you said it unprompted.  
The first time we did a group hug.  
The first time you asked for a group hug.

When you climb into my lap with a book  
and look up at me with your father's long eyelashes  
and my dark brown eyes,  
your long limbs growing at an exponential rate,  
I try to sit still in the moment.

So I can feel you.

My lemon of a body is flawless when I see it reflected in you.