

Windshields

Benjamin Buchholz



Windshields

Benjamin Buchholz

BlazeVOX [books]

Buffalo, New York

Bone Cages by Donora Hillard

Copyright © 2007

Published by BlazeVOX [books]

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced without the publisher's written permission, except for brief quotations in reviews.

Printed in the United States of America

First Edition

BlazeVOX [books]
14 Tremaine Ave
Kenmore, NY 14217

Editor@blazevox.org

publisher of weird little books

BlazeVOX [books]

blazevox.org

RINGSIDE

MARCO, 56, shirttails, looks toward the JANITOR.

Janitor mops, pauses, mops again.

MARCO

The devil stole my baby. Black
toenail man, curl-toes, chipping
golf shots barefoot in the big park.
We swinging, high-up, higher, with
the rusted red of the chains spread
like pollen or amnesia in the air,
some sunset, that night, me and my
baby, baby girl, she on my lap, the
sunset swirling through a cloud of
chain particle, sound silly and high,
and the devil out there in the knee-
deep grass chipping clods.

JANITOR

Go home.

MARCO

He had potato eyes. He had fishing
line fingers, glossy and long and
sparkling all over his chest like a
chandelier. He had a circle of burn
around him, easier to chip from such
rough, that, the scorch, how's I knew
you see he was a devil and not just,
say, a martian or swampman. My baby
says, hey potato-eye man, what is
that on your tongue?, you look like
my dad when he's been at work late,
all sharp smelling, I can smell you
from here, come closer, come, I've
made up a rhyme about you, see? And
she unfolded a bit of rhyme, tucked
there under her dress-hem, a triangle
of note, love-note, whatnot, with
the same swirlygig letters linked
swoopingly one to the other she used
to send me. What's you got devil
letters for, I says. Who says devil
letters? Me. At the apex of the
swing, which was our plan all along
but together, together, she jumped,

and ran, ran right up to the edge of
that gray smoky burn circle, the
tweed cap askew on his devil-horns,
the britches baggy around his goat
heel spindle legs. Stop, I says,
stop.

JANITOR
I'm locking up.

Marco reaches into his shirt, retrieves a much-folded sheet of paper.

The janitor turns off the lights.

MARCO
(reading)
Last night was beautiful . . .
(not reading)
Last night! Shit. And beautiful with
a big heart to dot the i . . . the
swing went up, up once more, I launched,
up and out and forward sprawling
windmilling with my belly forward and
sinking rhapsodically, flapping arms
like wings, fingers like feathers,
feeling the whoosh of the air, sailed
up and up and out beyond them over
the burnt circle, over that beastie
and baby with him toeing up to the
line of his ruination, looking in on
him, wanting. And I flew, and flew,
far beyond them, over the seesaw,
over the slide and the soft landing
wood-chip area, over the Seven Eleven,
over the near houses, clapboard-
sided, over the newer bric-a-brac
fenced along the highway, up into
the night air where I saw him stagger
with her, catch her in his embrace,
liquid her, limp, his big black
bat-wings stroking the air and lifting
them away into the apparition of
starlight.

SIMPLETON

MAGGIE, 32, nine months' pregnant, startles awake. She wears a strappy white nightgown.

RICHARD, 33, her husband, rolls over in bed.

Moonlight.

MAGGIE

It is time. The earth in me
quakes.

She nudges Richard.

RICHARD

What?

MAGGIE

Fields of yellow mustard in the
twilight waving, wishing branches,
wanting freed, uprooted, radiant.
I've seen footprints.

BATHHOUSE

AVERY, 48, wrapped in white towel, leans forward on a cedar bench in the steam room. Other men lounge around him, visible only knees down through the haze.

AVERY

Here comes the thunderstorm,
prickling the damp tumult, plush
baby birds in their bird nests
silent, suddenly, with that beak
clacking timbre of question and
wonder.

A man, GEORGE, leans forward, face visible.

GEORGE

I'm leaving home tomorrow.

Avery reaches behind him, pulls a sombrero from the bench and sets it on his lap.

George reclines into the haze.

AVERY

The mown grass, the prickle, ears
everything turns to the quiet, the
beatitude of the looming suburbia
with stilled cars on weedy offramps
and billboards flickering halon
bright, as in the depths of city
somewhere the steamtunnel fingers
a switch and pulse to its own
perimeter, will I feed you anymore
little birds?, little leeches out
there on my flanks, buttressing me,
pushing my center up tectonically
until I shiver at my heights and
the rolling blackout, the thunder
lips from café to rumor, urgent
and silent and alluring?

GEORGE

I don't think I'm coming back.

AVERY

The kids in the soccer field see
it, the moms in the folding mom

chairs rise in unison, baking and
bored to the yeast, you, think
back on the servant years of child
living and how they were free, how
the stand and applause, the score
mattered, the snapshot, hair-
ruffled, smiling up at your dad
mattered, as the gray gathers, as
night spins on its oblong axis,
gathering matter to it, distemper
and cloudbank, grumpy now and set
in your ways I will go woodcutting
at dawn each Thursday I will ride
the recliner bike without you if
you won't come, I will sing beneath
my breath the chainsaw song and
when the teeth no longer chatter,
when the diesel and oil spill from
the engine I will rise into the
relief of your enigma and hear the
last chime of the wind as this city
is blown swift and clean as a Bible
from the map of childhood revelation.

SLAMDANCE

SAMETH, 22, necktie, bare chest, surfs through the haze of a mosh pit, riding the hands.

Black Flag plays above, behind, in the background, discordant and wild.

The dancers in the pit sweat, fling their long hair in whiplash circles.

SAMETH

I held her up to the light, my
girl, firstborn out there in the
waves of nausea, woman wailing,
having brought pickles with peanut-
butter and figs -- figs!, who
carries figs in their Walmart?,
good God, I thought -- and the
little pink-skinned thing gurgled
at me, a suffusion of light, a
child without armor, yet, a child
not having seen sun but for the
mistake of gasping at very first.

A Color Guard enters the mosh-pit: seven men in starched uniforms, low-brimmed hats, flags with battle-streamers shouldered, ceremonially varnished weapons.

They stop and turn toward the stage. The outer two soldiers level their weapons and fire into the crowd.

Dancers fall, bleeding.

SAMETH

I began slowly with the lump of clay,
forming, pressing, forcing out the
bubbles of air, teasing it upward
and outward, thinner and thinner, to
shape a vase, the womb, the delicate
vessels and veils, her hands on my
hands on the clay, spun or blockset
on wax paper, lights out, hallway,
room, REM on speakers hidden behind
orbs of cardboard, chalked figures,
behind me sitting upright and leaning
over me, long hair wet, salted, lush,

SAMETH (cont.)

saying something like love to me in
in the basement of my suffocation,
O, dear mother shape me and shake
me as the tool cuts away such excess.

The Color Guard stomps forward.

The dancers flee.

Sameth hangs, fluttering, suspended in the air where the hands had momentarily held him aloft.

SAMETH

I went fishing with my father in the
desert, said to him, hey, father, no
fish here, just beer cans, just the
flapping empty sound of the thousand
tents, the vainglorious spillway of
blood spent, and ghost, here, ghost,
that unsimple sound of wind and noone,
the barbed wire now sunset-colored
from the years of rust, to which he,
dad, gray-haired and genteel in the
steeped hickory nut cracking end of
himself said let us walk and speak
of being in the midst of struggle.

DELTA

Maggie trudges the front stairs, door held open by Richard.

Maggie's hand rests on her belly.

It is dark.

MAGGIE

Change in the Corregidor unkempt
quiet predawn, here cricket, here
robin asleep, here husband, my
hand.

RICHARD

Did we remember everything?

MAGGIE

In my dreams I worked nightshift
popping test tops from soda
bottles, someone must do it, just
to be sure they worked, the whole
machine silver, blinking, arms
everywhere reaching, moving this
from here and that to there, it is
a wonder how the machine in its
mindlessness behaves, oil and mud
and motive force from us thrust
outward into something not
ourselves, into fizzy cola, kitten
t-shirts, monkeys playing cymbals
as they strut in store-windows the
world over.

RICHARD

Feels like I'm forgetting something,
we're forgetting something . . .

A light on the front lightpost turns on as Maggie passes.

Richard opens the passenger door for her.

She sits.

MAGGIE

The trick is in the glass. Let
light filter both ways but not

the air, insulate the air, keep
temperatures steady, storefront,
lure the cherry-cheeked onlookers
with their mittens and ice-skates
in for a browse, stay, that thing
Tommy said he wanted, do you have
it?, no, well then perhaps he'll
like this, replica cola, a phone
shaped like a football, ruins
piling on ruins where the animals
in us remind ourselves of that
first hoard we kept in the notch
of the banyan.

CASPIAN

Oscar, 13, sporting baby-blue water-wings, toes the edge of the kiddie pool.

Trevail, his younger sister, stands on a bench behind him. She has thrust her arms wide.

TREVAIL

Cored camera, just the shell, as if
the guts got in the way of whizzing
tabernacle mornings on the blue
bank of the sky, we're here, Oscar,
see us reflected, we're here and
we've begun to soar.

OSCAR

I want a popsicle.

TREVAIL

When the train came . . .

OSCAR

I want a popsicle.

TREVAIL

When the train came . . .

OSCAR

I want . . .

TREVAIL

Oscar! . . . when it came it came
butterflying along half-naked in the
way the big iron shivers in the cool
sweating, leapt up from its tracks
across the road, across the first
field poppy-bright as it goes to wild
in the rum of the town where we grew
up together, remember it?, you're
probably thinking if you're thinking
at all well how old can she be?, this
girl with the strange name and the
water wings and the brother here
ready to leap, how old can she be if
she's talking about naked trains
and that cool shiver, oh, let me
tell you we grow up strange and
fast, treating us like a chrysalis
like a cellophane something you

can preserve. I've been up here
for ages witnessing the blue, I
have, in glass.

Trevail begins to cry.

OSCAR
Don't cry.

TREVAIL
I'm not. I don't.

OSCAR
Can we go now?

TREVAIL
We can go. But just a minute,
give me a moment more, brother,
you see it there, the brightness
gleaming back at us?, the halo of
it, the shiver, it's coming quick
and black and rankling, it'll be
here bothering us and we'll have
to catch it right at the right
instant as it passes, look through
the steam, look through the ring
around it into the very eye of it,
it's a camera, it's a box inside
of which we will run away to a
country with a bright blue name
like a sea locked in the gearwork
of trial and age.

Trevail lowers her arms.

OSCAR
I have to pee. It's been a long
time now. Can we go?

TREVAIL
Toes first. I'll follow you.

WINDSHIELD

SHELLY-RAY, 28, with kitten-little shirt and surf shorts, rolls on-stage perched cross-legged on an office chair.

Off-screen, the sound of footsteps approaches, echoing in an otherwise empty auditorium.

SHELLY-RAY

I'm back.

(giggles)

And you, you stop right there little man, what're you doing with the Chinese, huh?, I asked for Mexican but damn, whatever, the balloons all wheedled free from my hands, see, up there in the rafters the tails hanging down, white and imperfectly straight earthward from the static, swaying in the HVAC gusto, bring me a calzone.

The approach of the FOOTSTEPS resumes.

JAKE, 25, in wife-beater t-shirt with faux blood stain on cheek/chest, mounts the stage. He stops a few feet from Shelly-Ray. His hair glitters.

JAKE

Bellissimo, ponte dio.

SHELLY-RAY

Don't go pretending.

JAKE

We've got General Tso's, fried rice, eggrolls.

SHELLY-RAY

Don't go pretending no more Jacob Mister Fatpants what's that on your face, looks like ketchup-blood and fake beneath this light, turn on the gels, the reds, browns, give our skin life, come here boy, I want you in my mouth where my blood comes closest to the surface of me, I tickle as I spin and the wildfire threatening through the moonbanks is silver cold jeopardizing the homes, the little comfortable capillaries I've been

known to explode, push me, push me,
spin me, Jake, set the wonton soup
down center-stage and help me out
here I'm going to be an old woman
soon and if you want to know how to
seduce me, me young or old, me here
or there, it works for anyone really,
us smarties or the bar-likelies you
most likely like best, well here's
how, glowworm us, tell us a little
about, oh, I don't know, death, or
the bled mascara in the rain that
brings out that first wrinkle and
damn like sunshine the whole spell
of woman opens up and I'm dizzy
again on the deep armrest of me.

JAKE
Ketchup?

SHELLY-RAY
You just don't get it, do you?

Jake touches his cheek.

Shelly-Ray stands.

SHELLY-RAY
The new night has begun to blossom
and I've got to go find my rower, my
ambulance.

Shelly-Ray runs two steps and jumps into the aisle.

Jake begins to eat.

JAILBREAK

Knobbed knees protrude, legs dangle from the edge of a pier: four legs, two of them shoed in clay-caked sneakers, two shoed in jelly-sandals. A picnic basket sits on the platform of the pier.

ABBIE, 15, touches one toe to the water and then lifts it.

ABBIE (OS)

I've got you to save me, Fireboy, when
 I look into the glassed face of the
 water, weeds upthrust like so many arms, what I want is to fall, skim
 it, skip
 along it like the swifts skip for
 mosquitos and water-spiders, I've got
 you, I've got my fingers mismatched in
 the grip of your fingers, so white
 against your clay-baked brightness, and cool, mine cool, a barrier
 between us,
 that cool, the faintest shot of air
 cushioning the space where we touch.

FIREBOY slips off a shoe. It splashes into the water, bubbles, sinks for a moment and then resurfaces upsidedown.

FIREBOY

No more glass. No more temptation. No
 more face there for you to see.

ABBIE

You've busted it.

FIREBOY

It's fake.

ABBIE

Have you ever thought, looking down,
 that it doesn't matter anymore?, the
 reality or the dream, the same riding
 bike along hot August crabgrass wither
 roadside is the same riding bike along
 minted waves of bliss shaking that moment
 of wet impermanent waking, thrush and
 merry, grasping it if only for a moment,
 have you thought: 'give me the madness,
 give me the silly dance great-grandpa
 does when he lumbers off to the toilet,

his suspenders half-down already and everyone embarrassed?', that is swifiting and closer to what I want to be, closer than office closets and spreadsheets, closer than the idiot ideas of picnic, marriage, childbirth, college.

Fireboy kicks off his other shoe. His toenails glow.

FIREBOY
Yup, I've thought it.

ABBIE
Have you done it?

FIREBOY
Jumping in?

ABBIE
No. Falling. Just simply falling.

Fireboy's legs shift toward Abbie's legs. They touch each other.

Abbie draws her legs away, up, out of view.

ABBIE
Ouch.

FIREBOY
I dare you.

ABBIE
What?

FIREBOY
Do it.

ABBIE
Okay.

The planks of the pier CREAK as Abbie stands.

A long SILENCE. The water flickers, the shadow of a body passing above it.

Fireboy draws his legs up, like Abbie. His feet burn, little flames licking from the toe-knuckles. The fire catches on the paint and spreads along the planks of the pier.

FIREBOY

Wait. Wait . . .

Bits and pieces of the pier break off, fall smoldering into the water.

Fireboy lifts one foot and then the other.

In the fragmented water the reflection of a blaze, like sunset, shows in the sky.

Fireboy's shoes float, clay from their soles loosening, dissolving, staining the resolute shimmer.

DIODE

Maggie and Richard enter the hospital.

Maggie doubles over, grabs the receptionist counter.

The receptionist stands in alarm.

MAGGIE

Cold comfort, the camera, the bait
and switch between seeing and
watching, what if I were to tell you
it transmits, I know, sounds weird
and impossible, not the filmed outer
whatever it is you think you are
seeing but the you, in repose, back
to the mind of some cavernous god?,
would you dress better, workout
once in a while, straighten up the
mess from last night, popcorn and
beer cans, or the pate knife, the
negligee, pluck her hairs from the
white couch as evidence and save
them pressed in a volume of Audubon?

RICHARD

(to receptionist)
Can we worry about paperwork later?

A nurse appears, with wheelchair.

Maggie sits in the wheelchair. She grits her teeth.

MAGGIE

The spell of night spelled backwards
apparent as the very being of us all,
I repeat, progenitor of the race,
caught walking in the Olduvai mud I
have seen you enter my bottle factory
dream and look around you in that awe
which is nine-tenths fear and the
remainder revulsion: had you only
saved the sweetest nuts in your banyan
enclave, sweet like arsenic, blue on
the motive fingertips, blue on the
skywriting contrail in that hour when
the stars begin to prick, we'd be free.

SALTADOR

MICHAEL, 30, in khaki shorts and white t-shirt, turns off the car radio, turns off the headlights.

CORA, 24, in matching shorts and shirt, faces him, braced, squaring her body in the passenger seat of the car.

MICHAEL

Brickwork whitewash the farm a mirage
 the sable wheat swaying like feather
 in worlds a bird's wing whipping
 with the currents pushed beneath it
 pushing it up, he pushes, pulses,
 quick on the whiplash, bare-toed and
 beatific, his arms spread out. You'll
 remember, I'm sure, red tile, red
 wine, the sunset red and eating away
 at the land by rill and poplar
 hedgerow yearning toward a zenith
 of the sun, sundials their shadows
 these hedges and hills, all slippery
 as the vein in a foot, skin, pulsing,
 pushed, as the age comes wild, whitely
 upon us. We must, right now.

Cora moves closer to Michael.

Michael looks at her.

MICHAEL

La ilusión de la calor y los besos
 se desvanecen.

CORA

My favorite.

Michael places his hand behind Cora's head, threads his fingers through the small curling wet hairs there, the tickle.

He kisses her, a long kiss.

They separate.

MICHAEL

The jumper sings of meadows, made
mad by moonlight apparitions of
you, so mad he thinks he might glide
and hawk the heavens, O this fantasy
silence!, this declension of the verb
'to beat', bold and real in a moment
and then gone, I must tell you, gone,
pushed, soaring, out into the old
was, will be, can, has been, to gentle
gray, gypsy, locomotive, swift and
still in the succotash drill of what
is real, up, up, jumper, from the
wall, wish, swell your arms into an
Icarus of kissing, the vicar of
midnight will catch you in his
ambulance and remind you what you'll
go back to isn't Spanish but is,
maybe, something not impossible.

Michael leans toward Cora again.

She rolls down the window and then faces him.

They kiss once more, a shorter but more perfect kiss.

Cora points one arm, then the other out the window. Her body shakes as she rises from the seat and drifts upward into the evening.

MICHAEL

Sólo queda el trigo. Un ondulado
trigo y paredes.

HANDGUN

HANK, 45, balding, in ill-fitting suit and lapel carnation, bends to pick a black pebble from his clean front sidewalk.

MARIAM, 15, the babysitter, follows Hank from a pick-up truck parked at the curb.

CATHY, 38, Hank's wife, emerges from the front door of the house as Hank bends for the pebble. Claudia wears a flowered evening dress. Her arms are pale.

HANK

I recognize the light in you, wan
spark, solitary atom around which
other pebbles ellipse and glide, do
not fear the arc, do not tremble at
the sprinkle sound shushing this
lawn. Beneath the mulberries you'll
land, face up, dreaming of the sky's
Rubicon coming.

CATHY

I'm glad you could sit, Mariam. Such
short notice!

MARIAM

No problem, I'm happy.

Hank throws the pebble into the bushes.

HANK

In Narmada the honor of it, dying,
slipping into the intoxication of
the stream where the galleon fires
and ritual sync, stone steps wheat
rubbed deep where the centuries tread
come trembling down, down, to that
bank, come bleed with me, I've eaten
my last leavened bread, broken the
soft core of the oriental fruit,
fish sweet and fleshy, stained blue
myself with it, stone, pebble, fling
you up into the sky and hear you
land and it will not be your Caesar's
honor to decide the act of falling
again, flying again, forced thing,
inanimate, I feel the simple force

of gravity in my hand as I hold you,
surely as he felt it pulling toward
empire.

Cathy passes Hank, steps into the pick-up truck.

CATHY

She's asleep already. It will be an
easy night.

Mariam waves, nods agreement, and enters the house, shutting the door.

Hank forms his thumb and index finger into the figure of gun. He points it at his temple and fires.

Brains explode from the far side of his head.

Cathy begins to GIGGLE.

HANK

There are two ways out, always, but
one way in, which is to accept, still
lingering in the realm of what you
once imagined, but breathing and
reciting the sacred private verses
of your personal triumph, pebble, be
that rising or falling, be that back-
alley purple throbbing in the stoplight
or music, tremulous music, the monk
wailing, carbuncle, and the taste of
perfection remembered from the pyres
of lighting yourself into the atomic.

Hank crumples onto the clean, white sidewalk.

CHILDLIKE

Hospital room: Maggie giving birth.

Richard holds her hand. He wears a blue hospital smock.

Nurses and doctors hover.

MAGGIE

Corrugated fingers in a grip
shellfish sweet I'm mostly
incognito now, you'll see, bit
through with musk and honey.

RICHARD

Breathe.

MAGGIE

In the air, staccato simpleton
somnambulist eggwhite and whipped
cream: what am I to Olduvai?

RICHARD

She wants water.

A nurse fills a Dixie cup, gives it to Richard.

MAGGIE

I saw footprints frozen on a
ledge in the rock. A boy walking.

RICHARD

Drink.

Maggie drinks, crumples the cup as the contraction comes.

MAGGIE

Preservation within the theater
tonight, this air doves into the
joints, heady tracing colorful
dust, groove, the channels of all
our TVs slip one by one into an
incomplete oblivion.

FERO CITY

JAKOB, 89, in thick winter work clothes, hauls a sled stacked with bundles of kindling.

Jakob's dog, a lop-eared mutt, name of MR. PINK, trots beside him.

JAKOB

There are things in the world what
don't make sense Mr. Pink and things
what do, winter makes sense, sled-
sense so the old bones labor less,
the old heart beats young again when
chilled, winter do make sense, winter
do strange things to the old man, so
don't look at me that way, Mr. Pink,
she had it coming these score of ages,
what with walking in and out, guise
of who knows what next time or this,
reaching in her baskets for the bird-
quick serpent, that breast of hers, I
remember it like the water, wine-dark,
the poet spoke me, the fumes beneath a
tripod, witch-eyed, what's to keep me
from seeing her now, I ask?

Mr. Pink cocks his head, growls.

JAKOB

Shush up, hear? So she's a little
young yet . . . it'll come around.

Mr. Pink yelps.

JAKOB

It's a trick? No it ain't, boy, or
if it is I don't want to discover it,
what it is, the galleon rows, this
ribcage, oars, expanding and striking
at me for once, for once I can feel it
cutting into the water the white wave
churning behind, prow, she come out of
pine boughs, fast across the log,
thumpity, thumpity, like grouses, and
at first I just laughed, laughed at
your ears all straight up, whatcha

got to say for yourself for that,
Mr. Pink?, fooled in your rabbit
wanting like an old man, saliva
swelling, it's meat and earth and
swelling that gets us, fecund thing
the berry stain on her lip, half-
naked in a nightshirt and galoshes,
but where did she go, where did she
go?

Mr. Pink circles the sled, tugs at a bundle of sticks.

The hand of a small girl-child, limp and winter-white, lolls free from the mass of kindling.

JAKOB

Just sleeping, we're all just sleeping,
dog, don't worry, I'll put cinnamon in
in the tea tonight and she'll come
'round, she's got those eyes like
freezing is all, exploded momentarily
and on accident, I swear, popped when I
showed her, maybe too fast, who I was,
is, had been, who, bright as flambeau
crystal and evergreen, all of me, but
hurry now, hurry, the night unto thee
is come, world, and we must lay down
together until the sarcophagus warms.

STILLNESS

The DOCTOR stands, hands a baby to the NURSE beside him.

Richard has not let go of Maggie's hand.

MAGGIE

Something is missing, like Richard
when you gave me the tin can, held
up a tin can yourself, our windows
facing each other across the street,
and the message painted on your chest
that said 'imagine a string.'

The nurse with the baby leaves the room.

MAGGIE

There's no crying. There's no . . .

The nurse walks down a hallway. The door to the birthing room shuts behind her.

Still, no crying.

On a bench in the hallway Marco, Sameth and Abbie sit. As the nurse passes them they stand and follow her.

The nurse passes a niche with a snack-food vending machine.

Trevail puts a quarter into the slot, waits for a bag of chips, and then follows the group down the hall.

Jakob and Shelly-Rae hold open a set of double doors.

The nurse passes through the doors, into a laboratory.

Around a steel bench Avery, Michael and Hank have gathered.

The nurse puts the dead body of the baby on the bench.

MARCO

I brought myrrh.

He sets a lump of myrrh on the table and then backs away.

END

Benjamin Buchholz's short fiction and poetry have appeared widely at places like Identity Theory, Tarpaulin Sky, GoodFoot, MiPoesias and elsewhere. For a full bibliography, see www.benjaminbuchholz.com