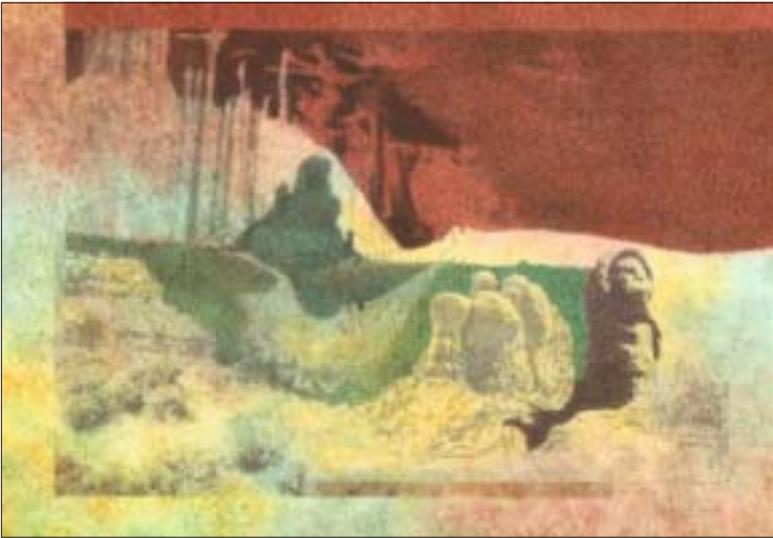


The 2River View

8.1 (Fall 2003)



From Buffalo to LA—Utah 4c © 2003 by Donald Bied

NEW POEMS BY

Arlene Ang, Stephen Benz, Benjamin Buchholz
Gu Cheng (translated by Aaron Crippen)
Christina Wos' Donnelly, Annalynn Hammond
Judy Kronenfeld, Treva Lewis
Allan Peterson, Scott T. Starbuck

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Stephen Benz

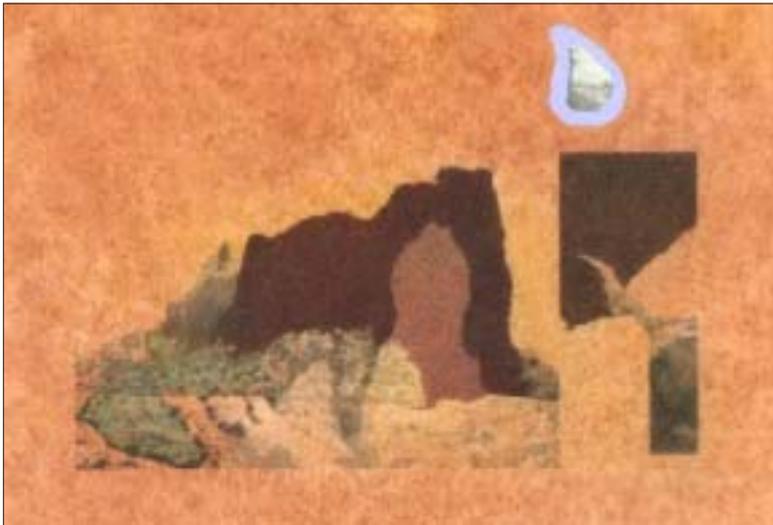
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Gu Cheng

Martyrdom

Halt!

Yes, I needn't run.
The road's at its end,
though my hair is still black,
and life's day's just begun.

The little elm stands unfamiliar
in the gray welcoming grass.
Soil, great grandmother,
I will listen here forever to your songs,
making mischief no more, no more. . .

My friends may come searching,
but will not find me. I am well hid.
At these things in the suburbs
towering like building blocks
I feel secret surprise.

Wind, don't duck away.
This is a holiday, a beginning.
After all, I have lived happily,
and quietly receive
this boundless gift . . .

translated by Aaron Crippen

Gu Cheng

Supplication

a poplar stands
greeting the early autumn dawn
its yearning branches reach for the clear sky
tired, trembling . . .

blue shadows crawl under its windswept
skirts converging and nestling
on the warm earth

shards of the moon and stars—high, high—float by

supplication continues
disappointment continues

translated by Aaron Crippen

Gu Cheng

The Start of This Chaos

a car is driving through misty trees
something must be happening
to draw the kids out of the street
and soldiers among them, carrying signs
I hit the dirt and see flowers
houses emitting strange smoke
and twins
the flowers attack us
ravaging us with their odors, they are an era
of still and moving pictures
painted red, green
 such beautiful children
 so beautiful, look
the shutter grips people in its teeth
shakes its head
how could you forget

translated by Aaron Crippen

Approaching Storm

Evenings when squid-spat meringue clouds
swim across the full moon,
rain seems so imminent
you taste wet soil on your tongue.

Even the noon wash struggles against drought.
If you watch from your window
hands trapped in grillwork,
if you watch with 13-year-old eyes
that still mirror blotches in wet beds,
the wind is Paganini playing
the clothesline while thunder gates
of hell open behind the sky stage.

This approaching storm has so much
the feel of war, something you've dined with
as spectator whose appetite for bad news
increases with every meal.

In the backyard, victims are grass,
the procession of torn marguerites,
pegs flying like shrapnel, dried leaves.
Here from fenced life behind the glass
you watch your mother run
in an effort to rescue clothes,
her pleas for help
a silent movie you've watch so many times
you forget to laugh.

Arlene Ang

Lucifer on his Knee with Diamond

Diamonds are the cruelest stones.
They glitter white fire,
a polished refraction of stoves,
stainlessware, even laundry suds.

My mother warned me early about men,
the penance for a single yes—
genuflecting to scrub floors, collect
porcelain shards, turn the other cheek.

I wonder whether she will agree
to choose my flowers, perhaps stand up for me.
I am too old for words. Years have waylaid
my face into thinking: I am safe.

Like cheap motels, churches are fully booked.
I shall walk, a November bride, through fog,
the diamond cutting holes in my satin glove.
This veil is milk I shouldn't spill before its time.

But I hear my mother soaping dishes and feel certain
every red carpet leads to Christ on a cross.
His thorns will wrap around my hung finger,
every pew will hold the silver-coined gaze of Judas.

When I lift the chiffon, will he realize
my pumpkin corset lasts only until midnight?
He will be in black already grim with divorce,
perhaps the childlessness of monogamy.

Now he drops to his knee and mentions hand.
I'm not sure if he is buying househelp,
but every ghost chain in my head rings alarm.
I pull away and re-box his temptation to hell.

Stark Hung Over in Belize

That Sunday morning, finding the Fisherman's Pub closed, Stark stood for an hour outside its door. Not once in his entire time in country had the Fisherman been closed before, and he trembled, feeling the DT's coming on.

Gone were the three gaunt men who played dominoes under the breadfruit tree that never lost its leaves, and a hot wind swirled dust around the overturned dominoes table. Stark's head ached for the cool dank reek of the pub. He wanted to hear the fat woman's fish sizzle and crackle in the pan while her white-haired man pried open bottles of Guinness with his teeth and read Stark's fortune in the foam.

Opening his eyes to a white hot blur, Stark saw an old man, arm severed at the elbow, and called out to him. The man shook his head, waved his stump: *Storm comin' to town, man, no gonna get drunk dis day.*

At the Coral Reef Hotel, Stark staggered past a herd of worried tourists waiting for the airport bus. His bare feet scraped boardwalk, the brown glass of broken bottles sparkled and sang. Stark's throat constricted. Moaning, he couldn't swallow.

At last on a flyblown road
where the sewer fructified and impervious goats
gnawed on rot, Stark saw a sign—
Beer Joint and Carpentry—
wobbly misshapen furniture scattered out front.
Hallelujah! A choir of angels cried, Hallelujah!
Beer Joint stood opposite
The Church of Christ, Belize,
hysterical now with shouts and cymbals,
hand-clapping and wailing.
For more than an hour Stark heard it:
Hallelujah, Lord! Yes, Lord!
Oh, Jesus, yes thank you, Jesus!
And the Guinness was not at all cold, not even cool,
was in fact a little stale, which is to be
expected from Guinness on tap in the tropics.
Stark didn't mind: a joyful noise filled his head,
a hot wind blew through the bar and women
carried bibles and baskets on their lovely heads
while somewhere out in the ocean, defining its eye,
a storm, a bloody big storm, was drawing ever nigh.
Amen, he sang, then sang it out again,
aloud in basso profundo for all to hear: Amen.

U.S. 77

Frozen rain has made the highway slick.
We're stalled in a car jam
near Corpus Christi,
accident ahead.

Exhaust swirls in clouds behind cars.
Rain blinds the road signs
and swells the pools along the verge.
Styrofoam cups bob like geese heads
in drainage ditch slush.
Mall lights maroon
the wet parking lots where
cars congregate around islanded trees
tricked out for the holy days.
Think of all traffic backed up for miles,
horsepower in the thousands, corralled but balky,
sleek flanks steaming in cold air.

Such comforts, such ease of travel—
yet the drivers end up dozing off,
crossing lanes,
crashing head on, or churning
headlong into fallow fields.
Wreckers come and haul carcasses away on hooks.
The rescue squad straps victims into gurneys.
Traffic processes past, staring,
faces pressed to glass, misted breath erased
by a blast from defrost vents.

Hours ago, we sat in a sterile diner
drinking coffee, mountain grown
in a poor country.

Steam obscured the pane, and plastic ferns,
arranged in an inert rainforest,
separated our booth from others.
We read the news and brooded
over statistics on global warming,
urban violence, famine.

Now I forget the exact causes for concern,
and we've reached the site of the wreck, broadcast
glass all that's left for the road crew's brooms.
A trooper waves us through,
the road up ahead gleaming
and wide open.

Benjamin Buchholz

Boxing for Army

I have uneven arms.

You'll have to hold
 hands with me to tell it, though.

Left side, right side, left side again:
Weigh them like the Feather of Maat
 while we walk out from the Magnus
 and search for kissing shadows.

Boxing, I say.

Boxing?

Threw it out of joint mid-fight. Had to finish.

oh.

Oh. Oh. Oh.

A dove bends *fatima* from its locust potting:
 speaking is, at best, translation.

Before we kiss I breathe your breath
 so that I am filled with your wine darkness
 and
 have this shield of air for when
 the high Caucasus *beshabar* rattles
 the flaps of my tent.

Benjamin Buchholz

Sketching Istanbul from Iowa

let me talk chaos theory and imaginary numbers
that is my element like when my boy standing

on his chair between us so we could no longer
see said *matt-daddy matt-daddy* you plucked

pork gristle and half-stifled laughter from your
teeth i needed no mandlebrot no vintage motorola

no telling details no real-as-life vectoring
noise silence beneath noise silence beneath silence

a field

in the late afternoon dryness i could no longer
eat we scraped crops from our anthill imaginary

number

a black chop on the Bosphorus tells me it took
more than Drunken Byron for the crossing

Christina Wos' Donnelly

Under My Skin

like the venomous strike
from the reeds,
or just a sting
in the dark, itching
to be aggravated

the bruised swelling, livid
testimony, dear, to
our bump in the night

edematous failure
to clear the waste
of battle, our hearts
working too hard,
too valiantly.

Useful Things My Father Taught Me: Arms

My father told me
that first time
she dismissed everyone,
even the midwife,
called for him instead.
*I'll never manage
to give birth around Mama.
Sweetheart, help me.*

So he slid his arms
beneath hers,
raised her slightly
from the bed, and my sister
was born as they conceived her:
from love's embrace.

My father taught me in travail
cleave to one another,
trust. Let yourself
be lifted

The Old Sandstone Quarry

Sometimes I sit up on the rim,
let pebbles scurry down from my hands,
trigger small avalanches with my heels.

The crows are upset by my presence,
but their caws are so loud and constant,
soon they seem like silence itself.

There are faces in the cut wall, faces
long buried. You can see the pull of the blade
in their stretched and furrowed skin.

On the ledge, moss and loam hang
in scraps, like the flesh falling away
from the cheekbones of a corpse.

An owl takes flight from the eye
of a long faced man, its talons knocking
the bridge of the nose to pieces that tumble.

But nothing startles me here.
Echoes carry everything away
before it hits the ground.

You can tell it was not easy to pull the sky
so low, that something fought hard
before it lost itself to space and dust.

Sometimes I lay in the center of the bottom.
Strange that it takes a hole a hundred feet deep
to feel the weight of the sky on my ribcage.

Maybe I just needed a wider mouth
to hold it all. The boundaries of my face
waver between wind and sand.

Spine to the ground, I know I am doomed
to come back to this place, to join the rocks
patiently waiting to lose their form.

The Writer

Sometimes he believes collecting stones, placing them in a small bag, is enough.

But other days it's not, and he writes stories of faceless characters, tries to place bags of small stones in their hands, but they don't want them.

Why, he asks, with your faceless faces, would you not want stones, a bag to carry?

They don't answer, only stare in a faceless way.

So he writes a story of a face so fleshy and real, gives it blue eyes and rosy cheeks, a mouth wet and open, and then carefully places one smooth stone on its tongue.

The face spits it out and says, *I don't need your stones, I have my own, look at my teeth, how hard and gray you've made them.*

Now his small collection seems sinister—too many stone faces in one body bag, too many mouths that can't open.

Judy Kronenfeld

Brief Reunion

chugging up and flying down
the hills of San Francisco
in the cab we all squeezed into
your long woolen thigh
pressed against the thin silk
of mine, your braced arm
blooming above my shoulders like
an arbored vine, I am hushed
as snow, radiant as a body
soaking sun, the year cupped
in this quarter-hour, desire
singing singing
its solo aria of praise

Judy Kronenfeld

Window Blinds Leaking Light

Years ago descending
from our summer-rental rooms,
absorbed by the sweet last
taste of something iced and glistening
Mother'd given me, I slid and fell
into a long stillness, and was carried
to the day bed by the window
covered by Venetian blinds.

As quiet as Venice
on that street where my ruined back
healed—all the fathers
train-fled. Shadowed mornings full
of the wheel and caw
of gulls, and when ocean freshets blew,
the fragrant clattery dance
of wooden slats on the sill.

She clicked them up
in gentled flamenco,
when I drowsed full
of dappled sleep, rippled
them down when rose light faded
to the color of their faded ribbons.

And I woke

*2 A.M.—moonmelt pawprints
here and there on the black
blanket*

for the joy of sleeping

slept

*6—almost immobile
white fireflies!*

for the joy of coming awake.

Eve

i break again the apple in my teeth.

red as menstruation and reflective as water,
its skin shows my irises,
two haloes blurred and faded
the way coastal fog obscures the sun and moon,
the way rules obscure my truth with
thou shall not eat,
thou shall obey his word and will.

i hunger to send my monthly river home to its ocean
where fluids mingle in a sister pact of yes,
we will be mothers of whores, daughters of virgins, yes,
we will be whole, human, holy.

my haloes darken in my red mirror.
i taste the sacrifice of my good reputation.

the only rule to follow is
thou shall not obey.

i break again the apple in my teeth.

Treva Lewis

Lights Out

four months ago you told me
we were like fireflies in your bed
owning the night by
writing our names with our body light.

i have never seen a firefly.

the closest i've come is my gloworm doll
when i was seven bruising my chest against its
huge plastic head under covers,
and wondering,

will it always hurt
to sleep with someone i love?

Blissful Havocs

They call accusingly, the same blackbirds,
titmice, flickers, chickadees,
that two days ago called bonanza, free lunch.
They remind me I forgot
to fill the tree feeder with its nine foot-rests
and a see-thru cylinder.
No, I am not making this up, any more
than in folding laundry
each shirt contains a body you care for,
folding their arms,
smoothing their wrinkles, totally beholden.
And Frances forever
inside the panties, and loose again in silk shirts.
Memories carry obligations
the blissful havocs. They bring back voices
and the heartbeats needed, and hunger of the times.

Cut

Cut by paper I will sting for a week
Every citrus will remind me
and a small edge of skin will catch on everything
and reopen.

That I slice so easily is as disconcerting
as finding I float in water
when I thought I was solid as a glyph.

This is just the beginning.

If Frances had said this on paper
it would have flourishes
like knives made of thin sweeps of Chancery
the script by which historians squint at the dead
wondering whose high forehead
will appear first from the skulls left for the rove beetles
osprey cave bear mine
a beaded necklace under which teeth
gleam shiny as their backs split cleanly

Scott T. Starbuck

The Kid at Calico Rock

Listening to the stringy kid
with the acoustic guitar,
I know his wildness of spirit
is stronger than empty pockets
and years of eating canned food.

Maybe the kid worked all summer
washing dishes to buy that guitar.
Maybe he loves it more
than boys on the hill
love their dogs.

They say the place he's from
has a river so polluted
it caught fire.

Scott T. Starbuck

Winter

Grandma says to slow down
because I drive too fast
in the snow.

She says the hills are steeper
this year
and the night is longer.

She says a buffalo shadow
walked through the meat department
at Safeway.

She asks if I still hear
the river flowing
beneath the street.

Authors

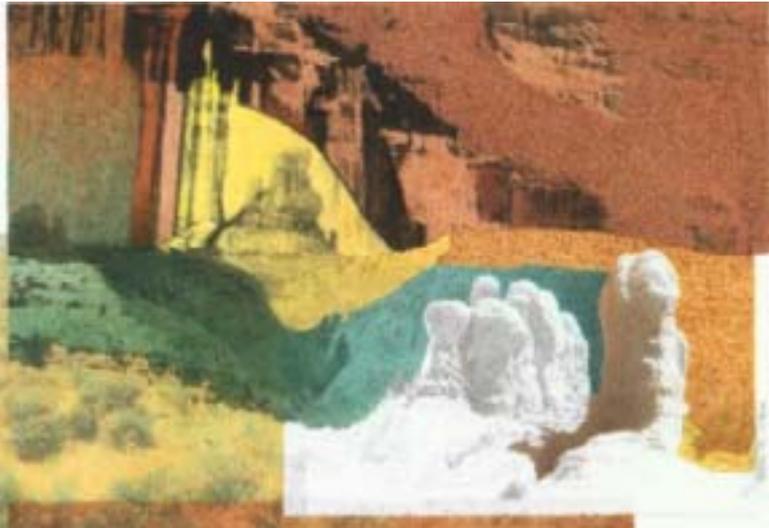
Arlene Ang is a freelance translator and web designer in Venice, Italy. She also edits the Italian edition of *Niederngasse*. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Adirondack Review*, *Cordite*, and *Tryst*.

Stephen Benz is a communications consultant in Atlanta. He has poems in recent issues of *Mudlark* and *TriQuarterly*, and has published two travel narratives: *Guatemalan Journey* (University of Texas Press) and *Green Dreams* (Lonely Planet).

Benjamin Buchholz is an Army Officer in Wisconsin. More of his poetry and fiction can be found in recent or forthcoming editions of *Abyss & Apex*, *Far Sector*, and *Snow Monkey*.

Aaron Crippen received the 2001 American Translators Association Student Award. His current work can be found in *Arkansas Review*, *Mid-American Review*, and *Texas Review*.

Christina Wos' Donnelly lives in Buffalo, New York. Her poetry appears in *WordWrights!*, *Slipstream*, and *Stirring*. She guest edited the November 2002 and September 2003 issues of *Stirring*.



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Gu Cheng (1956-1993) was a figurehead of the Obscure or Misty school of Chinese poetry. He burst onto the Beijing literary scene during the Democracy Wall movement of 1979. In 1998, a film based on his life, *The Poet*, was released in Hong Kong.

Annalynn Hammond has poems appearing or forthcoming in *Branches Quarterly*, *Canwehaveourballback?*, *Eclectica*, and *Snow Monkey*. Her first book, *Dirty Birth*, is the winner of the Sundress Publications' Book Contest, and will be available in Spring 2004.

Judy Kronenfeld teaches creative writing at the University of California—Riverside. Her poems have appeared recently in *The Evansville Review*, *The Montserrat Review*, and *The Women's Review of Books*. Others are forthcoming in *OntheBus*, *Snake Nation*, and *Spillway*.

Treva Lewis is a converse-wearing, coffee drinking redhead currently studying English at the University of Oregon, where she hosts the open mic poetry reading series.

Allan Peterson has had poems recently in *Arts & Letters*, *Marlboro Review*, and *Shenandoah*. Others are forthcoming in *Gettysburg Review* and *Quarterly West*. His awards include the 2002 Arts & Letters Poetry Prize, a Florida Arts Council Fellowship in Poetry, and an NEA Fellowship in Poetry.

Scott T. Starbuck teaches composition, creative writing and literature at San Diego Mesa College. Recent work has appeared in *Black Bear Review* and *Storyboard 8*. In January 2004, Starbuck will be a writer-in-residence at The Sitka Center for Art and Ecology in Oregon.

About 2River

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry, art, and theory, quarterly publishing *The 2River View* and occasionally publishing individual authors in the 2River Chapbook Series.

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