

Fall 2003

Apocalypse - 2003

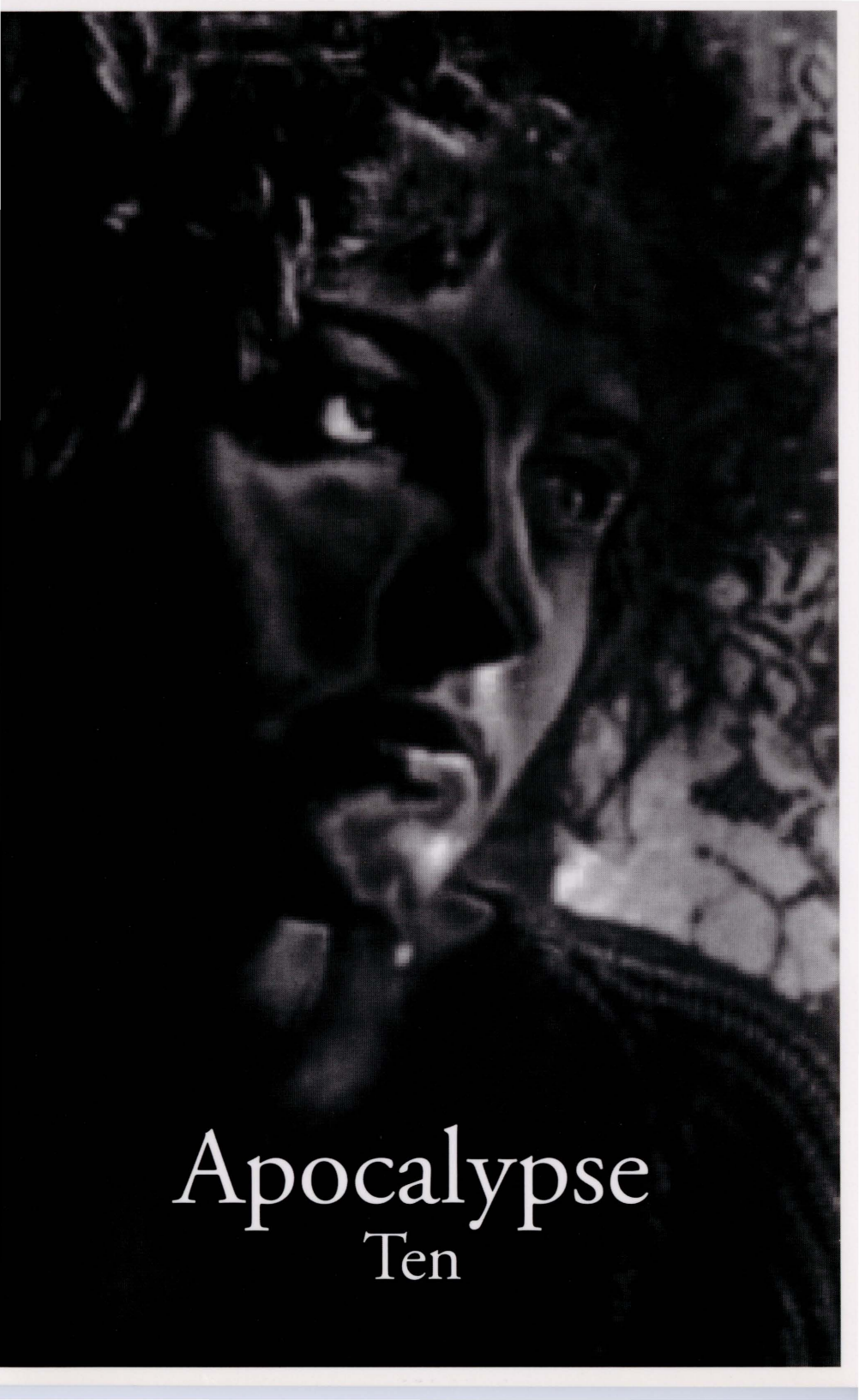
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Apocalypse
Ten

NORTHEASTERN FLORIDA
UNIVERSITY
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KATY PENA

There's Something About Snow

It's snowing outside, big fat flakes, and I'm sorting through old snapshots, wondering about the eulogy I'm supposed to write, flowery words of praise about my aunt, Eva, a dour reminder of painful pinches, especially in church.

She finally died on Tuesday in the intensive care unit. She'd been there a month and it was my second visit. My cousin, Karl, a little stooped and gray, embraced me, my head against him. There was something about him in my mind, a puzzle which bothered me though I couldn't pin it down, and while I was contemplating, my aunt groaned and died, her collapsed mouth open like a cave.

With a look of astonishment, Karl quickly leaned over his mother's face, searching her blue eyes, which were surprised wide inside their shell-shocked sockets; he clutched her shoulders, his knuckles white, whispering, "Oh," moving his face even closer to hers. After awhile, he turned his head and looked at me. "Listen," he said, and I leaned toward him, listening for something like a flap, a flight, waiting, waiting as a new silence could as Jupiter gathered around us.

Then suddenly, he stood up and hugged me with one arm. His other arm hung down, the fingers of his hand gripping my aunt's shawl draped over her legs, the very same shawl she wore when she was twenty-nine sailing across the ocean, all the way to the Florsheim shoe factory on Belmont. "Write something nice, will you?" he said. I nodded, turning away from the tear alone on the line of his lashes, my eyes following the plastic tube curling into a bag of blood and urine.

I remember Aunt Eva as a stern sturdy woman who voted for Bush. Both of them. Every Saturday, after German class, she threw all the leftovers together, always making us wonder what we were eating with our baked apples and chocolate milk. She would explain the sin of throwing away good food, sometimes reminiscing about her own hunger during the war, often times describing

soup with bug-infested peas, joking about the crunch. Sometimes though, she sat stirring her coffee, hardly noticing any of us, talking about how she survived the camps. I now know that because of Hitler's politics, some of the former Nazi camps were turned into camps for Germans, that many new camps sprung up throughout Eastern Europe to wipe out the entire German population. But most of the victims were common people, apolitical, like my aunt who came from the Banat in Yugoslavia. As children, we thought of her stories as adventures which quickened our blood, never for one moment realizing the horrors she described were her own.

Even now, looking through the snapshots, I realize I never really knew her.

In many of the pictures, she's staring straight into the camera, always staring straight into the lens, a dare-to stare, a woman with home-permed hair.

But, some of the photos reveal her as thin and elegant with dimples in her cheeks, playful even in a one piece bathing suit, holding a fistful of sand over my uncle's head.

But I only remember her as old with a swinging cane, screaming about the flames of hell she saw leaping around us, calling us "heeethans," crying loon-like and staring at the purple-colored painting of Christ kneeling in the Garden of Gethsemane, wiping water from her purple-colored sockets, her hands flashing with purple-colored veins.

According to my mother, Aunt Eva was married in a black dress. "No headpiece, no wedding guests, not even a cake." She told me this on the phone last night, after I called to find out what I should write. The custom was to pin long white ribbons onto the bride's dress. "But," my mother said, "Die Tante," referring to Aunt Eva, "never had any of that."

"Was everyone in mourning or something?"

"She had a hard life."

"And?"

"She really had a hard life."

"Mother, we all have hard lives."

"Ach," my mother said, "what are you talking about?"

And I could see my mother sitting stiff and pinched. "Why was Eva married in a black dress?"

"Your uncle wanted it that way because his first wife died from tuberculosis. Plus he was cheap." She sighed, then paused, and then I sighed. Then, "My parents promised her to Fritz, thinking she'd have a better life because his parents owned the largest vineyard around. Thank God, I was lucky, able to marry for love. My sisters called me 'the lucky one,' even in the camp."

"Why?"

"Ach," my mother said, "Always you are with the why," and I could see her frowning through the telephone wires. "How should I know why? What I'm telling you is what I know. They had their way with women." And I knew by the way she rushed that she was referring to rape.

I also knew that Berta was saved from the pit by a guard, and that she called the place "The valley of death," to irritate my grandmother, and that my Aunt Eva was taken away in the mornings and brought back late at night, sometimes covered with bruises, and that there was a guard who left his post when the other guards weren't around so that my mother could sneak out into the fields for food. Sometimes though, she was caught.

I know it from the Sundays of my childhood when company came over. They used to sit around the dining room table, drinking coffee and wine, smoking, listening to the German station, musik from two to four, talking about their friends, Landsleute. Sometimes they talked about the camps, about the slave-labor program, Arbeit Macht Frei, looking through photo albums, leafing through the Mramoraker Bote, a ten page newsletter on the whereabouts of the survivors, missing the Heimat, Heimat meaning much more than just a homeland. Sometimes they laughed; but sometimes they sat staring into a silence soft and swampy.

And then afterward, I could only think of how it must have been for them in the camp, wondering, trying to imagine what it felt like. As I got older, I sat in my bell-bottoms and smoked marijuana, looking through the photo albums, catching their

glimpses. Then, one day, the images became too powerful, so I stopped looking at them.

"Some things I remember as if they were yesterday," my mother said. "Others as in a dream. One thing is certain. Fritz was a changed man after the war. But before, well, what can I say? It was no picnic for Eva. She worked in the vineyard hard as a man. And then after Karl was born, they'd drop him off at my parents' every Sunday night, then pick him up the following Saturday so she could work in the fields. I can still see the way Karl hung on her leg, his face pressed into her skirt."

"But what about her real self?" I said, wondering about her arranged marriage, thinking of my aunt and uncle alone in their room on their wedding night, thinking of what my mother had said. "He saw her in the garden and liked the way she looked."

"Write about how she escaped Rudolfsgrad," she said, referring to the camp in Yugoslavia. "She got away with her children. She traveled seventy days and seventy nights, hiding in the fields and forests, moving only at night. Karl almost died. I don't know how she found the strength, but somehow, she carried him all the way into Romania. From there they traveled underground until they reached Austria."

"Where was Fritz?"

"He ended up in Theresienstadt. Night after night, he stood in cold water up to his neck. It's a miracle he survived. But like I said, he was a changed man after the war."

After I hung up, I pulled out another album and a rolled-up blanket my husband and I bought in Bombay on our honeymoon. We had gone there for some enlightenment but somehow ended up in the market place after smoking hashish. It was 1969, and mankind had leaped into the sky, onto a crescent moon we watched after making love. Now, it seems as if all of it had been someone else's life.

Wrapped inside the blanket is a velvet-colored box, soft as blue satin, my grandmother gave me. Inside are a few more pictures and a small maroon-colored plastic folder with a stamped

seal, "The United States Escapee Program." I remember these snapshots. By the time I was twelve, I knew most of them by heart. Now, almost all of them are yellowed, their ends cracked and curled, their images as distant as the stars.

There's a picture taken here, in Chicago, on Byron and Ravenswood. It must've been twilight because all the shadows are long and the faces are soft. There's something about the wait between the light and the dark that lures people outside. It must've felt like that because the entire family is standing in front of my father's Ford Fairlane. Eleven of us: Fritz, Grandmother, Eva and my two cousins, my two sisters, Aunt Berta, Mother and Father. I'm standing next to Aunt Eva, in front of my cousin, Karl. He has his arm around my neck, his hand cupping the side of my face. I think I was eleven, Karl twenty-three, maybe twenty-four.

It's three o'clock in the morning, but because of the snow, some of the darkness has crawled away, and I find myself listening to the soft bang of the furnace. Clouds of memories swirl around me: Mother scrubbing us clean, dressing us in stiff starched cotton, Grandmother dressed in black, always in black, her hair always covered, Aunt Berta squeezing her shoulders together like some nightclub singer from the Moulin Rouge with a cigarette dangling from her red lips shaped like a heart, while Aunt Eva talked about a garden full of jasmine, mallows, and mint. I remember my father drawing a map in the sand on the beach, a history lesson every Sunday. "This is where we came from," he said, making a spot, "a place called Mramorak, a place which no longer exists on any map."

When we came to America, we lived with Aunt Eva and Uncle Fritz in a tall skinny three-flat on Barry, a few blocks from the lake. I remember Father with him, waiting for us at Union Station. We were dressed in our best clothes, and Mother had pinned pink bows in our hair, Father was like a stranger running towards us, pulling us up into his arms and kissing us. We hadn't seen him in three years, a lifetime, it seemed. I don't remember much else, except the sweet smell of tobacco around him, also coloring books and a rubber doll with a white bonnet.

I tasted my first banana in my aunt's kitchen, so sweet, so good, "Ess doch," she said, laughing, telling me to eat, eat, smoothing back my hair, and I kept on eating, almost half a bushel. I used to spend hours sitting, staring at the brown Zenith radio on the shelf above the table, counting the numbers on the yellowed dial. Sometimes I watched my aunt stretching strudel dough thin as paper, listening to her sing some Slavic song. Sometimes she hummed "I'll Be Seeing You," a Lawrence Welk favourite. Sometimes when I close my eyes, I can still smell the chicken soup, the cabbage, the odor of vanilla which clung to her walls.

At that time, the bathroom had no locks. Sometimes, while I was taking a bath, Karl would come in and shave, winking at my modesty. Sometimes my sister would jump into the water with me. There was always someone coming in, going out. Funny I should even think about it all because I hardly remember any of it except the embarrassment I felt around Karl. I was in awe of him, following him around, watching the way he played chess, waiting forever, it seems, before he moved one of the ivory carved pawns.

It's a few hours before the funeral, and I still haven't written anything. Instead, I'm watching the snow, so white and fine and new. I like the quiet way it changes everything into something so absolute, the whiteness a blanket of smoothness covering up the brutal broken world. There's a deer by the snow-clasped fence, taking three quick nibbles of something, then lifts its head, cautiously glancing at everything deserted, then slow-slopes away.

At seven, the phone rings. It's my mother. "don't forget to say something about your grandmother, and don't forget to mention all the packages your aunt sent while we were waiting for identity papers. It's because of her that we're all here, you know."

In church, after singing, "All's Well With My Soul," I walk to the front, thinking about man in the totality of the universe, thinking about Aunt Eva in the last few years, old and alone, sitting in front of the television, her cloudy eyes lost in the "700 Club," or some other religious program, while her visitors couldn't wait to leave.

Except Karl, who watched and watched her die, cooling her

lips with ice. Now, for the very first time in his life, he's alone, his shoulders hunched in the front pew. "What a ladies man," they used to say. But somehow, he ended up taking care of his mother.

I swallow, looking down, thinking about all those packages my aunt used to send. They came, month after month, cans of Krakus ham, assortments of cheese, smoked sausage, and clothes, which my mother sold for more food. They came until she was able to bring us to America.

I clear my throat, looking around. There are not too many Landsleute left, but the church is full anyway. "I called her Tante Eva. She was one in fifteen million..."

DANNY BYZANTINE

Only in June

*I will begin to drink and strew flowers though the world think me
indiscreet. Horace, Epistles 1.5. 14-15*

With the peripheral vision
common to women,
especially those in the habit
of being accosted,

she caught my approach
to her booth
and defensively mustered
her best glare,

but it instantly revised
to a smile
after I told her
I had a poem.

I read her a haiku
on the triumph
of nature over contrived
endeavors

and then I drizzled her
with the petals
I had gathered up
in a baggie.

The withered peony stalks
of my desk vase
resurrected on her hair
and in her face.

DANNY BYZANTINE

"Syndicalist"

Nothing nourishes me
like learning a new word
over roditys
on a midnight Tuesday.

But it must be used
with precision
and not be greased
into a conversation

and lit with an "Opaa!"
of erudition.
The term has to cohere
to the situation

like the honey and nuts
between the phyllo
in a layered hunk
of baklava.

By a piece of luck
I have a literate friend
with pedigree links
to Sybaris and Uniontown.

DANNY BYZANTINE

Hotchpotch

For characters per square foot
at 2 AM
no restaurant could touch
Jeff's Laugh-Inn.

One night there were two conversations
other than ours,
both with single diners talking
to empty chairs.

There could be a limousine
flagrantly parked
where the week before there'd been
a grocery cart.

Once there was a couple
fresh from a film,
and we hashed Scorsese
and Altman.

Some diners wore the pallor
of addicts;
some appeared to be hookers
between tricks.

With a hotel upstairs
and crossroads outdoors,
the joint was a seminar
in urban discourse.

DANNY BYZANTINE

Backed-Up Juke, 1967

Digestive juices were breaking down
our burgers and fries
but no elbows were taking leave
of the formica
until I'd gotten
my dime's worth of Stones
and "Let's Spend the Night Together"
gorged my teenage veins.

DANNY BYZANTINE

Flush

In 1983 the aces
knew me by my first name,
and I could devour a steak
without gaining weight.

Jeff hosted a Tuesday game,
and half the nights he, Paul, and I
would wind the buzz down
with breakfast at the Parkway.

My eggs arrived way up:
two steep yellow hills
on a thick white island
not vulcanized but jelled,

with a talus of potatoes
grilled golden brown,
and tuffs of whole-wheat toast
decisively buttered.

And, ensconced
on its own plate,
a hulking length
of skirt steak,

a piece of meat that came
cooked with knowledge and care:
charred at all salients,
red artery at its core.

There was a steak knife
but, ripping along the grain,
I could have managed
with fork's blunt tine.

I washed it down with two
or sometimes three
cups of pungent
piping-hot coffee.

We'd replay hands
and plan Saturday's
party or band
and laugh, always laugh.

We'd watch the cops
watching the punkers
fresh from closing
NEO dance club.

I'd lay my silverware
on a plate cleaned
of everything but
a ruddy trickle of grease.

I'd head home replete
but keen, an animal
that has parried
with antagonists

and come out ahead,
that has feasted
and is eager
for more dreams.

DANNY BYZANTINE

The Wrangler

If you venture out to wild Western
where it crosses Chicago
don't sit next to the register
because the burger-to-go
sizzles for a fifty-inch waist
who holds his cigarette
between you and your plate
and thinks the Bill of Rights
is a friggin' joke
if it gives you the license
to snivel "Smoke!"
in a crowded restaurant.

DANNY BYZANTINE

This is My Coffee

All the glaze has been lipped
from the rim of the cup
and I drink communally
with the diners before me
from the bottomless pot
kept hot throughout the night.

DANNY BYZANTINE

Flighty

After hours of drinking,
it struck us that we were starved;
with only one place open,
that's the direction we staggered.

Now, Myron didn't drink that often
but when he did he overdid:
he ran abstinent or abandoned,
on-the-wagon or the guzzle kid.

Majoring in English
he'd read way too much Byron,
Blake, and Lawrence: excess
as the path to wisdom.

One thing he hadn't learned
was how to hold his liquor,
so Dave and I were the half-blind
leading the totally pickled.

He had made it to Clark
just a half-block from the Huddle
when Myron broke from our support
thinking he'd rather fly than shuffle.

Flapping his arms he dashed off
and was making great time
until he veered to the left
and was impeded by a lightpole.

We heard the gong: Myron
had struck the hour of one
for the night owls
of downtown Evanston.

He had also driven his front teeth
completely through his lip
which we learned later when the bleeding
had finally stopped.

We carried him to the restaurant
and spent an hour in the bathroom:
after we'd iced his mouth
he started to puke.

It was sobering to see how much
the aviator bled;
by the time we had it stanchd
his shirt was drip-dyed red.

It was about then that his brain
booted back up the system
that acknowledges pain
and balks Supermanism.

We'd lost our appetites,
so we escorted the wreck
home to his apartment
and got him into bed.

It's always baffling
how for a college student
food can mean everything
or be irrelevant.

DANNY BYZANTINE
Backers of the Arts

In this relic of dinerdom
waitress in her later forties sports
a self-administered haircut.
No split ends ravel from blunt lines;
the dark mass is thick and healthy
from infrequent bouts with shampoo.

Two sentences disclose she's not
the sharpest knife in the drawer,
but how many dames conversant
with Beckett have retained a lilt
of honeyedness in their voices
to such an appreciable age
or a green willingness to please?

Loathe to dyspalate me, she brews
a pot fresh and keeps refills
coming without instigation
even though Tom and I comprise
the customership. And when my
raisin toast arrives adequate
I burst into dithyramb on
the virtues of the joint and what
a public service is being
dispensed here. Tom lets the geyser
disgorge and then unmarvels me
with the fact that the restaurant
is a front which provides access
to the den of gambling next door.

Wiser but no less thankful I
propose a toast and we clink cups
to the gamesters who subsidize
our procrastinatory talk
of Coleridges and coined kings.

B. Z. NIDITCH
Hampton Beach

With new 9 AM binoculars
you survey the cliff dwellers
huge beef embracing
bruised motorcycles
heated leather and tattoos
near the turnpike
where two nymphs dance
to James Brown
in the tumbleweed
giggling with eagerness
will pass a half hour
with perfumed surf
stinging their nostrils
waves curled
in a panic attack
and big-eyed Joe
the eternal lifeguard
knowing he's being watched
removes his Roman shirt
and flips through a roadmap
for the shy tourists
who deposit towels, lotion and laughter
in Apollo's path.

B. Z. NIDITCH
Moving

It was quiet?
The furniture no longer speaks?
solitude has fused
your tiny rooms
the naked fatigue
of a mortal space
between blond teak tables
evening of something new
sunlight dissolves
the kitchen
you want to embrace
the sky.

DIANA SMITH

Just Once

I want you
to get crazy about me as I do about you
write me two hundred poems
write me one
sing a song in front of an audience
that sounds like you'll die without me
blush from head to toe
get down on your knees in front of the phone
make it ring
dial my number every last digit
don't stop thinking about me
ever
don't go on without me
don't act like you can go on without me
don't say you're doing fine without me
don't
don't
don't
just one time say what you mean
just say
stop driving me with that part of you.
I'm done
go back to what you were doing

DIANA SMITH

Ars Poetica

I ache inside to write this way.
So stolen lines become an inspiration,
to eke out words, unscramble images,
word incantation is falling in place.

Stolen lines become an inspiration.
What that poet did, I could too.
Word incantation is falling in place.
Who talks like this anyway?

What that poet did, I could too.
*The smell of barber shops makes me sob out loud.**
Who talks like this anyway?
The resonance of sounds feel like they're piercing my heart.

The smell of barber shops makes me sob out loud.
to eke out words, unscramble images,
The resonance of sounds feel like they're piercing my heart.
I ache inside to write this way.

**Walking Around* by Pablo Neruda.

DIANA SMITH

Missing You, Finding Me

I thought of how it might have been with you.
What would I give up? What part of me?
If there's a chance that we could be together,
then I'll endure these sleepless nights apart.
Expectations too much of a burden for any man.
I'm learning how to forgive as a woman.

Now I've found my strength as a woman,
this time that we've been apart.
Exploring my passions, what excites me,
focusing on me instead of you,
visualizing a new life together,
will you come back and be my man?

You came to me hurt, a broken man.
Yet, we made a good life together.
Love like that has never happened to me.
Panic, a constant companion, while we're apart.
I'm starting the car, driving to you,
please let me be your woman.

Friends ground me, respect me as a woman.
A wonderful life awaits even if we're not together.
Power is returning, what's happening to me.
I'll be ok, with or without you.
Secure and enough without a man.
I've learned so much since we've been apart.

Not answering me, you wish to stay apart,
both of us have to want to be together.
Memories of the good times, I miss you.
Beginnings of new life stirring within me.

Grateful to have been with such a gentle man.
Learning too late how to love like a woman.

Acceptance and forgiveness as a woman,
I'm letting go, in little pieces, of this man.
Knowing that we're going to be apart.
No choice but to live life for me.
Not forgetting or blaming but honoring you,
never giving up hope of a future together.

Whirling inside, thinking of you and me,
scared to be together, afraid to be apart,
Familiar story of woman and man.

DIANA SMITH
Disquietude

I'm so tired of listening for airplanes
just when I think I'm over you.
Embracing my new life until
the engine whirr makes me stop.
I hold my breath.
Looking up,
I remind myself to breathe in, out.

It wasn't safe up there
my life in your shaking hands.
Gripping the wheel
you flinched when I touched you
disengaged
from my touch, my words.

Walking with a friend,
I see landing lights flashing on
and off, a plane's way of saying hello.
Propelling forward
breaking free
looking upward
I come unglued.

DONNA PUCCIANI
Iowa

He stares straight ahead in the next seat, brows furrowed, hands clutching the wheel, steering between parallel lines. The tar road wiggles in the heat. We talk of how flat Iowa is, "like Illinois, or Nebraska," a landscape pocked by silos, dollhouse farms on deadened fields, a broken tree pasted to the horizon. Two hours out of Chicago, hills appear mounding around the highway which has suddenly begun to search for itself around corners. Stubble becomes green and the stark morning glare eases between little hills that surprise the afternoon. We blink, awakened into conversation. I ask, "if our marriage were a landscape, what would it be?" He swerves, swearing at an eighteen-wheeler holding up traffic in the left lane, replies, "Nepal." I wait, wondering, a tortuous climb? ecstasy at the top? instability — three kings in one week? Trees clump along the highway in well-manured fields, the car dips in troughs then rises with the noonday steam as flat becomes rolling, and a straight road turns to winding.



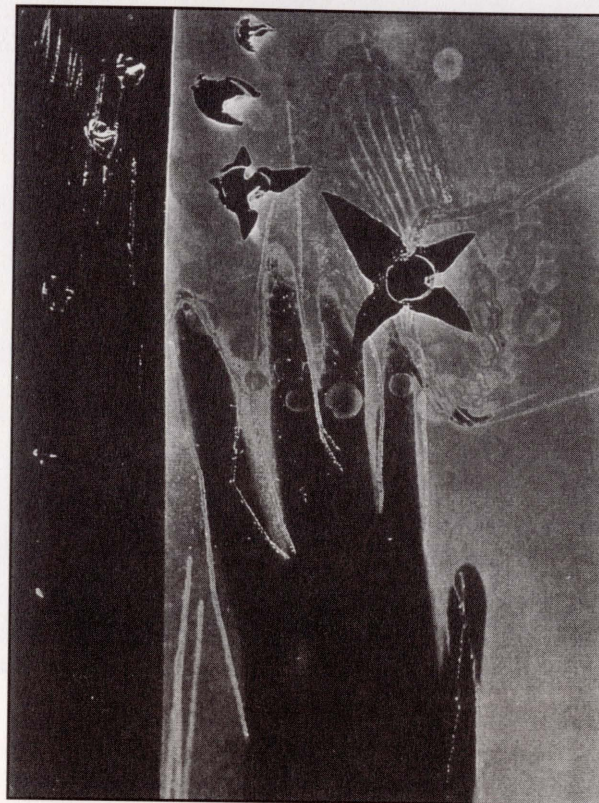
KATY PENA
Untitled



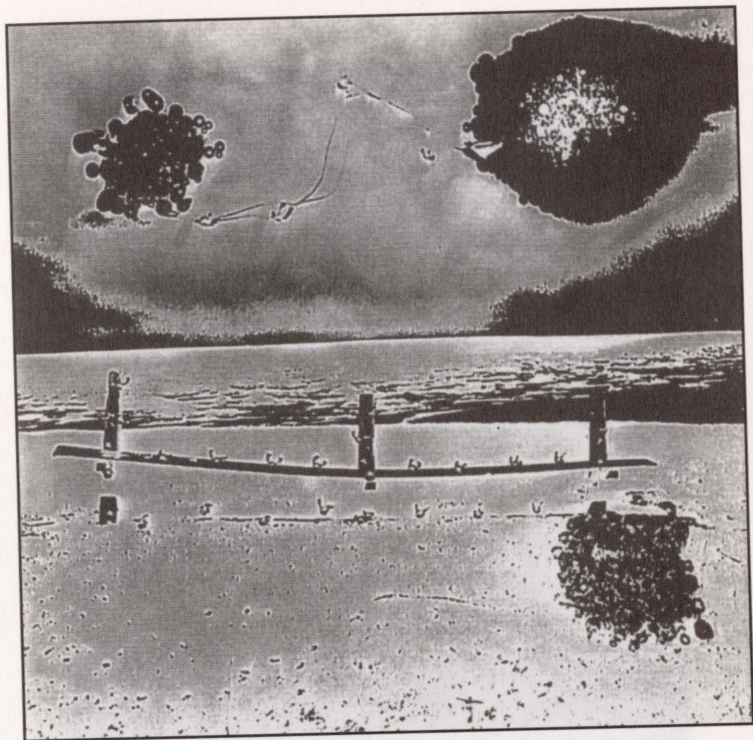
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PATTY DICKSON PIECZKA

Reading the Tea Leaves

The flakes have settled
in a blurred outline
on the constellation Carina,
the sparkling ship
that sails the sky.
I see a man about to
breeze into your life,
promising pearls formed
in the shell of a star
and a garden blooming with dreams.

He is the steam rising from your cup,
the smoke in your hearth.
He will imbue you with warmth,
but as you blink your eyes
or bend to scratch an ankle,
he will dissipate, leaving
you alone with your tea,
its surface a mirror
that reflects only your flaws.
The air will taste thin, as though
certain molecules were missing.

Sometimes, in the early evening,
you will stretch on a hammock
woven from wishes and bathe
in the glow of a falling day.
His voice will roll through your hair,
his breath kissing your ear.
You will reach out to lick his lips
with your fingertip but
bring back a handful of sunset.

PATTY DICKSON PIECZKA

Grandma

Her laughter ribboned
through the world of men.
She sang her way to independence
in a day when her opinions
were pages in an uncut book
her mouth's only purpose
to smile or kiss.

She was seventy when I was eight,
our interests as different
as jumprope and Puccini.
Stories sprouted in her garden,
tangling through butcher's broom
she grew for blood
and hawthorne for the heart.
Lilies blossomed, yellow
and silky as the kimono
she wore in *The Mikado*.

She threw skeins of wisdom
at my restless feet
and I tossed them
into hopscotch squares.
Now I wind threads together,
mend the tears in old tales
fragile as an embroidered shawl,
too tattered to wear
but too fine to throw away.

JOHN GREY
Early Snow

It's early snow. It's snow that's blown
its schedule and thinks that it can
do the same to mine. It's drifting
onto places still green with summer.
It's weighing on leaves just turned,
trying to bully them into falling.
It would light upon my eyes if I
let it. It would taper down onto
my skin. Even in this weakened, out
of season state, it would have me
believe it can blizzard my vision,
ice my tan. It skitters across the
window where I go for my vision of
the world. It wants to hear me describe
life differently, detect the surprise
in my voice, the disappointment with
the way of things. It's not here to
manipulate my notions. If it can
falsify the scenery, then all interpretation
is at risk. How about a chilly mound
on this man's love, an accumulation
right where the heart should be.
Why not some drifts across the forehead,
blowing in through the pores, slashing
brain and thought and possibilities.
Outside my window, the unexpected's on
a mission. But despite the snow's intention,
I still feel love, still feel, still think.
When I see it fluttering down too
early in the season, I merely tell myself,
"That's odd," the same way I'd say
nothing is.

ALAN CATLIN
Confined To

meager living
quarters by
insidious disease-
late in life-55-
he discovers
a facility
for creation-
primitive art
but original
all the same-
canvases
stretched &
filled w/
wild colors
places & things-
objects like
no other
gradually
diminished by
Parkinson's-
before a final
draught of
poisoned brew
steeped for
the endless
night

ALAN CATLIN

*Unfinished Ives: Giants vs Cubs August
1907 Polo Grounds*

Which bare symphonic line had he intended
for this unfinished fifth symphony?
Were there to be suggestive folk tunes
incorporated with a complex measuring of note
crushed against note? descending as a devil's chord,
something that can never be reclaimed, something
as simple as a Shaker tune or popped corn or
something as complex as Onward Christian Soldiers
marching off to a war to end all wars, which was only
a prelude to yet another war more unimaginable
than the last,
the recapitulation of a dread theme as vivid as Owen's
Dulce et Decorum Est, battlefields made luminous
at night
by bold artillery displays spelling the measures of
new anthems
for a doomed youth, celebrations so colorful and full
of life they are mesmerizing as all the Fourth of Julys
of the mind watched from dugouts, trenches permanently
filled in after the deciding scoring in the bottom of
the ninth.

TRACIE AMIRANTE

Direction

After my mother found vodka bottles
stashed under the eaves of our garage,
my father headed West
and slept on a mountain, among clouds,
while the rain ran on all night long. Elsewhere

and elsewhere, my new friend Sam napped on a boat
off the coast of Persia. When I shut my eyes,
railroad tracks rambled off into Pacific blue and
I lost you in a corn maze. Matt disappeared
in the gold sea of rural Kansas; Aireen came back
from China, but Chris remains an island north of
Someday. All this and more and I long-distance dated
the whole state of Pennsylvania and now here's this
ticket
to New York City and all my waking life waits,
half-packed
in the suitcase yawning open upon the bed. Sometimes,
all this travel makes sense: we leave home

to see which part of us will turn up in the cities
and swimmingholes over the mountains, across
the sea - as though whatever walks on in our
walking shoes is the true Who that we are. Other days,
only the question is obvious. And I sit here,
spinning the globe like the answer is easy as

x marks the spot

and I'm trying to pin it down and
my fingers catch on but
can't hold.

TRACIE AMIRANTE

What the Kindergarteners Know

Kindness is a boomerang.

Building a city or
breaking a bridge: but
it's the same hands.

In fingerprints, red is
preferred. Skies are blue
only until you shut your eyes
and pick green.

Ladybugs are pretty, but
they do not taste good.

Everyone has the potential
to earn a gold star.

Boring people believe
they are too tall
for the dream-mats.

Ants come
in 10,000 varieties
of small-but-strong.

If you hold it
too long, it's bound
to trickle down your leg
and cause Trouble.

Sometimes, being wrong
means you're learning
to be Right.

And if we were bees,
dancing would mean
deeper than any
of these words.

TRACIE AMIRANTE

yoU-Haul

Your life lies quiet: boxed
and stacked in the hall,
dust settles soft upon
the packed-up procession of parts
our selves
divide into.

This house
the house of our youth,
red warmth of bricks

stripped back to
birthday clothes—
this house is
all nude walls now, and counters
uncluttered by
crumbs.

The truck hums in the drive.
I wrap arms around a box marked
winter apparel, remember us
ten&twelve, shivering in
snow-wet wool,
thin fingers of shy light pooled
through the cab, there is just this
singular puddle of sun
to catch and keep us, ten&twelve.

The truck hums in the drive, sighs
down the block and rounds a corner
I can't see. Walking through rooms emptied
of sisters and giggles, I
one

by
one

thumb down the lights, draw blinds
across windows, pale and blank, eyes
shut in sleep. You dream across town.

The door at my back
has lips to kiss keys. I lock it and think
how the body, too, is like this:

all our memories matched
edge to edge packed
in the attic
behind the eyes.

TRACIE AMIRANTE
The View From a Dream

In the dream, the back window looks out
into a yard where it is always winter.
There's a steep cliff where rocks tumble
downdowndown to a place I cannot see,
and the railroad tracks run alongside:
a straight, smooth line leading into the horizon
where steel meets the patchwork mottle
of sky and cloud.

I come to the window quietly, seeking a new perspective.
But everything in this landscape turns to echoes
and snow. I'm learning. What the blind know, now
I know: how feeling fingers see. My greengold heart, new
and newer each season; my footfalls full of settled whispers-
but some vertical lines are endless. (In geometry class,
we knotted each parallel with a tiny arrow shot towards infinity;
and my hands—reaching! stretching! alive!—are like this too.)

Shutting the window, I choose the railroad.
Eardrum, heartdrum pressed to the tracks,
I listen for the singing settled inside everything:
blue sky, low cloud, cut steel bars and snow,
the loud-soft sigh of
snow and snow and
go and
why.

EFFIE MIHOPOULOS
Standard

your standards
are never the same
as mine.
so we break bread together
to make amends.
lunch in the afternoon.
here we go again.
your place is out.
how about mine?

EFFIE MIHOPOULOS

Facets

inside each face
you wear
is a new secret
you change
your mask
each day
as if it were
underwear
or pantyhose
or yesterday's newspaper
disguised as
tomorrow's news

EFFIE MIHOPOULOS

Lover's Masque

1000 shoes in line
on the rack.

How we use them to beguile
by disguising ourselves:
to become some other
creature we would like
to be,
a costume of
character,
a masquerade
of footwork.

EFFIE MIHOPOULOS

Trumpeter

for Maurice Brown

he sizzles the sky above his head
with sound
splits the room into a raging parade of rhythms
he makes the music move
alive
in his body
fluid sound

EFFIE MIHOPOULOS

Taskmaster

You cup my heart with your hands
and make me a dancer of minutes.
They stretch like a string that never slackens,
bouncing against the beat of your heart.

I am a dancer of minutes
that multiply into a chorus of sighs,
a chorus of tongues that linger
over the sound of words
whispered into the dark silence
of shoulders
that keep stretching into hands.

Your breathing is a series of strings,
ribbons that tiptoe against my skin
in a multitude of minutes.

The night is a dancer,
a metronome of minutes
set precisely taught
by your hands
and the sweetness
of words
precisely spoken.

EFFIE MIHOPOULOS

Saxophone

for Jose G. Aggari, Jr.

Jose has two hearts—
a real one and an imaginary one.
He worships the sun and the moon first—
and then the Saxophone,
meditating on its brass scales,
running his fingers up and down the keys.
He's got a spare heart in reserve,
for when his real heart gets broken.
The two hearts converse.
Each one makes up its own rhythm,
the heartbeat of the drum,
creating each moment that lives itself out,
the experience of the mutual harmony
of Earth, Fire, Water and
the heat of the Sun.
The ultimate therapist.
The void of the human heartbeat.
The reality of feelings.
The stigma of the ever-beating heart,
multiplied by two selves—
one heart for today, one heart for tomorrow.
He closes his eyes & imagines
the rising sun
dawning
surrounded by the shrouded moon
in the shadows of twilight,
those early hours of morning that birth the blues—
one heart here, the other there.
He molds each with his hands,
as if he is baking bread,
kneading it carefully, ridding it of excess emotions.
There is no answer to each of your destinations,

the difference of each individual truth,
one heart for each moment
that defines itself
the utter truth of each of those moments
that begins & ends with nothing
& grows from there
into twin hearts.

EFFIE MIHOPOULOS

Maneuvers

you move like a soldier today,
stiff and regimental.
your face is a mask
as rigid as the front of a hospital building
with its rows of doors and windows
lining it—
all of them an abstract painting
open or shut indifferently
their lights blinking
off or on
at random.
you are impervious to charm today—
nothing can change you.
you stare at me through those eyes
that never falter
you stare at me
as if I were a blank wall the patients confront
each day
like an enemy.
nothing can make you smile today—
like those guards at the palace gates
afraid to grimace,
with their jobs weighing in the balance.
you look at me through those eyes
that have turned from water into ice.
nothing can crack the surface,
not even the crackle of laughter
that echoes all around you:

glittering ice
you refuse to melt.
you could never even go as far
as to soften
into snow

EFFIE MIHOPOULOS
POEM FOR TED 3-6-80

for Ted Berrigan

If you can get to where you're going
write a poem
If your voice quivers when you read
write a poem
If you can turn the pages of a book in sequence
write a poem
If you can read French and wear a cowboy hat
write a poem
If you can crack the Alexandria Quartet
write a poem
If you can translate a sonnet into twelve dreams
write a poem
If you can transform lightbulbs into rose gardens
write a poem
If you can live on the cold surface of the moon
write a poem
If you can wear your hair like a shawl
draping your shoulders
write a poem
If you can write history while eating a baloney sandwich
write a poem
If you can make bracelets out of jeweled words
write a poem
If you can translate images into rituals
write a poem
If you can look at the moon
thinking only of its resident divinities
write a poem
If you can blow your gum into one big bubble
while you blow up a factory
write a poem

If you can wear the stars in your eyes
as if they were army fatigues
write a poem
If you can limbo under the shoulder straps of your purse
write a poem
If you can stay up past midnight regularly
with or without pills
write a poem
If you can turn yourself into a god or goddess
write a poem
If you can chase midgets and never catch up to them
write a poem
If you can read when the lights are out
write a poem
If you were ever drunk in Paris
write a poem
If you can tear up paper into black holes
write a poem
If you can write a poem under any circumstances
write a poem.....write a poem.....write a poem
in the space that follows
under the divine moon
in this room that makes you
such a crazy poet
write a poem

EFFIE MIHOPOULOS

Bronze Daze

your days are a succession of
everyday chores waxing & polishing until your
reflection shines in the mirror of each month
you wade through. the calendar comes full
circle again. first one month, then another. day
in, day out; months multiply into a year. first
one month, then another. you flutter toward
daylight like a moth too close to irony for
comfort. day in, day out. you polish the surface
of words that surround you, creating the same
metallic sheen. day in, day out: you are a
statue. the same book of letters in your hands
that your friends read: first one page, another,
first one poem, another: the book of living
days. polishing its smooth metal surface, such
shiny solid bronze, to accurately reflect
everything around you, the way it really isn't

GERTRUDE RUBIN

To The Moon

Blindman's white eye,
the gossip's left ear,
punctual intruder —
you tread a deadly
path, always
on target.

Now is the time
to break loose,
live by your wits,
take the advise
of an earth maverick:
defy gravity.

Waiting in the wings,
exposed by degrees,

You hang like a
hard, wet snowball
that missed its
mark. Stuck
in a spoke of the
Sorcerer's wheel.

GERTRUDE RUBIN

Casualty List

The elm is gone.
It was trapped, lassoed
like a dumb animal, and
felled by an ordinary buzz saw.
Ancient time-rings were stripped
naked, discarded on the curb.
All that remains is the sky behind it.

I sleep in a room, in a house,
younger than those trees.
Last night, when the elm held up
severed wrists to ease the pain,
and let the blood run down, I woke
and heard the roots stir uneasily.

I kept silence, mindful of
my bad habit of saying too much
or too little—dreading
the elm's last hours.
Rooted near the window,
I wept, helpless as a tree.

GERTRUDE RUBIN

Night of the Druids

Who picked the last rose,
and pricked the Beauty's finger
twice? Why were the birds
suspended in midflight, the
barking dogs struck dumb?
The West Wind declining
To answer, draws its breath
Like a cello's dark note.

Once,
while alone in the yard,
someone felt closely
watched. Or overlooked.
And, for reasons unknown,
knew the difference, but
not the words to say it.

GERTRUDE RUBIN

End of Season

The planet leans
to one side
like a phantom-ship,
listing. Pumpkins sag,
a peach is overripe,
my hand swells
the apple's curve.

Dry leaves collect
in unlit pyres.
I kick them—
impatient for the
smell of a bonafide
bonfire, the
charcoal taste
of autumns past.

Clocks turn
back, curtains hang
limp. Gauze sails,
without breeze.
All this silence
thickens my blood,
makes me want
to shout, awaken
summer ghosts, and
act perverse.

Perverse as
the Hunter's Moon
when it sulks
on its red haunches
instead of rising
as expected,
brilliantly.

GERTRUDE RUBIN

Swee-Touch-Nee Tea

Sold in small tin chests,
It was my grandfather's
solace. He sipped it
boiling hot, in a metal-
lined glass. Sweetened
it with jelly and a sugar
cube pressed to his teeth.
Stirred it slowly with a
silver "tinkling" spoon,
and a long, wheezy sigh.

Born in Liechtenstein,
short, stocky, proud,
he sported a trim goatee
I loved to tug, forcing him
to "growl" like a bear.
The times he visited us,
he carried a wood cane, a
copy of THE FORWARD, and
the stained tobacco smell
of his Sweet Caporals.

I've been to Maxwell St.
where he lived, and my
mother was born. A flat
behind his bakery, next to
the mysterious Gypsies.

The walls were unbleached,
like bread flour. Squat as
a potbellied Lucifer, his
cast-iron stove spat flames
from a wired, grate mouth.

At dawn, its sullen glare
woke him. Bakers' hours.
But if the children still
slept, he reached over
and made quick love to his
second wife, the tall one
who wore gold earrings,
a dark, driven woman we
secretly called, "the crazy"
but never, Grandmother.

GERTRUDE RUBIN

Verse Games

You wake from a nap,
staring at me
as if I were a stranger
whispering your name.

I file your nails;
tweeze eyebrows, and chin.
Lowering your eyes, you
smile like a penitent

being blessed. You speak
of the residents —
wondering who is Jewish,
and what time is it?

A bedcord is your lifeline.
Once, you were mine.
You recall my birth,
the uncle who called me

a skinny monkey, and chided
you for bearing another
girl. What does it matter
today? In the Lounge —

holding my hand, you ask
why my eyes have grown
smaller. And where are
my poems? We play verse-games:

I begin. "If Winter comes...?"
You answer, "Can Spring
be far behind?" declaiming
the syllables like an

Aging orator. My turn:
"The North Wind doth blow."
Yours: "And we shall have snow."
I try a favorite:

"Good-night, good-night,
parting is such sweet sorrow..."
But today, Juliet's farewell
will be left, unfinished.

Unlocking your chair,
you wheel back to your room.
Wait. Wave me good-bye,
"...till it be morrow."

GERTRUDE RUBIN

Sciatica

It stung my leg like a
sniper's bullet. Frantic,
I limped to Dr. Soong,
saw him unroll an ancient
stargazer's chart. On it,
the seven Pleiades were
acupuncture points linking
stars to the nerve center
of the universe. And the back
of my right leg. Pain has a
high and low, yin and yang
flow. I only felt its hardset
jaw. After my treatment, the
doctor said little. He locked
his pride in an ivory box
with his thousand-year old
needles. Then sat on the floor
in lotus position. And read
the Wall Street Journal.

MICHAEL BROWNSTEIN

The Language of Flight

In its final throes of wing and thorax,
the black bug tries to lift from ground.
Oh, life holds hard within this one!
And yet it cannot think too much of fate,
a time when it spoke the language to fly,
passed it on through evolution to the African
who like the lion and gazelle knew magic in words.
Out of the cotton fields came the slaves
freed into air, back into flight.

CECILIA CARBONI

Their Eyes Are Mine

The voices of children laughing
Off in the ever distant horizon.
I can barely imagine their eyes,
They are mine staring back at me.

So far away
By a sea somewhere in space
My quiet home behind me
The wind mute and it carries time away
My hands are cracking
The skin is rough
And I smile even though my bones all ache

The children are playing by the water's edge
At dusk they shall return to me
Their little hands grasping the door handle,
Letting the cool air outside creep in
Time scatters like seeds onto the clean floor,
And I watch them grow as my skin withers

I hear their footsteps upstairs
As I gaze upon this foreign atmosphere
That somehow seems so familiar
This home is my home
Somewhere amidst the fields
Of another universe
Where I was never young
Where I was born with a child in my arms

I am no mother in this world
And I do not know if I shall ever be
When I am old I shall wonder,
As I stand at the boundaries of my universe
My knees aching and my skin rough,
If I should have bore a child to Time
What a good father would he have been
When I was gone...

The wildflowers in the fields
Stir as the wind caresses them
Mute as it fades into the distance

Contributors' Notes

Tracie Amirante, 22, will graduate from Roosevelt University in December, 2003. As no accredited university has recognized "the Art of Happiness" as an academic ambition, Tracie is majoring in the next best thing: English, with a concentration in Creative Writing and a double-minor in Psychology and Women's Studies. Tracie's poems, stories and articles have earned awards from *Seventeen Magazine* and Chicago's Guild Poetry complex, and her writing has appeared in *USA Weekend*, *the Daily Herald Newspaper*, *Moon Journal*, *Oyez Review*, and the anthology *In Our Own Words: A Generation Defining Itself*. This is her first appearance in *Apocalypse*.

Danny Byzantine, has suffered for fifty-four years under the misapprehension that he was living in West Town. Little blue signs hanging from the lightposts have now informed him that the realtor-approved name for his neighborhood is East Village.

Cecilia Carboni, 18, is a current student at NEIU. She has been writing since she learned how to hold a pen and is a frequent participant at coffee-house open mikes. This is her first appearance in *Apocalypse*.

John Grey is an Australian born poet, playwright and musician. He has been published in *South Carolina Review*, *Louisiana Review*, and *Bellevue Literary Review*.

Effie Mihopoulos is the author of *The Moon Cycle*, *Languid Love Lyrics*, & *Pastel Words*, she has appeared in over 200 magazines and anthologies. Called "the publishing dynamo of the Midwest" in a review, she has published over 40 books under her Ommation Press imprint, including the Academy of American Poets' 1985 Lamont Poetry Selection, Cornelius Eady's *Victims of the Latest Dance Craze*. She has been awarded numerous CAAP, NAAP, IAC, & IHC grants from the Department of Cultural Affairs, the Illinois Arts Council and the Illinois Humanities Council for her writing and poetry performances.

B.Z. Niditch is the artistic director of the ORIGINAL THEATER in Boston. His work appears in *Columbia: A Magazine of Poetry and Art*, *The Literary Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Hawaii Review*, *Le Guepard* (France), *Prism International*, *Jejune* (Czech Republic), *Leopold Bloom* (Budapest), *Writer's Forum*, *Antioch Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*.

Patty Dickson Pieczka has won awards in several local writing competitions for poetry, playwriting and fiction. Her work has appeared in *Apocalypse*, *A Summer's Reading*, *Eureka Literary Magazine*, *Lucid Moon*, *Mid-America Poetry Review*, *Moon Reader*, *Quantum Leap* (Scotland), *Sidewalks and Springtime Magazine*.

Donna Pucciani, Ph.D., is a repeat contributor to *Apocalypse*. Her work has also appeared in *South Ash Press*, *Karamu*, *Without Halos*, *Touchstone* and *Oyez Review*.

Gertrude Rubin, author of *The Passover Poems* and *A Beating of Wings*, studied at NEIU, received her MFA degree from the Writer's Program, University of Illinois at Chicago, 1978. Her work has been published in anthologies and won Grand Prize in the Indiana State Poetry Contest, 1986. Gertrude lives in Chicago with her husband and trusty typewriter.

Diana Smith is a former student at NEIU who won the 2002 Point of View Award at William Rainy Harper College as well as a scholarship to the Deep Heart's Core: a Celebration of Poetry conference at the Omega Institute in New York. Her work has been published in *Tucumcari Review* and *Point of View*.