

NMJ
V.1



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nick johnson



the outdoor poems [21]

how your mouth moved into words
forgot them folded back like the night sky

before a storm you thought me a door
left open

talked about rain
talked about ruin

how you were taught to leave things

days amassed like soldiers

once: we walked on a beach in culebra,
shore dotted with palms & army tanks

how they sat facing inland rusted the color of lobster shells
they'd crawled from the sea you were certain—

how easy it is to say: forgive me
like peeling
the skin
of a raw
potato
with a butter knife.

tonight my heart is a child's hand reaching

the outdoor poems [1]
(for chelsea)

how the moon holds its glow
yet the pieces we bring back

like any rock we've ever thrown
skyward— hoping

not fallen or found or
a stone's throwaway —you

give what gravity can't gather
the shimmer the moon keeps to itself

set in stone

frost has melted from our minds.
that something does not exist.

we've forgotten the urgency
in reagan's voice, the words that followed

"mr. gorbachev..." we still want to keep

the brown callused hands that till the fields
from touching the fruit.

& with the ground moist with blood, we build,
set stone on stone. that something does not exist,

we love a wall, like it were a son.

if it's straight, obstinate, & willing to stand
for all we lay claim to.

Lunar Notes: An Interview with nick johnson



Why poetry? What pulled you in, and who was the very first poet you read/heard?

I started writing short stories as a kid. That was my jam for a long time. I think my initial impetus to write sprang from the fact that I couldn't find anything I really, really enjoyed reading; so I started writing the stories I wanted to read. I look back now and know that I just hadn't been exposed to the right stuff, which really shaped who I am today... and I guess what I mean by that is that I might not be writing today if I had fallen in love with books at an early age. Who knows...But why poetry was the question. I had a teacher in middle school, Ms. Castle, who had us write poems for an assignment one day. It was the first time I remember writing a poem. Anyway, she really liked mine and asked me to read it to the class. I was terrified. After class she pulled me aside and told me how much she enjoyed my poem and my reading of it. She encouraged me to keep writing and speaking in front of people. It took a long time to get comfortable with the public speaking and reading, but I am so thankful that she gave me that push. And I guess what pulled me in with poetry was how elusive it is, how ephemeral; and I love the instant gratification of finishing a poem...fiction takes FOREVER. lol.

If you were the last person on earth, and you pulled the last book from a pile of ash and cinders, what do you hope it would be? Why?

Wow. That's such a beautiful question and so hard to answer. Of the books that I can think of off the top of my head, it would have to be *Kafka on the Shore*. I really love Murakami. His books are like warm blankets, intricately woven with magical realism, poetry, mystery, unique and captivating characters and sentences that ebb and flow like the tide; you're wrapped in and unsure whether you're dreaming or awake, witnessing the magic or a part of it. He's really, really good. Thus far *Kafka on the Shore* is my favorite book; it's a thriller, it's poetic; it's...yeah, I'm pulling that from the ash for sure.

What space does/should poetry occupy in today's society?

I think art, no matter what the genre or medium, should hold a bright light up to society and allow us a new way to view ourselves and our surroundings. I think it should challenge, shape, and show us who we are at our core, show us what we believe in and what we hold sacred.

What was the first piece you ever had published? Are you the same person who wrote it, and if not, how have you changed?

I had a few things published while I was an undergrad, but I don't remember what those poems were...my first major publication was in *Black Renaissance Noir*. They published three of my poems when I was in grad school. I would say, I'm not the same person who wrote those poems. That poet was a little more direct and more willing to show his readers he knew something he could impart to them. I think now I'm a bit more exploratory, my writing now is a search.

Nomadic Press published your first book, *music for mussolini*, earlier this year. What was the experience like? How do you feel now that you have your first book on your shelf?

Yes; my first book of poems, *music for mussolini*, was published by Nomadic Press in March of this year. And it feels amazing! I can't even tell you how good it feels to see my book on my shelf, let alone at City Lights or Alley Cat Books, or in countries I haven't been to like Belgium or Japan. All thanks to Nomadic Press, and the help of my friends all over the world who've supported me...it's a wonderful feeling. But more directly to your question, working with Nomadic has been amazing! They really care about every detail and they're so willing to work with you and hear your vision for your book. My editor Michaela Mullin spent many evenings with me, on the phone, talking about not only what was and wasn't working but why it was or wasn't working, and the juxtaposition of sections...she was an absolute gem and my book is so much better because she had her hands on it. I could go on and on but, in short, J.K. and the folks are an absolute pleasure to work with.

Are you working on a second book? What's your work's center right now?

I might be...time will tell. I guess right now I am working on my "outdoor poems," which center on nature along with past and current romantic relationships...at least that is what I think I am writing about...one never really knows.

Name some poets you're really excited about right now. Who do you have on your shelf/in your ear/on your mind?

Let's see...Ilya Kaminsky, MK Chavez's *Mothermorphosis*; I'm rereading Gary Jackson's *Missing You, Metropolis*; and I am super excited for Fisayo Adeyeye's forthcoming book from Nomadic Press...that's what comes to mind at the moment.

What is the biggest adventure you've had? What adventures do you hope to have soon?

Ah, well I guess my biggest adventure to date was probably spending five weeks in Thailand, with my (then) girlfriend...we actually just got married ;-)...which was also

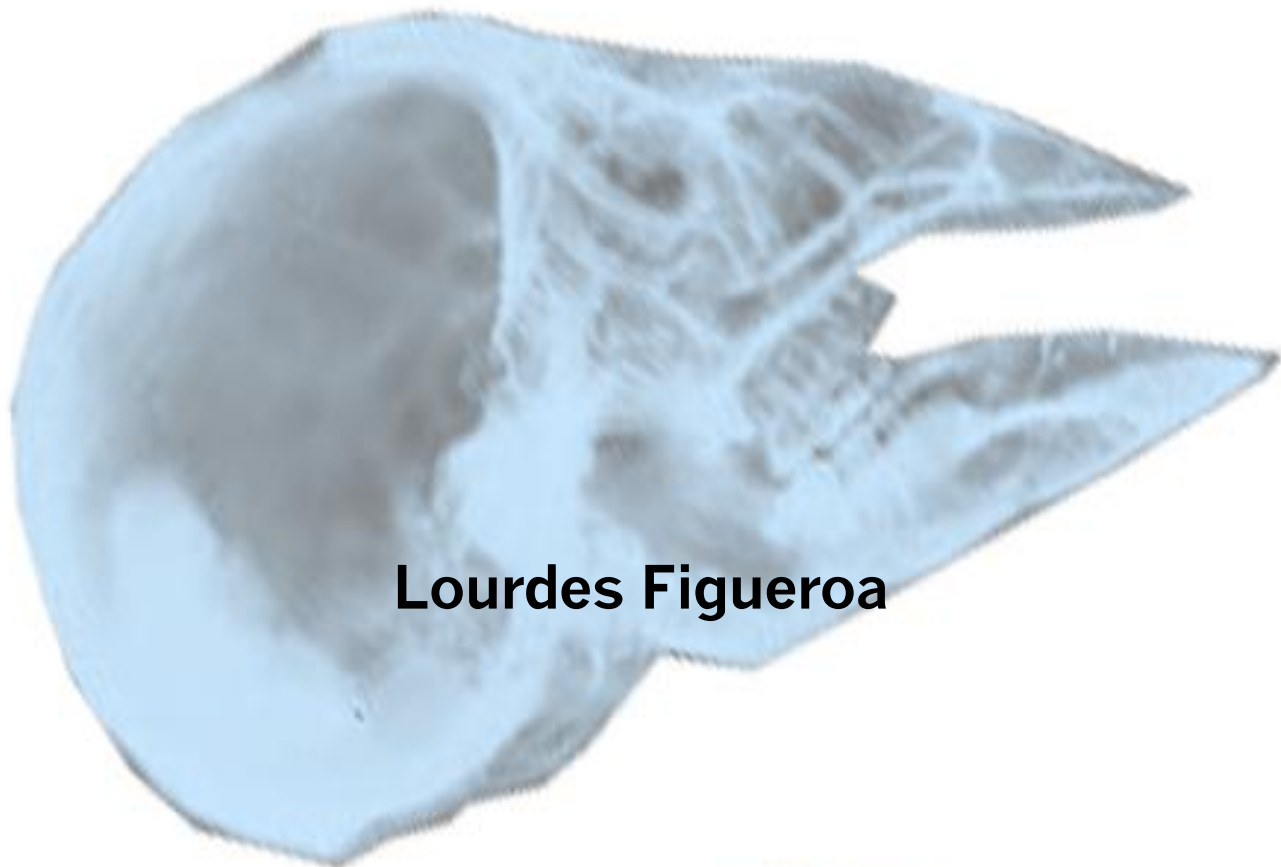
a pretty big adventure. But spending five weeks exploring Thailand was absolutely amazing, and this December we're heading to India for three weeks for our honeymoon...it should be pretty epic and we're super stoked about it.

If you could go back and say anything to your teenage self, what would it be?

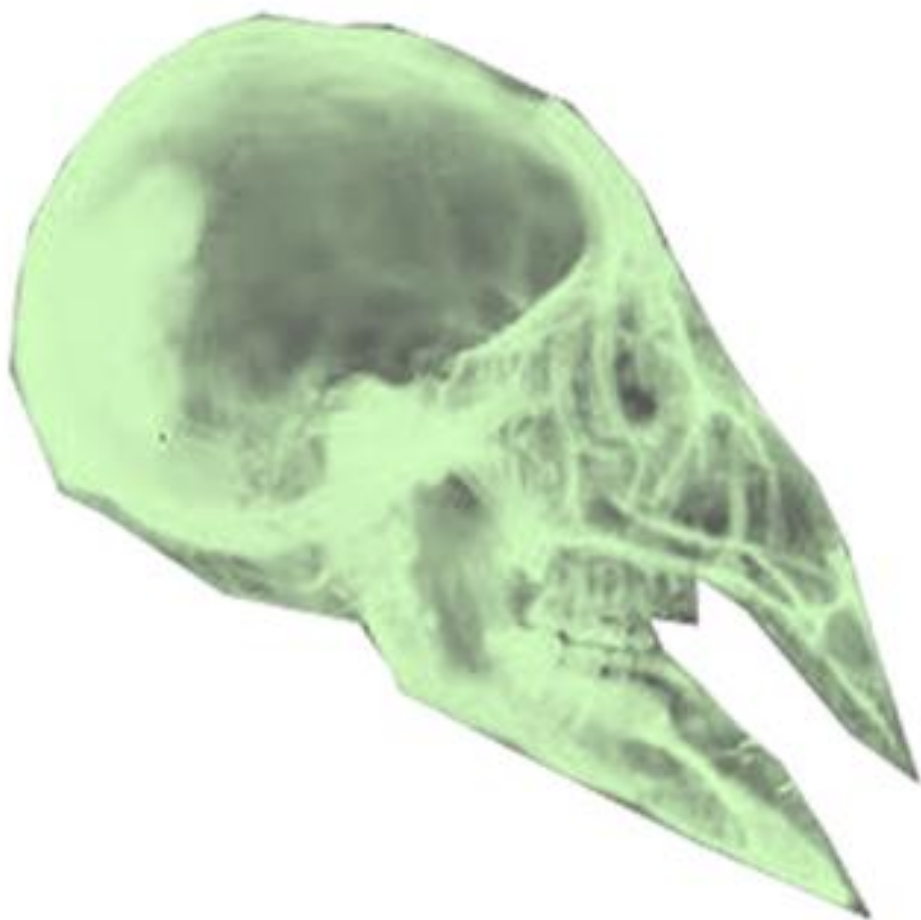
I wouldn't say anything to my teenage self. I think my teenage self needs to go through the same things I did without any interference from me in order to end up where I am now. The journey I took to arrive at this very moment was not easy but I love where I am and I might not be here if something were altered, if I lived life with a different perspective.

What advice would you give a poet just starting out?

When I was a young poet I thought I could only learn from the poets I admired...I eventually came to find out that wasn't true...read as much as you can...and learn from everything you read...except for the stuff you hate, totally ignore that shit. lol.



Lourdes Figueroa



Migrant III

I swear to you that they did come, that they are here, I saw them, at least I felt them, the rain collapsed hard that day, and so did the horizon, but they stopped by, their bodies were everywhere, I heard their babies crying, they were wrapped in blanket bundles with wide brown eyes, I swear this to be true, I can feel them, it is as if my world went into theirs, no, no—no that's wrong they went into mine, into ours, they smell of orchard and gun dust

Migrant II

We began to catch glimpses of them in the horizon, pink in their glow, sun in their walk, backs full of grain, we were warned that they were coming, they would arrive request to only have a sip of our water, as we saw them from afar we began to feel their bodies rising around us, the children reached for their faces, only to touch the sound of their ribs, and we looked and looked at the horizon the line of earth and sky the stars full

Migrant I

The sea began to surround us, the further out we went we discovered the horizon pink in her nature, the mouth of salt breathing a white glow, we started to uncover faint bodies, our tongues tasting where the rivers entered the sea, with the seaweed flowering us we entered into the glow rubbing each others' eyes with the tip of our thumbs dusting away life only to hear the sound of heart, a womb-like movement

Border

At the horizon—exactly not where it rounds the dirt started to rise, the land layering herself, the sun neatly tiptoeing mumbling a soft so unknown to the rumble of their steps, and they began to build a useable place, the others pressing against began to collapse, walls of stone, soundless rising higher and higher, waves of bodies—a seamless stream of water tickling what in memory could have been—a border

Song

I imagined her long before I saw her eyes, an ever shifting brown as if to show a ripple in a pond or a moving river, maybe she is Gabriel ever so capricious ever so rebellious or possibly Michael, I made her in my image to find me sipping wine with skin on my light, maybe I am speaking in tongues and only translating to you to make it into a poem, but no, I made her, and now she has—found me

Prophecy

You have to realize, she said as the night darkened and the stars emerged, that the poet is the prophet, there is no shame in that, and as the night grew darker, and the moon walked farther, she said, people always say we are made of the cosmos, but the poem is the prophecy, it wasn't her intention to reveal all of this, but she kept on, the poem is everything we've dreamed of, the secret language, the ancient language, the sacred language, merciful in its nature, holy regardless, a revelation constantly in its wake

The image features three circular, textured, golden-brown objects with dark centers, arranged in a triangular pattern. The central object is the largest and most prominent, with the text "Chris Carosi" overlaid on it. The other two objects are smaller and positioned in the top-right and bottom-left corners. The texture of the objects appears fibrous or woven, and the overall color is a warm, golden-brown hue. The background is plain white.

Chris Carosi

Own House*

"If I just keep walking / It will not be now"—Fanny Howe

you are the house you own
the magic words handle
the keys you enter

you bite a small bite in the door
the size of a hoof-print, oil-shaped

your lips against it you whistle
into the room you little
baby breathing you once breathed
the sound vowels snagging

the light in there as light
as firework dust
so you manage a sound so small
along this wall you're
the cried yeah weakness

you're afraid you're angry
you're choking a cry
a roller-skate in the sky
this meaningless height

* "Own House" is a short series of poems based around the idea of breaking into one's own body in order to alleviate or at least understand the cause of severe panic attacks.

Own House

I will read the sun's biography at night
no past tense in to have read
the light sooner than now has left

I say something to the house in the morning
sun pass across the sky safely
again on the other side of spoken

given that I wish a sunrise
and no one to hear
what meets the skin of land

if there is some property

bent the light out of sun's fist
the window meets a closing hand

what I can only see alright in the dark
my god I shut my mouth

falling under moment, sun
inspect the aisles in Hades deep in the water

a downed kingdom searches
illusions of darkening

Own House

"THIS ATTEMPT *is right here.*"—John Berryman, *Recovery*

to argue mechanically the candle out
constrict light in sub-wave panic

in beauty regard the beauty
sun's streamline gradient-quiet

tangent-selves in the West

think it's backward dusk
half-light terminated

fill my measure like that from the "top
of my head" thickening a
measure as sundown
paints splayed straw-body
rudiment of fresh
bell breach

that kernel of light slipped & broke
longer shadows spill upon the land

companies may lie down
other empires are serial such as this
memory of my own business

keep still you moving thing to keep still
the sky doesn't or the sun would remain

all that does appear to move
knows a silence and a noise
that reacts to silence

stark breaths deeper than deep breaths
a dark warmth

I imagine the sound coming last out of the heat
the candle works on me as it has ever worked

whole gulfs of sound un-breathed
I bisect the air with a voice I fear

Own House

"The best in a litter is the one that begins to see last."—Pliny

come back sleepwalk to the roost
(a pile of sticks and bandage forms)

come back to the house the house
we unlock our jaws there we breathe again there

we say, "You all live the best" as we excuse
we feel the grass worry about it, we trespass

we say, "The white smoke you all exhale dangles
from your mouth which is sweeter than ours"

we say, "No one creeps here to spy us"
not welcome we approach the heavy doors

touch its void with our eyelashes
with our eyelashes touch its void

a person is asleep we touch careful
this phrase on the stair

the morning is asleep the nighttime we hear
breathing look the fragile the back of the knee of the neck

lie down lower a thousand minds in mine
switched off like lost keepsakes up in hell

welcome the affected wholesomely through a primal gate
there is a clear voice and a far-off light

the ultraviolet light mistaken for plain white light
all light is said to be born from wholesome light

Own House

"I want to hear you speak my tongue"—Sophokles, from *Philoktetes*

the fabrics in the trees
the trees will protect every seed

the wind rippling the bandages
a hollow resonance through the studs in an empty house

the doorway as a mouth says,
"Don't stay here"

they would say don't stay here in the corner
in the corner felt the face

do not pass through, outsider
your brown hair caught in the catch on the gate

cannot find the latch with a wolf's head on
separating ghosts with a fence

stone lion guards—
you may pass, strength, hands around jaws of the lion

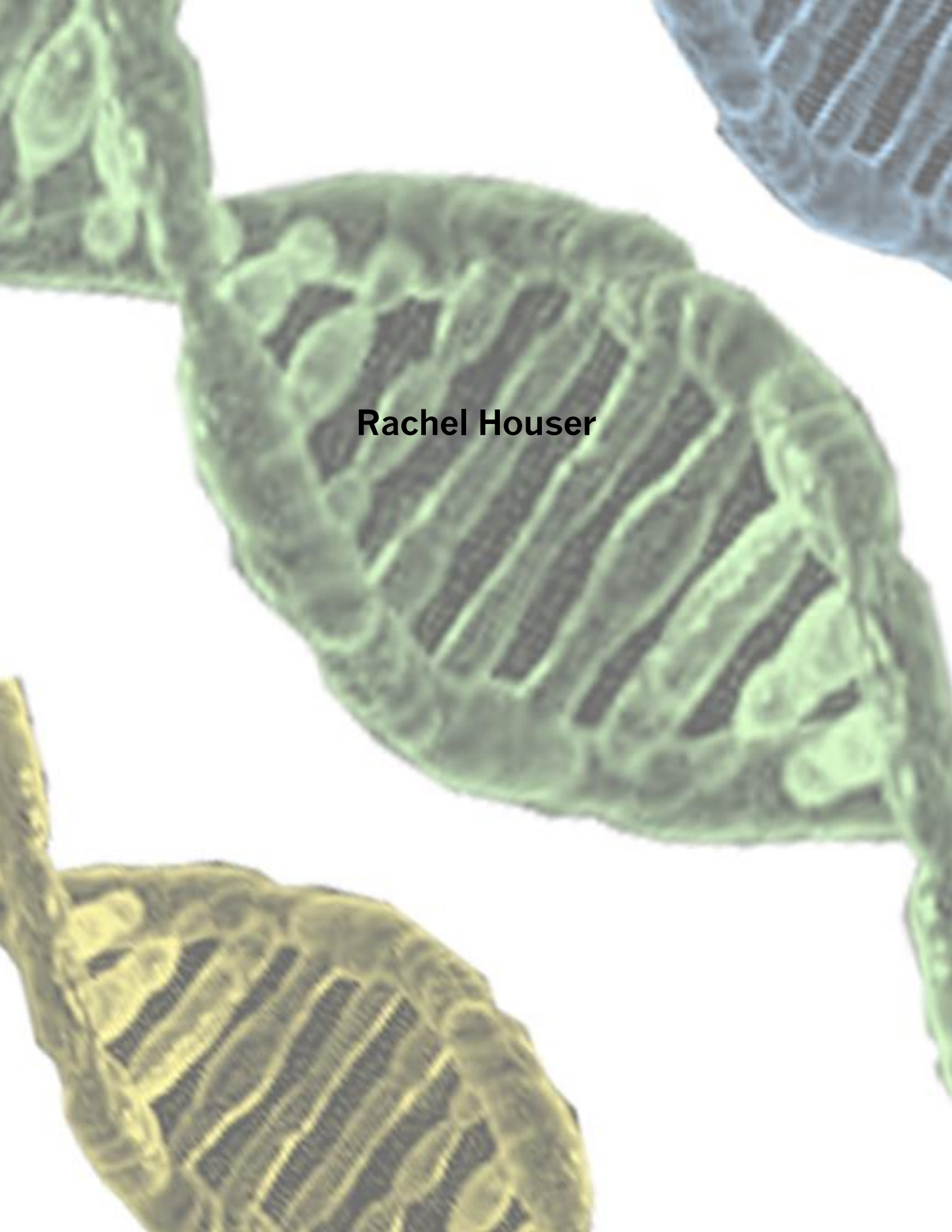
the cat-ghost that bats at silence
hoof-palm across the knuckles tossed a plaything over the seal of door

crave this primal love and don't express it to anyone
don't wake the pigeons' sleep on the curls of twigs

the nests are hollow on the elms
plastic is sewn thru the nests

"I cannot rest" breathe, talk, stand, sit, teach,
wham, drip, dark, coin, cry, crap, yawn, or bitch

it gets dark but the rooster will say
that he's a fucking loser at the dawn



Rachel Houser

Ephemeroptera

You are not a mayfly
Born without mouth parts
Or a working digestive track
You were not meant to
Crawl from the cradle of childhood
Only to fly for five minutes
And then become fish food
You are not fish food

We are not tragic heroines
Despite what every asshole who fancies himself a playwright
Tries to throw at us
I know no Shakespeare
Only Lady Macbeth
We've both got blood on our hands
But we can use it
To paint the sky in every shade of pink and red
Because fire sky is made for us

I am made of fire and steel
You should know
You kept dropping matches in the underbrush
What did you expect to happen?
But I digress
That's not what this is about

It's about those ghosts we chased up the coast in the back of your father's car
It's about the grass stains I could never wash out of my jeans
It's about all the cuts we'll stitch up with feathers and flower stems
That we found in the woods
On those pathways we made
Still worn down by our feet
Like the pathways, the neural connections
The poison ivy that etched itself into your skin
I could never wash away

You are not a mayfly
But I can't teach you to grow a new mouth or a new stomach
I can't coax your taste buds to feel again
I can't rearrange the ecosystems for you
But I will fight all the fish I can
They will swallow hooks
Sparkling with power bait
Before they swallow you
They will fly into the air on fishing line
Five minutes suspended in our fire sky

I will hold your hand
While you get your wings to work
And they will last for decades
Not hours

Frog Song

The heat leaves quickly on those warm days in early summer
Or was it late spring?
I guess it doesn't really matter
Seasons blend together and lie in a pool on the floor

We lie in wet, itchy grass
Like we did as kids
Sometimes I think I can feel good memories radiating from me
Lost as heat and tears and outbursts
And all those nights I spent staring at the ceiling
But tonight we are safe
Lying on the grass
Picking scabs off the moon
Under the sound of the frog song
An unknown choir, a brand new voice
Because frogs don't live in the desert
Or if they do they dry up
With cracks forming in their lung-lined skin
But here they breathe through the moist mystery air
And the sound of rushing water is never too far away

I can count all the stars in all the universe
And I know they say that it's infinite
But we have all the time in the world
To look for the little pinpricks in the sky

And yet
In that cool summer night,
that forever night,
Even in that piece of eternity
You'll never wash the sunscreen off the back of your throat

God of Death

I am Persephone
Pomegranate juice dripping down my face
Except I didn't stop at six seeds
No, I ate the whole fruit
I ate the whole orchard
And let an ocean in
To water the dead gardens inside my stomach
And bring them back to life

In this story
My story
There is no Hades
Only me
Growing pomegranate trees in a desert
Feeding them with my own blood
No other god could hope to strike life back into those roots
But I can
God of life
And god of death

I will braid oleander into my hair
And wear nightshade as jewelry
My touch will be toxic
My gaze like flame
Remember what I can do
Remember that I've crawled out of the underworld
Swam upstream in the Styx
Like those salmon
Launching themselves over waterfalls
When they die
Their bodies feed the trees around them

Don't forget
Those pomegranate trees
Shoving their roots through rocky soil
And remember
That they couldn't grow without me



Wes Solether

in *home*

a word where

no voice gives

hold there

but my own

I slip away

to dream

fingerpushed

in her voice

*she reads an inscription in murky water
and traces these runes with fingerprints
never forget the name you left*

darkness falls

into lilac memory

untamed pinks growl
with purple skies

pipng clouds cut
little triumphs
through the sun

I find her palm lines
in the trail of grain,
her bones the splintering wood
roots at the base of the handle.

There are rituals attached to carrying
another's weapon in mourning.
I tie off a black lace and tangle it
in the roots of the handle.

I am rusted, shorn and slick as rain.
She left me threadbare but sharp.

on high

the Night-Threaders vocalize in lightning
form fragments that begin

to spool out a myth

the tendency of leviathan

to be made of worms

I master warm winds

and navigate storms

from their stories

slight

whispers

I lied on phones for hours
that weren't made for others
the downtown neighbors sulk
about the noise and pockets
across the heart a bullet
below to warm up hands
caught cold in sledding
snow downhill the cartography's
got her number down
in elevation even seven
seems like a fall or mist
the fury and returning heat.

Polaroids have gone the way
we started to walk cold down
feather pillows or high thread
needlework from long dead
ancestors shrines that give
us scrolls we don't want
to hear the ambulance outside
delivering more ice cream truck
bad news where we find our
hero faced with the choice
that isn't ever a choice because
we don't get to make it.



Amanda Korz

Mummy Your Baby Wants To Die

Blurry.

My memory is fuzzy.

What time are we in again?

Is it the roaring decade? Is sexuality still
being held; a damsel in distress?

Have we escaped those times?

Do we ever?

I don't remember.

No, Lady, I won't take your

Poison
anymore.

It doesn't help, it never did.

Medicine my ass!

You won't stab it into my soul
anymore.

I don't think Jesus died for me.

At least he suffered physically
people could glance at him and understand
why he gave blood cries and tears.

When I do at family dinner in restaurants
people

get

mad

Mother.

Medusa turned her to stone
and Poseidon shifted under the blankets
and she cracked

She can't see the sun

She's lactating death

It pumped down my fetal throat

What if I set my head on fire?

Would the badness go away?

Mum?

Kill it! Kill it! Kill it!

Make it leave, make it cry, make it suffer!

Mummy kill it!

Let me go
Mummy don't look at me.
the badness has me
I don't want to be like this anymore
it isn't cute

They're confused
they can't find out why?
Why? Why? Why? Why?
But there is no why?
There only is. I laugh at them
But they want a history they'll never get.
So the wheel keeps fucking turning.

Mummy?

A Sick Wish

Kiss me on the backs of my knees
and say you're in love with me
Touch my chest and see a mirror in my eyes.
Tell me I'm not insane.
Hold my hands with their dreams and tears
and don't look away.
Let me be between your legs
at last relaxed.
Let me have your healing touch again and again,
loving you with all my lungs.
I know I'm not beautiful, but I want you to think so.
Heart and soul rough by the erosion of tears.
What do you look like free in the dark,
when no one can see you?
Will you be vulnerable with me?

There's a rainbow in your answer,
and a rainfall in mine
as we walk away holding hands—friends.

Contributors

nick johnson was born and raised near the brackish Chesapeake Bay but now calls the Bay Area waters home. He received his MFA from the California College of the Arts. johnson's work has been featured on KPFA's *Rude Awakening*, and has appeared in *The Cincinnati Review*, *Black Renaissance Noire*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Metazen* and other fine journals. His first book of poems, *music for mussolini*, was recently released by Nomadic Press. Additionally, he wants you to know, he enjoys telling long-winded stories, Instagramming, making spicy curries, and drinking whiskey; typically in that order, but not always. Learn more at his website, www.nickjohnsonpoetry.com.

Lourdes Figueroa was born in Yuba City, California, during a trip her parents made from Mexico to the USA when they worked in the campo tilling the soil. Her work is rooted in migration, what her family lived when they moved to this country. In 2009 and 2011 she attended VONA. In 2012 she completed an MFA with a focus in poetry at USF. Her work has been published in Jack Hirschman's *Poets 11 2008 & 2010*, in *Generations*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Something Worth Revising* and BACKWORDS Press. She currently works and lives in San Francisco with her wife. *yolotl* was her first chapbook, published by Spooky Actions.

Chris Carosi is from Pittsburgh and studied at the University of San Francisco creative writing program. He is the author of the chapbooks *FICTIONS* (Gorilla Press, 2015) and *bright veil* (New Fraktur Press, 2011). His work has been published in *Spring Gun*, *Switchback*, and *Your Impossible Voice*. He lives in San Francisco, and works at City Lights Booksellers & Publishers.

Rachel Houser is a nineteen-year-old poet who is currently a sophomore in college, studying sociology and creative writing. When not writing, working, or going to class, she enjoys painting, hiking, and petting dogs.

Wes Solether teaches English and lives on a dead end street somewhere in the Midwest. He runs *Bitterzoet Magazine* and Press with his co-editor. Wes has been most recently published on the back of a t-shirt for BACKWORDS Press. He has a website with a very predictable address: www.wessolether.com. He knows you don't have to use the w's anymore, but he's nostalgic.

Amanda Korz is a sophomore at Mills College majoring in English with a minor in creative writing. Her work has appeared in De Anza College's literary magazine *Red Wheelbarrow*.

