

Spring 2005

Apocalypse - 2005

Joe Eldridge

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Apocalypse

TWELVE



Spring 2005

Apocalypse Twelve Staff

Editor

Apocalypse

Nathan Quinn

Twelve

Volume

Spring 2005

Debra Bruce-Kimbro

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CONTENTS

11-Chair Man	Joe Eldridge
13-Likeness	Donna Pucciani
14-A Lesson in Coffee	Christine Swanson
16-excerpt from "For Love of a Gypsy"	MJ Cummings
19-Darfour Darfour	Joan Payne Kincaid
20-An Ordinary Day	Daniel Green
21-Man About Town	Joan Payne Kincaid
22-No Mother There	Christine Swanson
23-Untitled	Simon Perchik
24-Real Art Starts Here	Nathania Quach
26-The Day Illinois Said We Are Equal, in Part	Ryan Libel
27-Sapphics of Abbottsville, Ohio	Joe Eldridge
29-The Meaninglessness of Words	Charles A. Cave
30-The Wedding Night	Vic Cavalli
31-Rooster Dolls	PJ Beemer
32-Along the Charles River	B.Z. Niditch

33-"First Angel"	Frank Bonello
34-"Copied after Goya 2"	Christine Swanson
35-"Door into Eternity"	Jill Battaglia
36-"Gryphon"	Ross Blackburn
37-"Lot Cheap"	Vicky Trakan
38-"Sofia"	Susannah Maldonado
39-"Blackhole"	PJ Beemer
40-"Fallen Angel"	Frank Bonello
41-"Androgyny"	Vicky Trakan
42-"Island Storm- partial image"	Ross Blackburn
43-"Palm Parasol"	Sonal Blackburn
44-"Laura 1"	Susannah Maldonado
45-"Lady Ingrained"	Ross Blackburn
46-"Laura 2"	Susannah Maldonado
47-"Living Silhouette"	Sonal Blackburn
48-"Copied after Goya 1"	Christine Swanson
49-Summer Break(down)	PJ Beemer
50-Water Feature Northern England	Donna Pucciani
52-When I Forget	Ken O'Connor
55-Flashbax	Mohammad Kandah

58-Tinted Mirror	Nathania Quach
60-The Dinner Party	Susannah Maldonado
63-Skewed Horizon	Ryan Day
65-Holy War	Christine Swanson
66-excerpt from "Dumpster Divers"	PJ Beemer
71-Contributors' Notes	
77-Submission Guidelines	
78-Audio Companion Information	

Chair Man

Spinning graphite colored spokes
gleefully through his muscleman
gloved fingers, he pops a wheelie
up on the curb, landing on a mass

of cracks and spray-can graffiti,
a patchwork of hieroglyphics,
then parks his gunmetal black wheelchair
under the streetlight so that the rays

shooting onto his face look
as if they are marionette strings
pulling the cherry nose on his burning
cigarette making it cha-cha-cha.

Brakes locked, he blows smoke rings
and eyeballs me from my shoes up,
cocks his head seductively, and asks—
Hey man, got a dollar?

I pat my coin thin pockets
thinking a couple of measly bucks
and I'd still be suctioned to a bar
stool lining up beer bottles

so I mutter—*Sorry* and stagger
on past his dead legs throwing him
an encouraging smile. He twists his body
and screams—*Faggot!*

I flip towards him in fighter's stance
ready to tussle, but the epithet—*Cripple* trips
so effortlessly off my tongue,
I twirl around and stumble on.

- Joe Eldridge

Likeness

I saw him in me yesterday
as I meddled through the clothes closet—
meaningless ritual—
trousers right, blouses left,
coats in the corner.

His obsession had extended to bottles, jugs, jars
in the refrigerator. My sister and I would jest,
“Dad’s playing the container game again,”
as he pushed the mustard behind the milk,
consigned leftovers to the bottom shelf.

At the end, that’s all he could bond with:
hangers, piles of goods.
Everything in its place.
Now, unable to touch them,
he watches from some well-ordered star
my busy, unnecessary hands.

- Donna Pucciani

A Lesson in Coffee

I was thirteen. I dragged myself up the front porch stairs. My backpack slid off my shoulder and my keys fell out. I swiftly grabbed them, balancing on one foot and holding onto the doorknob. I fell in as the door opened. "You're home," my mother said. "Come and sit with me. It is time my son had a cup of coffee with his mother." She was going to be nice today and there was no way I was going to pass up this chance.

There was always a pot of coffee on the stove in our house. I could smell the familiar, forbidden, exotic aroma. This was a fresh pot. She had set up on the table with two coffee mugs, a bowl of sugar cubes, and a cow-shaped creamer full of cream. I slid out of my coat and joined her at the kitchen table.

"Now Stephen," she said in her best fifth-grade teacher voice. "You may choose to drink your coffee anyway you like. Some people drink it with cream, some with milk, some with sugar, or any or all of the above." She put her head down and looked at me over the rim of her eyeglasses. "Your father and I drink it black."

I reached for the bowl of cubed sugar. She rested her

hand on mine before I could take any.

"Think about this, Stephen. Do you want to spend a lifetime putting cream and sugar in your coffee? Do you?"

I sat mystified. I knew this was a very important moment in my life. I just couldn't figure out why or what she was really saying. I moved my hand back and placed it in my lap.

She poured the thick, tobaccoey, cocoaey, delicacy into my cup. "Your father and I drink it black."

I reached for the cream. She flinched. "Try mine," she pushed her cup toward me. "Black."

I took a sip; it burned smooth as it went down. I understood. No cream or sugar, just a special ingredient, a special additive that was making her nice to me.

"Well, I suppose I will drink it black."

"That's good, Stephen, you wouldn't want to spend a lifetime putting cream and sugar in your coffee. She smiled. "Now. Would you?"

Mine was different, yet I savored the moment and every last drop of that dark potion. By the time I had finished I had uncovered the mystery and I knew I would always drink my coffee black.

excerpt from "For the Love of a Gypsy"

He had traveled the world, fought to learn- at least the basics- of several languages, and yet Aiden O'Grady could not leave the terminal of O'Hare Airport. He paced back and forth, his rangy build moving like a caged tiger, *I'm home. So now I need to go home*, he thought to himself.

At baggage claim, he took off the ratty cap that had seen him through Europe and ran his hand through his midnight curls. "Aiden?" he turned and saw a girl- *no, not a girl*, he corrected himself, *a woman*- who looked familiar, "Aiden, you did remember that I was coming to get you today, didn't you?" The young woman was peering at him curiously through gold-flecked violet eyes.

"I'm sorry, what?" Aiden shook his head to clear the fog.

"Shit, it's only been five years, do I look that different?"

"Jenna," he sighed. "Sorry, jet lag." God, she was still beautiful.

"So how about a hug?" Jenna smiled her crooked smile and looked up into Aiden's exhausted face.

"Of course," he leaned down and embraced her. The lavender scent of her hair surrounded him. *Get back on the*

plane, his mind screamed, *don't slip back*.

"OK, kiddo, let's get you home," Jenna grabbed as much luggage as her slight five foot four frame could handle and still managed to offer her hand. "The rest is being shipped?"

"Hmm, what? Oh, yeah, should be here in a week or two," Aiden looked at the pixie blonde... *Blonde?* "Hey, you're blonde," Aiden picked a stray strand, "and blue."

Jenna laughed, "Yeah, this week; you should have been here for what I like to call the 'Bruise Debacle,' just a word of advice, never color your hair black with green and purple streaks."

Aiden chuckled, "I won't."

"So how was the world?" Jenna asked, plowing through groups of people.

"Big," Aiden smiled ruefully remembering his desire to get away, to learn, to teach.

"Not big enough for my Aiden," Jenna laughed. They burst outside together, supporting one another under the weight of all the bags.

Aiden stopped short, "Jesus H. Christ! You still drive that piece of shit?"

"Hey, you'll hurt Fred's feelings. And anyway, nothing

beats a '92 Ford pickup.”

“Especially when it’s painted camouflage.”

“Hey, be nice! Here, get in, I’ll load the truck.”

Aiden made no complaint as he crawled into the cab of the truck and tried as best he could to arrange his long body in the seat. He caught a glance of Jenna hauling his expedition pack with little trouble- even though the pack came up to her ribs- into the bed of the truck. She blew a blue strand of hair out of her eyes, caught his glance and grinned. The drive home was too short for Aiden’s taste. Aiden looked around, “Where are we?”

“My house, where your car has been,” Jenna laughed.

“God, you are out of it. Are you going to your parents’ tonight or do you want to crash here?”

“Could I crash here?”

“No, you can’t,” Jenna rolled her eyes, “I just offered to be nice. Of course you can stay here!” Aiden looked up at the town house and started to feel trapped. “Come on sweetie,” Jenna called as she strolled up the garden walk.

“Yeah, I’m coming.”

- MJ Cummings

Darfour Darfour

Beautiful gentle innocence
I can see only through glass
of a tv window on the Sudan
a place I’ve loved since childhood
and admired your elegant vision
and natural way of life
living by instinct and historical wisdom
how the power players love extinction
deciding you must go
that all the old ways the old societies
must end like Neanderthals
(of which you have never heard)
and orangutans in the next three years
their forests gone;
because of your innocence
you cannot see what is coming
cannot stop it anymore than we
on the other side can.

- Joan Payne Kincaid

AN ORDINARY DAY

Inebriates breakfast on a pick-me-up
an egg, raw, to moderate the sting of
last night's brandy, and calm the shakes.

Lunch, too long awaited, is prefaced
with a Bloody Mary, or two, and shared
another with a companion, doing business.

Commuting, the train provides a welcome
oasis, rescue from the nine to five desert.
Home, at last, a pair of preprandial martinis

stirred, not shaken presumed to sharpen
appetite, spur exuberance. Then wine
'til glass and bottle are bottoms up.

And so to bed.

- Daniel Green

Man About Town

The clouds are a horizontal block
changing from female to zooming villain
a mountain range after blue dissolved
you know you would not want to live
in mountains... a woman alone
with ominous visions moaning violence;
better be down at the friendly harbor
you know from birth
although gentle Teresa
who used to model for the library group
was the first friend
(found floating in the Sound,
blonde hair spread out in murky bands)
murdered by her husband
who was never caught
and parties on.

- Joan Payne Kincaid

No Mother There

My womb is empty
with explanations
like the time I was raped.
He said it was my fault.
I provoked it.
Or all of those abortions, because:
it was never the right time,
the right mate, the right me.
And now the missing,
is like a hollow echo,
that bounces through a canyon
so loud at first, then fading.
My womb is empty, it repeats
the longing
to hear the name
that haunts me
Mommy.

- Christine Swanson

(Untitled)

Not yet feathers though you
still breathe in the smoke
trailing from some climbing turn

hidden by clouds and weightless
circling this tree allowed at last
to shed its bark, warmed

the way each leaf expects
a better life somewhere, takes hold
with its wings around the Earth

carried up hillside over hillside
spurting more and more blood
from your eyes, your ears

till their shadow flies from under you
escapes this time, hovering overhead
as branches and evenings

and further though their roots
come by to remember why this sky
ended its wandering and closed.

- Simon Perchik

Real Art Starts Here

Tropical temperatures tell my mind
the sun is gradually glistening outside.
Sun-stoked skin mocks me so I can start
my creative confession—

I'm timidly trapped in hell
High school
art class
and Ms. Berryapple is fondly free.

She's over at her corner
eating store-bought salads
with her 4-pointed plastic pitchfork
that she uses to torque
her timely students

She's over at her corner
drinking her room-temp water
making us listen to this
brainwavesbrainwashtrackoverandover

“Open my windows,
you'll be disciplined for disaster.
Get over it!

Read my writing on the blackboard.

I'm doing you a favor!”

I rigidly raise my heavy head
to read: *the real art starts here—*
all the greats are tuned to be tortured.

I perfect my project
of black and white patterns
that spot and splatter
through the paper.

It is a variation
of the same one
everyone else has.

- Nathania Quach

The Day Illinois Said We are Equal, in Part

There is no fanfare, only quiet musing
that the paper manages to put on the front page
I see as I step on the bus.

Arriving at school, I read from Whitman and Ginsberg,
who might have found it quaint too.

I observe students huddling smoking outside the doors
engaged in hushed conversations about him and her
or their 12:15 Spanish class or the price of the books
they still have not purchased for the semester
because they can get a better deal online.

Traveling from class to class
I see the poets who are still living going about their day
eating in the cafeteria where I purchase a soda,
confident I can navigate the line while I eat out of my brown
paper bag.

Arriving in poetry class,
I sit pondering Simpson and Wilbur thinking
our world is Nemerov's and Magritte's
while my friend says the old queers are dancing in the streets.

Sapphics of Abbottsville, Ohio

Looking out his circular window, over
mangled pear and cherry trees, where the sled-marked
hillside slopes on down to the gravel pit, he's
dreaming of this life.

Climbing down the rickety staircase, sneaking
through the breezeway, out by the lilac bushes
choked by blood-red poppies in spring, he's gently
dreaming of this life.

Walking past the Civil War graveyard, local
families buried there in a mausoleum
guarded by a galloping man, he pauses,
dreaming of this life.

Past the corn shocks, past all the farrow cattle,
past the empty paddocks awaiting horses,
past the rusty silos, he's passionately
dreaming of this life.

Off beyond the acres of winter wheat fields,
stopping by the woodland creek, frozen solid
for the first time, wondering whether it's real...
dreaming of this life.

Rubbing stinging cheeks that throb, sorely wind-slapped
by the whistling currents, he's fantasizing
burning houses, feeling alive this instant
dreaming of this life.

Leaving with a restless itch, melancholy
homing pigeon heading on home, he's flying
higher to the city, where often he's found
dreaming of that life.

- Joe Eldridge

The Meaninglessness of Words

The more a thing is said the less it means.
I grew to hate him for saying he'd quit getting high.
Some things are better left unsaid, it seems.

She says she loves me day and night. It seems
she lies, because she's got another guy.
The more a thing is said the less it means.

My father liked to say he didn't mean
to be mean. He just couldn't stop, though he'd try and try.
Some things are better left unsaid, it seems.

He said he'd never leave her; life was a dream.
When time revealed his lies, she felt she'd die.
The more a thing is said the less it means.

At times my mother cries divorce- she screams
it out just like she means it, but why lie?
Some things are better left unsaid, it seems.

When words are overused they lose their sheen.
Yet still they cut so deep they make you cry.
The more a thing is said the less it means.
Some things are better left unsaid, it seems.

- Charles A. Cave

The Wedding Night

As night strengthened
The sharp edges of the mountains cut
The pink sky; I can still see it, as pink as an electric blanket
covering an old
Gray woman again remembering the man she long ago said
no to marriage
To because he seemed fanatical and actually believed.
With those primitive knives around us we felt defended.
I cuddled her full contact bare naked in an old Yukon arctic
eider down bag
As the fire crackled and spit its red seeds into the darkness.
There is a great energy with a new wife completely naked in
A freshly deserted northern B.C. campground.
Massive bears had scared everyone away,
And whether we were fence post stupid
Or just too ignited to fear, we built an intense fire.
And there in flames, with the mystified
Grizzlies watching from the darkness, silent, invisible—
pushed back
By our circle of hot light—we conceived
The first of seven sons in ecstasy.

- Vic Cavalli

Rooster Dolls

Good lord, but there are so many
man-pretty boys in this world

they know they are so beautiful
they strut their cocks-
no, no- they strut *like* cocks

(Freudian slips are sometimes fun)

and they are as proud,
those pretty ones

poor little romantics
all they want in this world
is to collect the man-pretty boys
and line them up and lay them down
and play with them like toys

because little girls love their dolls,
don't we?

- PJ Beemer

Along the Charles River

On the last hour of the day
a sax running tunes
by the orange flash
of distracted cabbies,
a poet on the first bench
where others sleep
blindly feels
a longing to walk
in the rain
to the river
but the cold stars
are sure to find him.

Tonight he will rent
a faded room
for a boarder
in silence for a notebook
along blighted walls
which cannot imagine
what shadows speak words
colder than these lines,

in the wake of morning
only the Charles expects him
from the nocturnal light
and infinite sky,
your body is composed
for the first wave

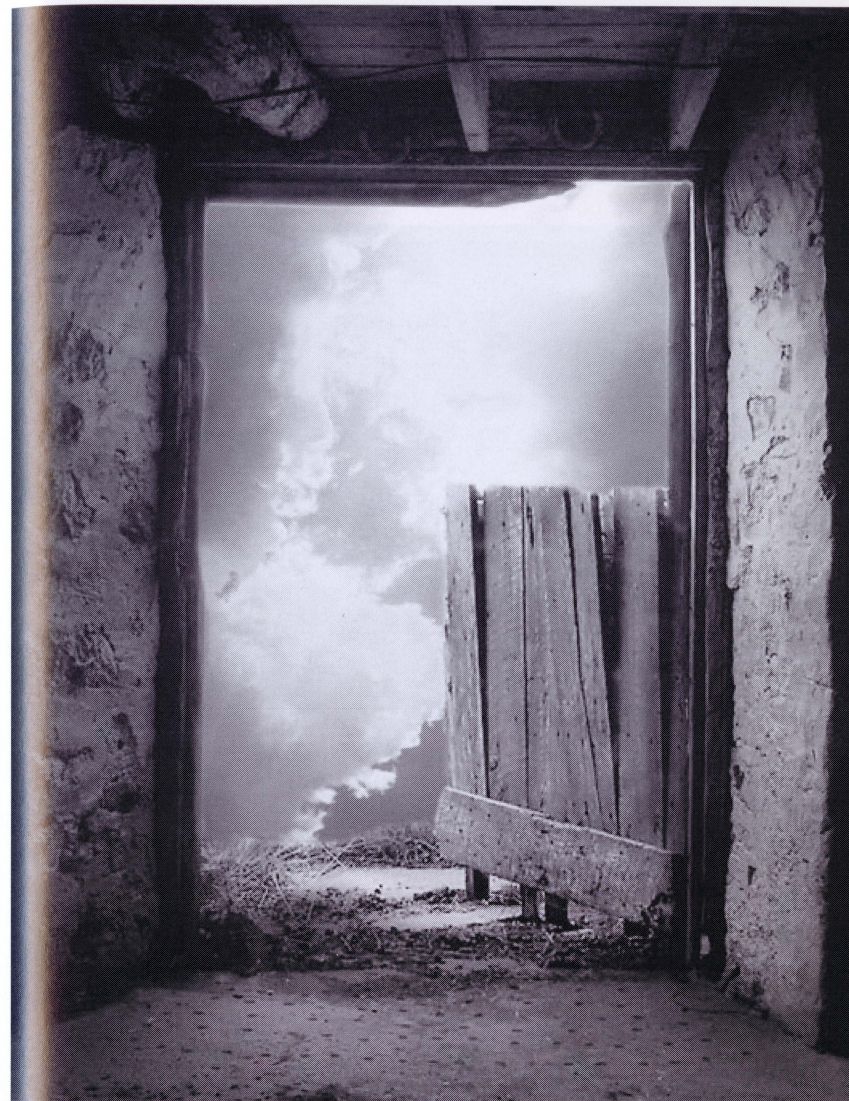
- **B.Z. Niditch**



First Angel
Frank Bonello



Copied After Goya 2
Christine Swanson



Door into Eternity
Jill Battaglia



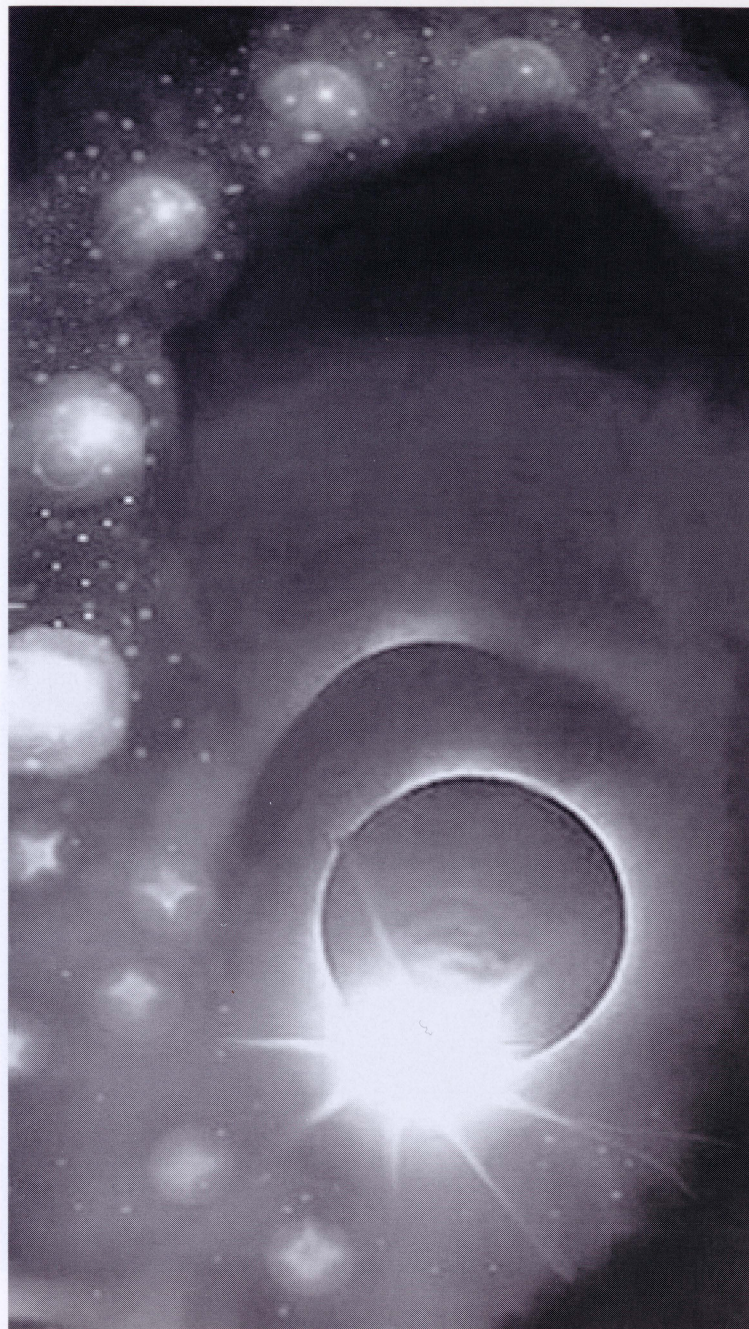
Gryphon
Ross Blackburn



Lot Cheap
Vicky Trakan



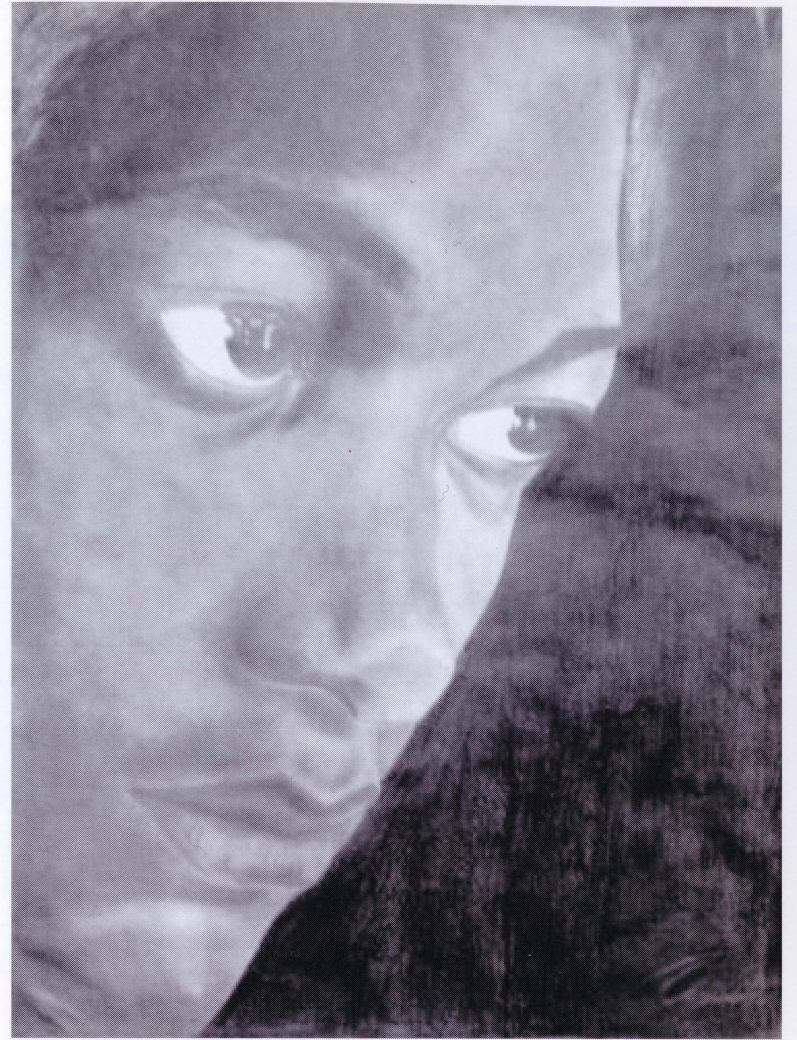
Sofia
Susannah Maldonado



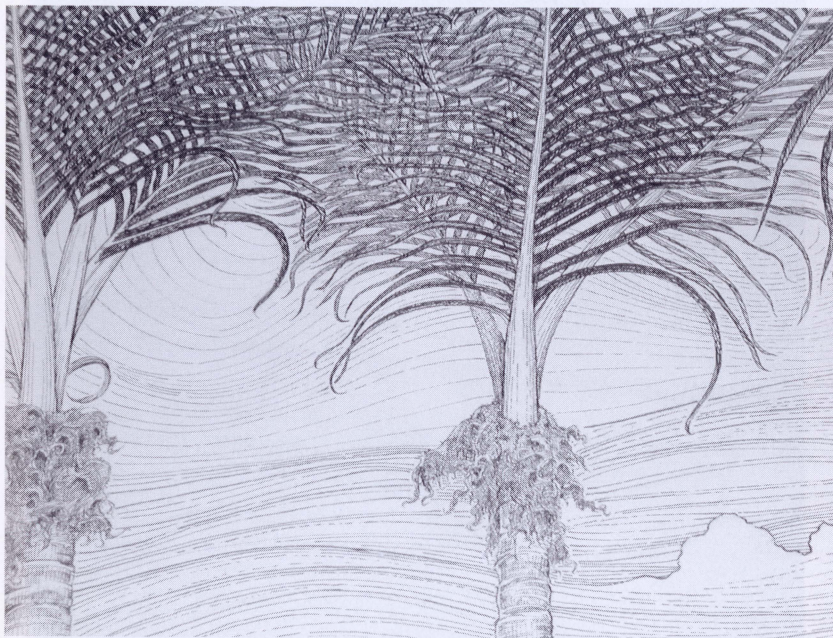
Blackhole
PJ Beemer



Fallen Angel
Frank Bonello



Androgyny
Vicky Traken



Island Storm-Partial Image
Ross Blackburn

Fallen Angel
Frank Donello

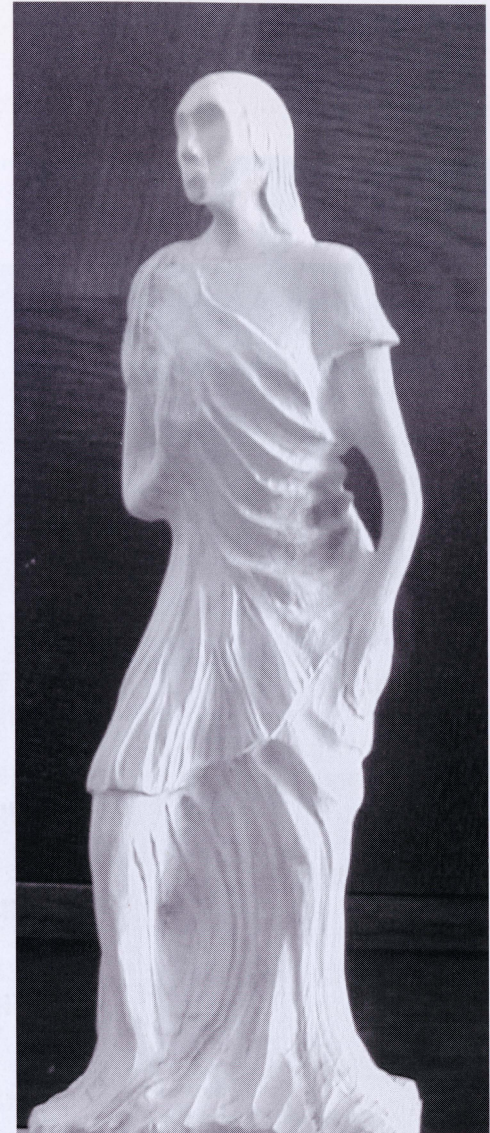


Palm Parasol
Sonal Blackburn

Fallen Angel
Frank Donello



Laura 1
Susannah Maldonado



Lady Ingrained
Ross Blackburn



Laura 2
Susannah Maldonado



Living Silhouette
Sonal Blackburn



Copied from Goya 1
Christine Swanson

Summer Break(down)

bloody piss

under the fluorescent light

shines

the stones are coated

with poisonsdust

the earwigs climbed

the shower curtain

the centipede writhed

behind the litter-box

little berries in the backyard

are poisonousberries

the neighbor planted them

to-kill-the-dog-it-barks-too-much

the house sings from a radio

planted in the vents

just to drive me crazzzy

nurses armed with needles seem so nice

until doctors come in

forced interrogation

jab and inject

when wrong answers are given

consciousness recedes

Lesson learned:

if you don't have anything nice to say

don't say anything at all

- PJ Beemer

Water Feature

Northern England

In a country renowned for rain,
a fountain-spray among the pansies
or a fake verdigris faucet dripping
water from a hose cleverly
concealed among the marigolds
clearly defies logic

Gardening is itself an irony:
growing flowers in one place,
transplanting them to another
where they can be purchased
and trundled to yet another location
seen from the kitchen window,

sweet alyssum scenting dark-eyed lobelia,
osteospermum and four-o-clocks
closing their small hands in the dusk,
day-lilies dead-headed,
all weeded, watered and bedded,
for the aching satisfaction
of dirt under the fingernails

and the bright denial of death
until October, when kaleidoscopic petals
parch and drop under the gurgling tap
that will soon freeze
Jordan's baptism into Ganges ashes.

- Donna Pucciani

When I Forget

I once knew a man who suffered terribly. His physical condition had deteriorated to such a state that he could hardly keep food down and frequently experienced convulsions. His mental capabilities, so promising as a youth, were all but gone. Forgetful and constantly disoriented, he seemingly was no more than a wandering entity, alive, but inanimate. As for his emotional well-being, he endured constant depression, punctuated by long bouts of hopeless crying and self-imposed solitude. These episodes would manifest themselves at his work, while driving his car, even in the company of his few acquaintances, but rarely with any perceptible external reason. Spiritually, the man was void. Any belief in an omnipotent force had been replaced by unshakable self-doubt and pity. Where the world had seemed like an endless series of glorious possibilities, it now represented an endless chain of disappointments and failures. Surely this man was sick beyond repair and would only find refuge with the end of his wretched existence. Death seemed the only cure.

The man did find refuge. And it did mean the death of a wretched existence. One man did die. This suffering man, who lived by self- who placed his wants and desires at the center of a

lonely universe consisting of one- was relieved of his earthbound existence. But relief came not in the form of physical death- which to our man seemed the only cure- but in another way. A way that proved infinitely more fruitful and desirous. It came not in an end of existence but in an end of self. What had appeared as a hopeless condition of body, mind, and spirit revealed itself to be a path of awareness and hope. Where his mind had all but deserted him but for the most simple of tasks, he now enjoyed renewed abilities that had been all but destroyed through years of torture. His bouts of loneliness and isolation were replaced with a sense of community that he had never known, nor knew existed. Slowly, he rebuilt bridges, tore down walls, and discovered pathways that led him to his greatest conquest of all. The defeat of all-encompassing self. Though his battle is not entirely won, he now possesses the arms to defeat even that most formidable of adversaries- himself. For our man learned from others what he could not realize nor was willing to accept. That the way out came from within. That his freedom lay not in the breaking of external chains but in the letting go of internal bonds. That true emancipation was only possible through honesty, humility, acceptance, gratitude, and selflessness. Slowly, the questions he presented himself stopped reflecting on what he

wanted but were replaced by gratitude for all that had been provided. Slowly, he came to understand that his greatest accomplishments would not be measured in material achievements but in humble gestures of helping. Finally, he accepted that self-determination was not the answer; that a greater plan existed and he honestly asked his Creator that he might carry out his part- whatever that role might be.

Today this man lives a rather simple life by outward appearances. Spiritual and mental improvement dominates his daily existence, though he catches himself sometimes wondering how a little more of the material world would taste. But he stifles this question by not forgetting where he came from, what happened, and how he has been blessed. And sometimes he cries. But this is not the pain of hopeless fear. No, these are tears of love and gratitude. A Higher Power erases all doubt and replaces it with faith. A God of love and tolerance nourishes our man so that he may stay well. And if our man stays on this course, asking what he can do for others, where he can be of the most service, how he can carry on the work of his Creator, then he shall be provided with all that is necessary to accomplish the true purpose of his life. What else does he truly need?

- Ken O'Connor

Flashbax

the light, love,
the light we felt then,
grayly, was it, that
came in, on us
the light of
the sun coming
for another morning
in the world.
it moved me,
that life was
after all like that.
you are in love
you stand in the woods,
with a horse, bleeding.
the story is true.*

1
passed before his eyes
he did not remember
a single line
of the hundreds of songs
he had committed to memory
in his youth so that he could
give himself the shivers at will- not.

peculiar origin traced
a peculiar pattern,
flukishly calling to life
a summer four
years past, and long
since lost to memory
striking the cranium
synaptic lighting that
flashed around
the memory came under
the meditation
of brain time
which gave him plenty
of leisure to contemplate
the scene

2

she thought about the pale bachelor-poet,
his dying eyes begging,
how he had come to see her, and
how he hadn't even placed enough pressure
on the doorbell to make it ring, and
so had stood there, waiting on the porch,
holding a purple wildflower, until
she just happened to walk by the
front and see him standing

56

there. O Poetry! when she invited
him in, and he gave her the
flower and sat down to decry
the coded bloom and doom of all
things, decry as well as his own unearned
deathlessness, how everything hurtles
toward oblivion, except words, which
assembled themselves in time like molecules
in space, for the Power and Light
was an act- an act!- of language,
it hadn't seemed silly, not really,

3

there was silence again between them
now as the countryside once more
unfolded its quilt of greens, the
old roads triggering memories
as if it were a land she had
traveled long ago,
its mix of luck and
unluck like her own past; it seemed stuck
in time, like a daydream or a book.

*an excerpt of assembled passages from Robert Creeley's poems
"The World" and "Bresson's Movies"

57

Tinted Mirror

I want to see
the inner me

I want to take away
the reflection in my
Tinted mirror
when jerks make me feel
like I have jaundice with their gestures:

Hey, could you help me out with my math homework?

Hey, get out of the car!

Asian women and Italian nuns can't drive!

Do you understand the words that are coming out of my mouth?

Ever since Rush Hour came out

in the same smart-ass Chris Tucker tone

These missed conceptions are coupled with

straight A's
here everyday
at school
overachiever
grow up to be engineers,
mathematicians

and actually, almost all
the occupations of the
medical, technical world

Any other job for me
would make me look like
a rebel without a cause

I might as well
live young
die fast
and bring blossoming
shame to family

Straight up, Asians don't seem to fit
any other formula
except the one I describe with my lines

and people don't want to see
the inner me

- Nathania Quach

The Dinner Party

Heavy with the weeks pull
the guests fumble around
in conversation and in chairs
while the children are secured
in the master bedroom
with construction paper and a movie...

We suck down wine
until our eyes see dreams
play across the walls.
Suck down more
until our voices turn to rain on metal
and we smell the cool mist it makes.

Our hostess tells a story.
Then we watch her cry.
So charming she is
as we watch her be less than discrete
and let her shirt ride high.
And when all of us start to talk
and show our wit,
she laughs too hard
and pounds on the table.
Our glasses and silverware chime together.
She laughs again,
and now she hits the wall

sending a photograph flying
and crashing onto the table.
The glass stabs our food and dives beneath the salad's shade.
And she says,
"Let's move the conversation to the living room, shall we?"

A child sways out to whine of boredom,
another to complain of lumpy pillows and strange smelling
sheets.
The fathers turn them around with stares,
and we start to spell out our swear words again.

Time for a party game...
"Would you kill for love?"
"If you were on a deserted island, what's the one thing...?"
Time for another game...
Drunk musical chairs?
The wives are playing dirty, very dirty
But we'll all have hell to pay tomorrow.
Oh, I can't believe you said that!
I can't believe you did that!
Ooh you were such a star last night, so cocksure!
And you! Your legs spread so wide apart!

The night goes on,
winds pick up speed
and before long
we are swimming in a raging tornado

that makes the hostess so sick,
she lays upon the bathroom floor
whispering
“life is good. Life is good.

I know it is.”

And we gather our children,
just as happy to leave
as they were to arrive.

- Susannah Maldonado

*For Mary Joan Soucek (1929-2003) and Robert Burns
(1922-2001). In memory of their dinner parties.*

Skewed Horizon

The sun bounced off the asphalt on the barren road, creating an illusory effect like the vapors around a gas can.

“Sho is hot,” Jess said.

“Hot,” Austin nodded in agreement, removing a cigarette from his pack, then depressing the round butt of the truck’s lighter.

“Why don’t ya roll down that winda.” Jess swirled his hand, imitating the use of a manual window crank. The truck’s windows were electric, but pressing a button just didn’t seem like a decipherable gesture.

Jess looked at his son, his beady eyes no indication of the warmth he felt at that moment.

“What?” Austin asked, while reaching for the lighter whose popping sound had just given them both a start.

Jess put on a slight smile, “Noth’n, just look’n at ya.”

“I can see that. Why?” Austin applied the lighter firmly against the cigarette’s tip and inhaled deeply.

“No reason, just look’n.” Jess watched the smoke roll out of his son’s mouth and nose; when it reached Jess’ eyes, they stung. The smoke lofted through the truck’s cab, briefly making it look as though they were in a sauna.

“Well, I’d appreciate if you’d cut that out. Mak’n me nervous. You oughta be watch’n where the hell we’re goin anyhow.” Austin held his reddened right arm out the window and, with authority, flicked the ash off of his cigarette.

Jess stared out at the squiggled horizon. He tried to picture all that he knew about his son in one face. He tried to think of all the faces he’d known his son to have. “Funny how heat distorts things, ya think?” Jess looked so far into the distance that he saw nothing.

“I don’t know.” Austin flicked the butt of his cigarette out onto the road, and rolled up his window.

- Ryan Day

Holy War

Four times I climbed the hill to see over
the wall they built to keep the others out.
They stoned a man as children ran to find
the God they fought to hold in hearts that died
in suicide bombings while temples burned,
and no one sought the thread to weave and mend
years of strife and sorrow. Oh Israel
and Palestine your fight has gone on far
too long. Why can’t they see that he is me,
his flesh can tear, he bleeds his mother cries.

- Christine Swanson

excerpt from "Dumpster Divers"

A hand smacked the back of his head, driving him forward before he could get a chance to brace himself. "Off the doorstep! No loitering! See sign?" They went through this routine once or twice a week, whenever he slept in the alley next to The Canton Tea Palace. Digging the last few grains of rice out of the carton with tobacco-stained fingers, he tossed them into his mouth, swallowing hard to get the dry grains down without a drink. He studied the empty box, the last vestiges of the soy sauce dribbling out of the cheap cardboard carton, adding a stain the shape of Gorbachev's birthmark onto already ragged sweats. He hurled the carton into the gutter and watched brown runnels- the last vestiges of the night's rain- carry it down the street. The neon sign in the window behind him hummed brokenly and flickered out as Sung Liu began to close down for the night. The absence of moths slamming their bodies onto the bulb of the streetlamp escaped his notice as its light blinked erratically, chittering in protest as the filament in the bulb strained to stay lit. It made the shadows jerk disturbingly...

His eyes flew open, blinking rapidly to focus on the shape lit from behind by the sunlight streaming into the alley.

He pushed himself up into a crouching position, hysteria causing shallow breaths that left him without enough air. He fought to calm himself as his left hand reached slowly under a battered, upside down box to pull out a twisted, sharpened piece of metal. He held it out warily before him, blinked again, and then screamed in a voice that belied his age- younger than the sweat and dirt made him appear...

He swallowed once, then again, and looked it up and down. Its face was a squirming mass of larvae and maggots, framed by the hood of a brown leather jacket obviously worn and stained. Centipedes crawled over its hands and millipedes wove through its fingers, obscuring the flesh completely. Gnats and small biting flies circled lazily about its head until it waved them away and leaped toward the homeless boy, a look of desperation and unrestrained anticipation evident on its face...

As he gasped for air the thing laughed, the sound like a low grumble, while its victim tried to break the hold upon his body. It watched as the larvae and maggots poured off its own body and began to flow up the boy's arm. Unable to break the unyielding hold on his wrist, the boy watched as they made their way to his face. As the mass made its way higher, the thing got up. When the boy screamed, the larvae rushed towards his open

mouth all at once.

The maggots, reaching his neck, continued to pour up over his cheeks and forehead. He began choking as the things—beetles, flies, worms and other things he couldn't name—crowded into his throat, undulating their way down to his stomach, their wings and carapaces scraping against the soft tissue and getting caught in his vocal cords and trachea. He felt them as they flowed into his gut, writhing as they fell into his stomach acid and dissolved into worm/beetle pulp. Nightcrawlers and overgrown ringworms twined themselves around his hand and made their way up one arm and down the other, circling his wrists.

He clawed at his face and tried to stick his finger down his throat in an attempt to force out the infestation. Feeling things crawling on his body, he imagined them in him, swimming through his veins and wrapping themselves around his bones. He was wracked with spasms; they were taking over. He convulsed, arching upward so that his heels and shoulder blades were the only things supporting him. When he finally collapsed, he looked down and what he saw made him gag again.

The movement of the sleeves of maggots that had straggled their way up his arms made the gorge rise in his throat.

Flies coated his hands like gloves while beetles tap-danced on

his fingernails, beating out a barely audible tattoo. An unknown amount of something was clinging to his hair, forming a living skullcap.

He looked up and, seeing that the thing had removed its hood, doubled over. With all of the insects transferred, the thing's new appearance reminded him of a sunken-cheeked, haggard old man, its skin a sickly blue-gray. Its fingers resembled wax-coated twigs, with the rest of its body just as emaciated. Smiling and revealing rotted brown teeth, it spoke in a grating voice.

"They make you eat shit, you know. You live in fucking dumpsters, shoveling garbage into your mouth. When you throw it up because you feel as rancid as you smell, they make you eat more. Then you get to crawl out of it, pull off the soaking coffee grounds and the shreds of newspaper that you rolled in for a blanket and"...

He laughed wildly, throwing himself onto the ground and, curling into a ball, whimpered, "all I want to do is die. Take them and get the hell away from me." The boy scraped frantically at his chest, his eyes darting wildly around the alley. Looking down, he spied the piece of metal that had fallen when the thing grabbed him. Crawling towards it, his fingers found purchase on

the edge of the shard...

Jagged metal dropped from suddenly slack fingers; the skin framing bone-baring cuts on each forearm gaped, grotesque mouths that drooled increasingly thick streams of blood. As he fell back against the wall, he saw the truck back into the alley and latch onto the dumpster that the thing's body had rolled next to. Through fluttering eyelids he saw one of the men, overalls covered in years of faded stains, step out of the truck and move to grab the first of the pile of bulging garbage bags he knelt behind. As he slumped down, shoulders hunching in and chin dropping to his chest, his eyes rolled back in his head. Under his skin, waves of the massed infestation rippled, propelling him forward and down onto his stomach. He lay there behind the garbage, arms stretched out, head to one side, body twisting with the horde's need to leave him.

Inside him they were writhing, frantically pouring out of his mouth, waves rolling off his body and surging towards the mud-crust work boots planted only a few feet away.

- PJ Beemer

Contributors' Notes

Jill Battaglia

Returning to college more than twenty years after I first began has been a wonderful adventure so far. I had been an art major, but now I've narrowed my focus specifically to photography. I have been participating in online photographers' forums and photo contests since 1999. I've won many awards and have been published in Photo World; three times in Popular Photography; Photo Life, and a calendar. Last spring I was fortunate enough to be contacted by two foreign photography magazines that wanted to feature my work in their publications. This was quite a surprise and an honor. Some of the work they published had been done in my class during the fall term of 2003. In January of 2005 I signed a three-year contract with a stock agency in the UK. My focus now is on medium and large format photography, experimenting with Photoshop techniques, hand coloring, and Polaroid transfers.

PJ Beemer

This is her second year in the Apocalypse Literary Arts Coalition and her first as Secretary and "Angel." She has spent her entire life experimenting with the various art forms available to her. After two years as a music education major, she finally realized that the writing she had been doing for so many years was not just an idle pastime or a creative outlet but preparation for the entry into her chosen fields- writing and editing. While she will never stop singing, she can go for days without touching a piano. A pen, however, is never far from her hand.

Ross Blackburn

Ross Blackburn is an Art and Secondary Education student at NEIU. For three consecutive semesters he has been awarded

with the Special Skills Scholarship for his paintings, sculptures, and drawings. In addition, Ross's sculpture, titled, "Gryphon" (image included in this magazine), was recently awarded the 3-D Media Merit Award during the 2005 Juried Student Show. "Gryphon" and "Divine Image" are currently on display in the Fine Arts Center Gallery.

Sonal Blackburn

Sonal Blackburn spent her early childhood years in India before moving to Chicago, Illinois in the late 1970s. She has traveled extensively throughout the United States, Europe, and Central America. She plans to continue her experience of the world through future travel. The selected photographs in this edition of the Apocalypse Literary Arts magazine are part of a larger themed visual arts study which was inspired by her international travels.

Frank Bonello

Frank Bonello is a student at NEIU. His major is Art, which he considers to be his chosen art form.

Vic Cavalli

Roughly half of Vic Cavalli's life has been devoted to physical labor and construction and half life to scholarly work, the visual arts, music, and creative writing. He has published poetry in Apocalypse; Prairie Journal Trust; The Wascana Review of Contemporary Poetry and Short Stories; Stand; sub-Terrain Magazine; YAWP; Nebo: A Literary Journal; Nexus; Whetstone; Critical Mass; The Eclectic Muse; American Goat; Scaling the Face of Reason, and Revelations. He is currently living in the mountains of Mission, B.C. with his wife and seven children, ages brand new to 16. Due to the number of bears in the area, the younger children are not allowed outside unless the dog is with them.

Charles A. Cave

Charles A. Cave lives in Skokie, Illinois. This is his first time being published in the Apocalypse.

MJ Cummings

MJ Cummings is a story-teller who waits tables to pay the bills. In her free time she is a student at NEIU.

Ryan Day

Ryan Day is a person who writes stories and occasionally poems when he's not caught in the drama of being punched in the eye on the advice of a psychic Llama. He is a student of Philosophy and English and an aspiring student of those things as well.

Joe Eldridge

I am a poet and a martial artist writing like crazy and training in Seido karate by the lake on the North side of Chicago. I am also a graduate of NEIU with a dual major in English & Communication/Media/Theater. In April, I read a selection of my poetry as the poet representing NEIU at the citywide poetry festival held annually at Columbia College. I have published poetry in the Apocalypse Eleven, and "The Windy City Times." This past year I also worked as an editor on the Apocalypse Literary Arts Coalition.

Daniel Green

Daniel Green, now 97, wrote his first poem at age 82. He was born in New York. A school drop-out, he later earned three degrees while night schooling during the Depression. He served three years in WWII, a year in China, Burma, India. He later managed the American Red Cross, Children's Aid Society, and Graham Home in New York City.

Mohammad Kandah

I like to think that poetry is a spontaneous overflow of feeling recollected in tranquility; a reflection on past experiences of memory representing an unfinished idea, which is how I am living life right now. I can't bring any aspect of my life to a conclusion as of right now and I feel like I have a long way to go. My poetry is about everyday emotions of reminiscence, as vague as that sounds. We all experience things everyday, things that are not always exciting

or thought-provoking at first glance. However, with the help of poetry, even the most bland of experiences can be made worthy of discussion and further thought.

Joan Payne Kincaid

Joan Payne Kincaid is published internationally in journals and magazines. This year she will have two books published: *The Umbrella Poem* together with Wayne Hogan, with drawings by both poets; *Greatest Hits: Published poems from 1985-2005*, published by Pudding House. She lives in Sea Cliff, Long Island with Rod, one red Doberman, and 5 Siamese cats.

Ryan Libel

Ryan Libel is a senior at NEIU. He returned to academia in 2003 after an absence during which he became caught up in living the glamorous life of a computer geek. Now back on track to pursue his passions for literature and linguistics, he aspires to an academic career.

Susannah Maldonado

Susannah Maldonado is currently an honor student at NEIU. She is working on an Education major in Spanish. Her passions include poetry and photography, both of which she also pursues at NEIU. She is the proud mother of four-year old twins. She is enjoying her experience working with the Apocalypse Literary Arts Coalition.

B.Z. Niditch

B. Z. Niditch is a poet, playwright, and fiction writer, as well as the artistic director of The Original Theatre in Boston. His work has appeared in *Columbia: A Magazine of Poetry and Art*; *The Literary Review*; *Denver Quarterly*; *Hawaii Review*; *Le Guepard* (France); *Kadmos* (France); *Prism International*; *Jejune* (Czech Republic); *Leopold Bloom* (Budapest); *Antioch Review*, *Fiction International*; and *Prairie Schooner*.

Ken O'Connor

As a senior at NEIU, I am pursuing a degree in Sociology with a minor in Theatre and am due to graduate summer 2005. Currently I am working on my internship at Oakton Community College as a teaching assistant for sociology. I am President of the NEIU Sociology Club as well as the department tutor. I have taken "the road less traveled" to get to this point, though I "neither regret the past nor do I wish to shut the door on it."

Simon Perchik

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. Readers interested in learning more about him are invited to read *Magic, Illusion and Other Realities* at www.geocities.com/simonthepoet which lists a complete bibliography.

Donna Pucciani

I have a Ph. D. in Humanities from New York University and have published over 100 poems in journals in the US and Britain, including *Maryland Poetry Review*, *Spoon River*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Mid-America Poetry Review*, *Willow Review*, *After Hours*, *Prairie Light Review*, *International Poetry Review*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, and *Apocalypse*. I have won awards from the Illinois and Florida State Poetry Societies and Chicago Poets

and Patrons. I currently serve as Vice-President of the Poets' Club of Chicago.

Nathania Quach

Nathania Quach is an English major at Northeastern Illinois University. She has wanted to be a professional writer since she was 6 years old and she recently realized that fame and fortune don't come until a writer is dead. Unless you're Stephen King.

Christine Swanson

Christine Swanson is just another depressed neurotic with an arrested development, who loves the details of life and is trying to stay alive, write it all down and make some sense of it. She is a student at NEIU.

Vicky Trakan

Vicky Georganas Trakan (also known as "Veek") is a native North Side Chicagoan. She is a first year art student at NEIU, currently working to earn a degree in Fine Arts. Vicky has been drawing and painting since high school, and has worked independently for last four years. The mediums with which she currently works include acrylic, oil, watercolor, color pencil, graphite and charcoal. She is eager to explore other mediums such as ceramics, sculpture, metals and woodcarving. Her work focuses on representational art, using people, animals and nature. She is also an accomplished beaded-jewelry maker, using semi-precious gemstones and sterling silver.

Submission Guidelines

The Apocalypse Literary Arts Coalition is currently soliciting manuscripts for its annual publication. We accept poetry, short fiction up to 2000 words, excerpts of longer works, plays and non-academic essays. Only 10 pieces per person will be accepted for consideration. Once pieces are submitted, no revisions- unless requested by the editors- will be accepted. All genres will be considered as it is our intention to publish as wide a variety of literary styles as possible.

All manuscripts must be typed and submitted on a disk, CD, through email, or through snail mail. Any submission not meeting these guidelines will not be accepted.

Art should be submitted in either .TIFF or .JPG format. Cover art will be published in full color; all other artwork accepted will be published in black and white.

Submissions are due by March 1st, 2006.

Contact information:

email: alac88@yahoo.com.

write to: Apocalypse Literary Arts Coalition
Northeastern Illinois University
5500 N. St. Louis Ave.
Chicago, IL 60625

Audio Companion Information

For the second year in a row, the Apocalypse Literary Arts Coalition is proud to present an audio CD with selections from authors published in the magazine.

The idea originated from John Lasse, a former member of the Apocalypse. This project was made possible with guidance and assistance from Richard Pierson of the Communications/Media/Theater Department. Rick Martin of the Audio Recording Facility made his staff, time, and equipment available to the Apocalypse.

Special thanks to the members of the Apocalypse staff who took the time to read the pieces selected for the CD, and also to the Audio Recording Facility, with recognition to Rick Martin and David Cavazos.

Audio Companion CD copyright information:

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IN THIS ISSUE

PJ Beemer

Vic Cavalli

Charles A. Cave

MJ Cummings

Ryan Day

Joe Eldridge

Daniel Green

Mohammad Kandah

Joan Payne Kincaid

Ryan Libel

Susannah Maldonado

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Donna Pucciani

Nathania Quach

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- audio companion enclosed -