

# The 2River View

8.1 (Fall 2003)



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## 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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Gu Cheng

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## **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

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### **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

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### **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*

Arlene Ang

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### **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

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### **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

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## **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

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### **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

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### **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.

Christina Wos' Donnelly

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### **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

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### **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

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## 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

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## **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

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### **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

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## **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.

# 2RV

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