

Richard Newman

My Favorite Apocalypse, Too

Catie Rosemurgy

My Favorite Apocalypse (Graywolf Press)

Catie Rosemurgy's publishing history has a storybook ending, the kind we only heard about in a far-gone age, before the days of lotto-like first book contests awash in thousands of manuscripts. Fresh out of the masters program at Alabama, she sent a poem called "Mostly Mick Jagger" to *Cream City Review*. The magazine published the poem, which later also found its way into Best American Poetry 1997. Graywolf Press called her shortly after, and the result is the beautiful collection, *My Favorite Apocalypse*. But Catie is even better than she is lucky. Anyone who claims to love poetry and isn't seduced by her book within a handful of pages is either a liar or in a deep, dreamless, tuneless coma. She writes some of the best lines in contemporary poetry:

"Her face pinches like an outfit she looks good in
but wears only to take off."

("Grace Lies on the Sofa and Waits for Her
Boyfriend to Get Home from Work")

"Everything in my life led up
to my inappropriate laughter."
("Doll Up")

"Most girls just get to be the kind of beautiful
that mothers need them to be
after being turned gut-side out by delivering a girl."
("Steel Blue")

"And the girls get cockier every day. The end of the world,
they've decided, tastes like them."
("Invitation for a Dead Friend")

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Her poems are far more than assemblages of cut-n-paste, though. Catie Rosemurgy also knows how to end a poem. A poem of hers may press through the paces of stunning lines, humor, and unabashed honesty, but the best of her poems end with a poignancy that gently nudges against the line of sentimentality—and (to echo Richard Hugo) a writer who doesn't risk sentimentality is not writing from the heart, is not writing honestly, is not close to the inner self.

In "An Angel Finally Admits What She Knows to Lou Binkler of Betheny, Missouri," for example, a beautiful angel addresses a sad litany to Lou, beginning

"Some people weren't meant to eat a New York strip . . .
Some people, Lou,
weren't meant to wiggle their ten toes
in the sand and say, "Hey!

Those waves are nibbling everything away besides me!"
The angel ends with the inevitable:

"Some people—lift your damp face to me, Lou—
weren't meant to ever fall in love in the first place."

Besides great lines, the book is studded with a series of poems about a pair of lovers, Billy and Grace. Grace always opines from a supine position, with titles like "Grace Lies Down on the Hood of Her Car" and "When She Gets Home from the Grocery Store and Notices the Fireflies, Grace Lies Down next to the Driveway." Billy usually responds adoringly in unrhymed sonnets.

Though some of the diva-like Grace poems shine with the wit, humor, and extravagant honesty of the book's best poems, the Billy poems are perhaps the least successful. Billy's a bit of a wet noodle, a little too adoring, and his failed attempts to understand Grace don't always hold the reader's attention. Few of the Billy and Grace poems live up to the book's many other highlights, like "God, as Quoted by Two Adulterers," "To My Lover on Returning to His Wife and then Finding Another

Lover," "Why God Invented the Cold," "Hard Put," and "Invitation for a Friend," to name a few. Catie's hit is, of course, that Mick Jagger poem, which rightfully deserves to be a hit because of its unflinching treatment of adolescence, sex, and a rock icon, as she ends the poem's first section:

"After I saw him, when a wish moved in my pants,
I nurtured it. I stalked around the room
kicking my feet up just like him, making
a big deal of my lips. I was my own big boy.
I wouldn't admit it then,
But he definitely cocks his hip
as if he were his own little girl."

Despite Catie's hit and dreamlike book deal, her publishing career hasn't been all lucky. After "Mostly Mick Jagger" appeared in the *Best American* anthology, she received several solicitations from literary magazines to send them some of her poems. She happily obliged, and nearly as many came right back. That's because the editors wanted more unabashed Mick Jagger/adolescence poems, and Catie's subjects cover much more—her mother's cobalt-blue glass collection, a dear friend who killed herself, even the three little pigs. The unifying thread of Catie's poems and *My Favorite Apocalypse* is, of course, love—unrequited love, carnal love, the ache of love, bad luck in love, love of love, her love of Mick Jagger and Steve Earle, but also a daughter's love, the love for a dead friend, and the love for all the strange, beautiful, insignificant things that make life bearable. Which goes to show how much editors know. In the poem "Hard Put," the speaker sneaks out of a hotel room after a one-night stand, claiming "Spite made the architects put the front desk/next to the hotel's only exit." Guilty, she sneaks "past two, three houses at a time" as she winces at memories from the night before. The poem ends

"I almost don't notice
that an angel put a geranium in her window

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between her lace curtain and the glass,
a young mother put a gold barrette
in her daughter's dark hair. I can't
put the acts of kindness on this street into words."

But that, of course, is exactly what Catie Rosemurgy has
done in *My Favorite Apocalypse*.