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The Poetry of Charles Bukowski

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INTRODUCTION

Charles Bukowski is a prolific author. During a writing career spanning more than three decades he has to date produced over two thousand published poems,many short stories and essays,a travelogue,a Film screenplay,and five novels. These have brought him an international readership, considerable commercial success,and a recent discovery of his work by the Film Industry. But it is his contribution to contemporary American poetry that forms the subject matter of this study.

Thus far,his writing has rarely commanded the attention or approval of influential literary critics,and seldom been included in supposedly representative anthologies and textbooks. Though Bukowski's work has been contained in The Penguin Book of American Verse (I979) and in the latest edition of The Norton Anthology of Poetry,perhaps the most widespread college-level teaching anthologies,it was omitted from The Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing (I979) and only briefly mentioned within the pages of Los Angeles in Fiction (I984),despite his probable stature as the leading figure in Angeleno writing over the past thirty years. Helen Vendler,editor of The Faber Book of Contemporary American Poetry (I986),rightly found space for Allen Ginsberg and Frank O'Hara,two of the anti-formal maestros of Post War verse,yet made no mention of Bukowski, whose achievement and influence has arguably been as great. Even in West Germany,where Bukowski's reputation and name-recognition among the reading public is higher than in the United States,opinions as to the value and significance of his work have been sharply divided. While he has been

hailed in Die Welt as 'the greatest American writer since Hemingway',more recently (according to Carl Weissner,his German translator) the detractors have ranged from 'a former speechwriter of Willy Brandt who called Bukowski the most overrated writer of the century to the right-wing Munich paper that tried to put him down as "a marginal figure of the U.S. porn scene"'.[I]

The writer who has attracted such ambivalent epithets as 'America's sewer Shakespeare' has frequently been caricatured as a sub-literate barbarian,a *naif* writing off the top of a muddled head,his writing smeared as simplistically autobiographical and lacking identifiable literary techniques. What one might call The Bukowski Personality Cult has contributed to this kind of reaction,and been the bane of much previous criticism. The whiff of autobiographical immediacy that his work gives off has been almost intoxicating to his most vehement admirers and detractors, leading them to wilfully conflate and confuse the authorial voice created by Bukowski with knowledge about the author's life. To C.Lynn Munro,for instance,'his is an extremely personal and autobiographical poetry; the terror and agony are not merely "felt-life" but life as Bukowski has known it',while to the more hyperbolic Steve Richmond, Bukowski is 'the Balzac of Today moving constantly back to his typewriter as if it were a fountain of spirit'.[2]

Surface indications to the contrary,Bukowski's verse addresses itself to literate readers capable of appreciating its slangy departures from polite literary expression, and the large number of irreverent,sometimes scabrous, references to the lives and works of writers,painters, composers and philosophers which it contains. His work goes down well with student audiences,even though its humour

tends to subvert their educational values. Despite the lamentable crassness of his worst work,Bukowski's verse is wonderfully capable of being comical yet affecting,widely allusive and surprising. Since the mid-1960s at least, Bukowski's work has certainly shown 'the excess of distinctive manner...common to all remarkable poetry'.[3]

Bukowski's apparent artlessness disguises great artifice. The tools in his craftsman's bag are used to create an impression of conversational spontaneity,and he exhibits enormous resource in working this through on the linguistic level. Bukowski manages to impart an element of improvisation,the feeling that a poem's destination is not fixed in advance,but arrived at after a lexical journey which might have taken other directions. He seeks to lower the rhetorical barrier between poetry and its audience,to address the reader as an acquaintance,a bar-room buddy perhaps. How in general are these purposes pursued? By the use of a first-person narrator; a vigorous,street-wise language unencumbered by complex words or intellectual concepts; the cultivation of a no-bullshit stance,as though the speaker were too busy telling the truth to dilute it with high cultural values; and by jokes and asides to the reader. The narration of his poems uninhibitedly encompasses repetitions,digressions,ungrammatical constructions, split-infinitives and sentences with no verbs; they are often flavoured with slang and swear words,sexual innuendos and other linguistic ambiguities that enable him to splice sex and violence,nastiness and humour. By leaving in those features common in speech but usually repressed within books,Bukowski is signalling that he wants to align with spoken rather than written conventions. As further outlined in chapter four,this has implications for his narratology

and associates it with a species of writing, particularly marked in American literature, that wishes to pass itself off as speech, the unmediated voice of the author/narrator.

An important element of his style is the consistent use of structurally simple language. The vast majority of words in any Bukowski poem contain only one or two syllables, and seldom require recourse to a dictionary, except perhaps a dictionary of American slang terms. His poetic language is generally barer, more direct than that employed by smoother, more literary writers. Indeed, he is of the opinion that 'a good style comes primarily from a lack of pretentiousness, and what is pretentious changes from year to year and from day to day and from minute to minute. We must be evermore careful'.[4] Bukowski enlarged upon such 'pretentiousness' during a 1966 essay in which he recalled his early experience of haunting the Los Angeles Public Library and reading copies of The Kenyon Review and The New York Times. Even as a tyro, he became 'aware of a glass-prison terminology: that fancy, long, and twisted words were evasions, crutches, weaknesses. And so I used to think of it as "bullshit padding", talking about useless things in a useless terminology'.[5] Such a decision to employ a simple, unliterary language should not be mistaken for a naive approach. For example, the relatively stripped down prose of a Hemingway or a Camus, as the critic Jonathan Culler has noted, 'is not natural or neutral or transparent, but a deliberate engagement with the institution of literature; its apparent rejection of literariness will itself become a new mode of literary writing, a recognizable écriture'.[6]

One speculates that Bukowski's grasp of the artistic potential of simple language may owe something to the

etymological background of his national origins. Born in Andernach, Germany in 1920 to a German mother and a German-American father, Bukowski was brought to Los Angeles as a small child. The English language itself is made up of words mainly derived from Anglo-Saxon, French, Latin and Greek sources, plus many more recent cross-fertilizations. As a generalization, those words obtained from Anglo-Saxon, and therefore from the Germanic inheritance, tend to be the shortest, simplest and most common. They are typically used to express emotions and perceptions, basic actions and details. The Latinate word-hoard is structurally longer and more complex; it is usually found in descriptions of ideas and abstract concepts, prevalently employed in learned discourse and official language of all kinds. Bukowski's pronouncements, prejudices and practice as a writer almost always lean towards the former usages.

But a more demonstrable source for the language to be met with in Bukowski's poems lies in an undoubted response to American Modernism, and Romantic tendencies imparted by Walt Whitman to American poetry of this century. Bukowski owes allegiance to those American Modernists who were also literary nationalists, concerned to use the American vernacular as a basis for their art - William Carlos Williams, e.e. cummings, Henry Miller and Ernest Hemingway. Each shared an intense verbal scepticism and hatred of false rhetoric, a hostility to verse and prose forms inherited from English Literature; in their differing ways, each achieved the ambition of being avant-gardists whose work was still accessible to relatively unsophisticated readers. Bukowski's artefacts are as thoroughly _In the American Grain_ as those of Carlos Williams, whose 'clearing

up of the language' Bukowski has acknowledged and learned from.[7] Bukowski's relationship with the American Moderns crucially affected the inherent Romanticism of his subject matters.

To put this contention at its simplest,one can see that there is clearly a Whitmanic inheritance within his work,as well as a compensatory influence from Hemingway. These two writers have most pervasively infiltrated the vocabulary and poetic territory that Bukowski has chosen to explore, though he also had to deal with other inputs during the formation of his mature style. Ultimately,there are significant differences between Bukowskian praxis and that of Whitman or Hemingway. As has long been established, Hemingway was a very careful,painstaking writer who famously preferred small,'honest' words to abstractions. An obsession with the authenticity of words and feelings seeps through onto the Bukowski page. Though their continuity of Existential concerns is apparent,Bukowski's humour makes the page more divided,ambiguous,and harder to pin down ideologically than other American writers (say,Norman Mailer) who revamp Hemingway's male mythology. Bukowski's specific literary and ideational debts to Hemingway are fully discussed in the third chapter. But a crude formula for Bukowski's work,in its early phase,can be construed as the stripped-down language of the prose technician Hemingway combined with the oratorical stance of Whitman.

Bukowski's reaction to Whitman is hardly surprising, given that the disreputable Walt has obliged American poets to define their relation and attitude to him,either for or against. The self-promoting,self-inventing nineteenth century Romantic is the Prime Mover of modern American poetry,especially important to those concerned to declare

their independence from English literature. The anglophile T.S.Eliot had grave reservations about the competence of Whitman's verse, while Ezra Pound was often equivocal on the matter, though he did offer 'A Pact':

> It was you that broke the new wood,
> Now is a time for carving.
> We have one sap and one root -
> Let there be commerce between us.[8]

As late as 1963, Robert Creeley felt constrained to say to an interviewer, the English poet Charles Tomlinson, that Walt Whitman had been 'suppressed' by the influence of the New Critics, but was nevertheless far more 'available' to contemporary poets than T.S.Eliot.[9] Whitman's Open Forms, his long lines of generous inclusiveness 'measured, by the number, not of syllables, but of major stresses in each line' have proved indispensible resources for Americans; most notably, Allen Ginsberg's works 'Howl' and 'Kaddish' bear witness to the efficacy of the Whitmanic manner.[10]

Bukowski also has habitually used the verse paragraph and the parallelism as structuring devices for his verse, bringing order and cadence to lines of irregular length. But Whitman's Romantic ideology is just as vital to the meanings of Bukowskian works. To Whitman, 'the poetic quality is not marshalled in rhyme or uniformity or abstract addresses to things nor in melancholy complaints or good precepts, but is the life of these and much else and is in the soul'.[11] Though unlikely to find 'the soul' a utile concept, Bukowski likewise maintains that the poetic quality is not in rhyme, uniformity, abstractions - still less in 'good precepts' - but in life-centred entities. Moreover, Bukowski is a poet who constructs a heroic myth

of himself within poems; his persona is also as 'one of the roughs.../Disorderly, fleshy and sensual'.[12] Both writers revel in lists, catalogues of human life and America. Bukowski's is the eye of experience which has seen, accepted and memorialized it all:

> ask the man sleeping in an alley under
>   a sheet of paper
> ask the conquerors of nations and planets
> ask the man who has just cut off his finger
> ask a bookmark in the Bible
> ask the water dripping from a faucet while
>   the phone rings
> ask perjury
> ask the deep blue paint
> ask the parachute jumper
> ask the man with the bellyache
> ask the divine eye so sleek and swimming [13]

Whitman's demand that the poet should walk the Open Road of life, embracing the world in all its fascinating, sordid vitality made a deep impression on Bukowski; the line 'I am the man, I suffered, I was there' is seemingly engraved on his psyche. In the piece 'A Rambling Essay On Poetics and the Bleeding Life Written While Drinking a Six-Pack (Tall)' Bukowski several times refers to Whitman as an ancestor of his concerns.

> Call me a hardhead if you wish. uncultured, drunken, whatever. The world has shaped me and I have shaped what I can. I have carried the bleeding ½ steer on my shoulder that was alive a minute ago and swung him on the dull hook on the truck-roof through gristle; I've entered the women's can with a mop while you've slept; I've rolled and been rolled; I've prayed to a toteboard I've been black-jacked in a pisser for making a play for a gangster's moll; I was married to a woman with a million dollars and left her; I have crawled drunken in alleys from coast to coast; I've pumped gas, worked in a dog biscuit factory, sold Xmas trees, even been a foreman; I've been a truckdriver, I've guarded door, looking for boots, in a Texas whorehouse; I lived a year on a yacht by learning how to start the auxiliary engine and by making love to the women of a rich madman with one arm who thought he was a genius at

> playing the organ and I had to write the words for his damned operas, and I was drunk most of the time and it worked until he died, but why go on with the rest? the subject is poetry.
> The subject is dull.
> Poetry must become, must right itself. Whitman had it backwards: I'd say that to have great audiences we must first have great poetry. I've never said this before but I am now high enough as I write this to perhaps say that Ginsberg has been the most awakening force in American poetry since Walt W. [14]

Bukowski is here not just indulging in self-mythology, but pleading for poetry and poets to go all out, to go for broke, burst out of straitjackets of convention and good taste, and take risks in the cause of revivifying art. For Bukowski, the verbal arts should be grounded in harsh experience of the world, and should not be merely word games. Unpeopled, serene scenes are rarely found within this poet's work, which teems with desperate characters, and melodramatic, messy occasions. He praises Ginsberg, but behind the phrase 'Poetry must become, must right itself' is the burgeoning ego of someone who passionately wants to correct the 'dullness' of poetry - Bukowski himself.

Whitman's shadow also falls upon Bukowski's societal perspectives, which identify with and gravitate towards those on the economic margins. Writing about the bottom end of the social hierarchy, Bukowski's sympathies are with the people excluded from America's cult of conspicuous consumption, its national concern with material rewards. The underbelly of mainstream society that his typewriter describes contains skid row bums, whores and brassy bar-stool hustlers, convicts, daylabourers, barflies, losing boxers and racetrack punters, rapacious landladies, struggling writers and other economic failures subsisting as best they can. Commentators who have remarked on this aspect of his work usually claim that Bukowski records 'the voices of the

streets,the factories,the racetracks....the pathos of poverty,blue collar jobs,hangovers and jailyards'.[15] But Bukowski actually alternates sympathy for toiling,exploited humanity with disgust at its bovine behaviour. The two faces of Bukowski's authorial self show an empathetic smile and a misanthropic grimace. He does not truly adopt 'the vantage point of the underclass'; rather,his typical narrator is a writer who knows the streets and is not just slumming. He investigates the Lower Depths but is not of them. His culture-knowledge keeps him apart,free to take sidelong,ironic views of high art and low life. Bukowski's speakers are as well-acquainted with writing,painting, philosophy and classical music as they are with sleazy bars,racetrack whores and fights in alleys. Bukowski Man enjoys the products of both Beethoven and Budweiser.

The observational sympathy for economically marginal types,his insistence that poetry can include the crudity of life yet allow artistic references,may be seen in the poem 'Officers' Club,A.P.O.'. It first appeared in a 1966 issue of the magazine Iconolatre,and has not been reprinted in American verse collections.[16] It illustrates the assertion that Bukowski's art is habitually written on behalf of losers,social oddballs,the estranged,the indigent - all those unable or unwilling to conform,or measure up to the competition ethos of bourgeois societies. The poem is written,one notes

> for those dishwashers in Germany,
> young,
> singing with the Afros,
> hardly making enough to get
> decently
> drunk
> you've got the fucking charm
> of any army
> without guns,

hanging around,
delirious,
on edge,
perched like piss-ants
on a cliff,
look look,
it's got to go;
you'll end up famous
you'll end up bankers
you'll end up
dead,
but now it's good
thinking of you,
in the stink of it,
in the greasy slime and shit,
alive enough to hang Christ by his heels
upsidedown
in the orange dirty morning,
going out to hear some German blow the
Strauss air,
and besmirching daylight
with green beer,
inviting jail or suicide or myth or
murder - I was once a
man like that
like that
like
that.[I7]

The aggressive yet allusive speaker is drawing parallels between the dishwashers' situation and his own experience of life on the societal,psychological and economic edge. He is clearly not a true dead-beat,but someone intent on emphasizing alienation from the dominant culture,and the relishing of vibrant extremes ('the stink of it','jail or suicide'). The language used is a mix of slang and swearing ('the Afros','piss-ants','shit') interpolated amongst a simple narrative,which yet contains oddly extravagant expressions such as 'hang Christ by his heels' and 'blow the/Strauss air'. The poem's reiterations and hungover lines are typical Bukowskian usages; again,many of his speakers place themselves in position to accept such invitations to 'jail or suicide or myth or/murder'.

Accompanying this simultaneous embrace of social marginality and rejection of conformity,Bukowski's stance

is often scornfully impatient with art lovers and conventional culture,as in 'The Talkers',where a boy is heard

> talking about recitals,virtuosi,conductors,
> the lesser known novels of Dostoevsky....
> he gabbles about the Arts until
> I hate the Arts,
> and there is nothing cleaner
> than getting back to a bar or
> back to the track and watching them run.[I8]

Bukowski has always been keen to promote himself as an iconoclast,an anti-intellectual writer,part of a permanent opposition to societal and artistic orthodoxies. As 'the gloriously impertinent Bukowski' antagonizes aesthetes,he also comically deflates poetry buffs who naively imagine poets to be elevated or exquisite beings,sending a 'Note to a Lady Who Expected Rupert Brooke'.[I9]

To find a more serious and considered statement of Bukowski's oppositional aims as a writer,one needs to turn to Jon Edgar Webb's significantly-titled magazine _The Outsider_. The third issue in I963 proclaimed Bukowski its 'Outsider of the Year',and brought together the first collection of critical responses to his work,an important _festschrift_ for a then relatively obscure poet. A number of little magazine editors were asked to write about Bukowski's special qualities. The comments of Felix Stephanile (sometime editor of _The Sparrow_) brought out an interesting riposte from Bukowski,and the two pieces were printed alongside each other. Stephanile had appeared to brand Bukowski as a primitive writer.

> Let the man alone; let him cavort in left-field,where he belongs,way out,alone,performing with both hands, and at the top of his voice,waving his poems like a flag. He only wants the thing that is himself in his

poems; we need such men to remind us how poetry got started. I have compared the man to a brick-layer, a pugilist, and a baseball player.

Bukowski replied by first remarking that he was 'against concepts & preconcepts of what poetry should be'. His short essay, a bewhiskered avant-garde credo, is worth quoting almost in its entirety.

The politicians and newspapers talk a lot about freedom but the moment you begin to apply any, either in Life or in the Art-Form, you are in [for] a cell, ridicule or misunderstanding. I sometimes think when I put that sheet of white paper in the machine: you will soon be dead, we will all soon be dead...while you're living it might be best to live from the source stuck inside of you....If you come to the poem, you are not going to worry too much about [writing like] Keats, Swinburne, Shelley; or acting like Frost. You are not going to worry about spondees, counts, or if the endings rhyme. You want to get it down, hard or crude or otherwise - any way you can truly send it through....The mass, both actual mass and the artistic mass (in the sense of large practising numbers only) are always far behind, practising safety not only in the material and economic life but in the life of the so-called soul....If you write a poem that escapes the mass-hypnosis of the 19th Century slick-soft poesy they think you write badly because you do not sound right. They want to hear what they have always heard. But they forget that it takes 5 or 6 good men every century to push the thing ahead out of the staleness and death. I'm not saying that I am one of these men but I sure as hell am saying I am not one of the others. Which leaves me hanging - OUTSIDE.[20]

Thus, Bukowski's writerly persona likes to adopt the position of an outsider, sometimes presenting this as a consciously avant-garde gesture and at other times as the reaction of an unstudied tough guy. In both cases, the critique of the status quo being espoused comes from a quintessentially individualist standpoint. He thus joins a long line of American writers who conceive themselves to be rugged individualists, anti-aesthete aesthetes and Advertisers for the Self: Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, Robinson

Jeffers, Ernest Hemingway, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Ken Kesey and many others. Bukowski also echoes an American cultural tradition that stresses individual freedoms, and distrusts collectivity.

America, so its cherished national myths hold, is the land of the Free, the land of opportunity, where anyone may pursue more abundant life, liberty and happiness. This is partly a wish-fulfillment stemming from the idea of America itself, which gave religious freedoms to the early Puritan settlers, and freedom from European class and economic barriers to later arrivals. Even today, speech-making politicians have only to couple the words 'America' and 'Freedom' together to provoke an invariably enthusiastic audience response. The new-minted coin of American freedom and individualism has, however, self-reliance on one side and dissidence on the reverse. The outlaw spirit is in evidence throughout the development of American culture, as Leslie Fiedler maintained, from 'the frontiersman, the pioneer, at last the cowboy...[to] the beatnik, the hippie, one more wild man seeking the last West'.[21] According to this scenario, both cowboy and beatnik are united in their opposition to collective values and organisations, which might restrict or abolish their freedom to celebrate a Majority of One. Thus, only the individual can live up to the ideals on which America itself was reared, whereas the collective is perceived as potentially corrupt and corrupting. Disillusionment with America's gulf between ideal and reality has powerfully affected its most representative writers. Walt Whitman, often stereotyped as the poet of American Optimism, was moved to complain in his 1871 essay 'Democratic Vistas'.

> The depravity of the business classes of our country is not less than has been supposed, but infinitely greater. The official services of America, national, state, and municipal, in all their branches and departments, except the judiciary, are saturated in corruption, bribery, falsehood, mal-administration; and the judiciary is tainted. The great cities reek with respectable as much as non-respectable robbery and scoundrelism.... I say that our New World democracy...is, so far, an almost complete failure.[22]

Not only is there a 'perpetual failure to live up to the nation's preconceived foundation myths', but America's actual historical record conjurs up something not far from a dystopia. Witchcraft trials, extermination of Red Indians, slavery, the Civil War, endemic political/financial scandals from Presidents Grant to Reagan, the Depression, McCarthyist blacklisting, the Vietnam War, assassinations of variously progressive politicians, and the pervasiveness of the so-called Military-Industrial Complex since at least the 1950s are some of the most prominent features of that history.[23]

A well-publicised strain in American cultural mythology claims to enact dissent from straight society, its values and institutions; this influential figment of the American imagination has been endlessly reprocessed in Hollywood Westerns and in classic American literature. The archetypal hero of such imaginings lives on the moral Frontier, wary of the encroachments of Big Government and neighbours, lighting out for the territory ahead of civilization and the domestic realm, in constant emulation of the pioneer, the outlaw and other American role-models. Leslie Fiedler long ago noted the significance of Huckleberry Finn's status as 'a marginal American type, who only wants to stay alive; but who does not find this very easy to do', beseiged as he is by the threatening forces of violence and societal pressures.[24] Disaffiliation and individualism are the key

characteristics of all subsequent fictional 'offspring' of Huckleberry Finn,who find their individual integrity often leads to conflict with the law and collectivizing forces in general. This is approximately the situation of Bukowski's narrators,who are in continual battle with societal attempts to make them conform. For all the wealth of contemporary detail and streetwise perspective to be found within his work,Bukowski is no social realist. While he has written poems,especially latterly,about parenthood, property ownership,work,school,vacations and other areas of everyday human experience within society,such subjects do not characterize his writing. Bukowski's is a mythic and Existential America,his pages filled with archetypes and stereotypes culled from American cultural myth,and more particularly the filmic and literary tradition. When reading his _oeuvre_,one rarely if ever encounters the middle-class American who works for a large corporation, responds to _The Hidden Persuaders_ of advertising and consumer capitalism,lives in the suburbs and confines the experience of the American landscape to weekends or holiday homes. Instead,one meets in the Bukowskian world very familiar fictional types - the sentimental tough guy, the Vamp,the tart with a heart,the _schlemiel_ comically mugged by fate,the rebel with no cause except drink.

All the previously mentioned stylistic,ideational and cultural elements make Bukowski very much an insider to American traditions,and not the outsider that superficial reading - and the author's anti-Establishment rhetoric - might lead one to suppose. Even when he enters his own texts as 'Bukowski' or 'Henry Chinaski',he is reinscribing the American experience 'of being so much a "self" - constantly explaining oneself and telling one's own story'

which is,as Alfred Kazin has observed,'as traditional in the greatest American writing as it is in a barroom'.[25]

Bukowski,an aficionado of the Los Angeles Public Library,is a writer who has consciously aligned his art with the American native tradition,its Modernism,and its cultural myths. The anti-literary stance is standard procedure for writers,especially American avant-gardists, intent on re-proclaiming literary independence from previous orthodoxies and influences from English literature. Arming itself with the weapons of dissidence and extreme individualism,his writing seeks to embody these in its forms and subjects. Above all,it has sought the artistic means to authentically capture a certain anarchic quality of human life. The melodramatic titles of certain of his verse collections bear witness to this concern: Flower, Fist and Bestial Wail (I960),At Terror Street and Agony Way (I968),Play the Piano Drunk Like a Percussion Instrument Until the Fingers Begin to Bleed a Bit (I979). He is very far from being a man without art.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

I. Die Welt comment reported in Neeli Cherkovski, Ferlinghetti: A Biography (Garden City,New York,1979), p.I96. Weissner comment in Jay Dougherty, 'Translating Bukowski and the Beats: An Interview with Carl Weissner', Gargoyle, 35,(1988),68-86 (p.80).

2. 'America's sewer Shakespeare': Morris Edelson, 'St.Bukowski',in A Bukowski Sampler,edited by Douglas Blazek,(Madison,Wisconsin,1969; reprinted with essay, Houston,Texas,1979),n.p.
C.Lynn Monro,'Charles Bukowski',in Critical Survey of Poetry,edited by Frank N.Magill,(Englewood Cliffs,New Jersey,1982),354-365, (p.355). Steve Richmond comment in 'Gagaku',Second Coming,2,no.3,(1974),n.p.

3. The Faber Book of Contemporary American Poetry, edited by Helen Vendler, (London,1986),p.7.

4. Undated letter from Charles Bukowski to Neeli Cherry (Cherkovski),in Laugh Literary and Man the Humping Guns, I,no.2,(1969),n.p.

5. Charles Bukowski,'A Rambling Essay on Poetics and the Bleeding Life Written While Drinking a Six-Pack (Tall)', in A Bukowski Sampler,9-I5, (p.II).

6. Jonathan Culler,Barthes,Fontana Modern Masters Series, (London,1983),p.28.

7. For example,the reference to Williams in Bukowski's 'Poem to a Man in Jail',Second Coming,2,no.3,(1974),n.p.

> Poetry does seem to be getting better,more
> human,
> the clearing up of the language has something to
> do with it. (w.c.williams came along and asked
> somebody to clear up the language)
> then
> I came along.

8. Ezra Pound,'A Pact',Collected Shorter Poems, (1952; London,1973),p.98.

9. Robert Creeley,Contexts of Poetry: Interviews I96I-I97I, edited by Donald Allen, (Bolinas,California,1973),p.28.

IO. Stephen Fender,The American Long Poem, (London,1977), p.I4.

II. Walt Whitman's introduction,in Leaves of Grass,The First (1855) Edition,edited by Malcolm Cowley, (Harmondsworth,Middlesex,1977),p.IO.

I2. 'Song of Myself',Leaves of Grass,The First (1855) Edition,p.48.

I3. 'They,All of Them Know',Burning in Water,Drowning in Flame, (Los Angeles,California,1974),pp.89-92.

14. 'A Rambling Essay...',in A Bukowski Sampler,p.13.

15. Such as C.Lynn Munro,in Critical Survey of Poetry,p.355.

16. 'Officer's Club,A.P.O.' has,to the best of the present author's knowledge,only been reprinted in a German edition of his works, Gedichte die einer schrieb bevor er im 8. Stockwerk aus dem Fenster sprang,translated by Carl Weissner, (Augsburg,1974),p.59. A copy was kindly sent by Weissner in March 1989.

17. 'Officer's Club,A.P.O.' originally appeared in a West Hartlepool,Durham magazine,Iconolatre,18/19,(1966),p.15.

18. 'The Talkers',Burning in Water,Drowning in Flame,p.38.

19. 'The gloriously impertinent Bukowski': Charles Bukowski Notes of a Dirty Old Man, (North Hollywood,California,1969; reprinted San Francisco,1973),p.165. See also 'Note To a Lady Who Expected Rupert Brooke',Burning in Water,Drowning in Flame,p.145.

20. Felix Stephanile and Bukowski prose pieces in The Outsider,3,(1963),p.60,p.61.

21. Leslie Fiedler,The Return of the Vanishing American, (London,1968),p.23.

22. Walt Whitman,'Democratic Vistas',in America's Humor, edited by Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill, (New York,1978), p.254.

23. Some of the information,and the phrase 'perpetual failure to live up to the nation's preconceived foundation myths',is indebted to John Osborne,'American Male Mythology and Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest',in Bête-Noire,I,(1984),50-65,(p.51).

24. Leslie Fiedler,Love and Death in the American Novel, (New York,1960),p.575.

25. Alfred Kazin,'The Self as History: Reflections on Autobiography',in The American Autobiography,edited by Albert E.Stone, (Englewood Cliffs,New Jersey,1981),31-43 (p.32).

CHAPTER ONE: BUKOWSKI AND THE AVANT-GARDE TRADITION

What is the avant-garde? This French term connotes art and artists in advance of public taste or antagonistic to it,but the concept of the avant-garde is protean and international. It can be seen as a tradition of the untraditional,as the most advanced form of art possible within bourgeois society,and as the way in which an artistic elite sustains its own production and development through an ideology of cultural embattlement. Chapters one and two are halves of a single argument. The first looks at the characteristics and ideology of the avant-garde,and then suggests their relevance to Bukowski's work and stance as a writer. The second half will concentrate mainly on one late phase of the avant-garde,the Sixties Underground,and detail Bukowski's contacts within it during the decade in which he began a rise to prominence. Bukowski's stylistic and ideational borrowings from three of this century's artistic and philosophical movements - Modernism,Surrealism,Existentialism - plus his relation to the Beats are discussed in the third chapter.

In seeking to trace the origins of the avant-garde, commentators generally point to the Romantic movement as the essential precursor. For instance,Peter Bürger's important study <u>Theory of the Avant-Garde</u> (1984) identifies the commentary on a perceived split between art and commercial-industrial society offered by Goethe,Schiller, Rousseau,and the English Romantic poets. Within the book, Jochen Schulte-Sasse states that Goethe and Schiller's perception of a degeneration of language 'are permeated by an awareness of the interrelation of various sociohistor-

ical developments: bourgeois-capitalist mass culture, the poet's stance against this development, the consciously esoteric character of "high" literature, and the like'.[1] Romanticism began the process by which such literature occupies a problematic status in bourgeois society, no longer 'critically presenting norms and values' but attacking 'the ossification of society and its language in what amounts to intellectual guerilla warfare'.[2]

The English Romantic poets can be said to exhibit several early characteristics of the avant-garde, by reacting against previous artistic orthodoxies, and by taking a critical attitude towards contemporary political and social values. Hostile to the effects of the Industrial Revolution and its associated upheavals, they were also alerted to the oppressive political climate engendered in England by a bloody Revolution across the Channel. Both Coleridge and Wordsworth, however, eventually became conservative moralists. Formally, they sought to put 'life' back into art, responding to the artificiality of much late eighteenth century writing; the preface to the second edition of Lyrical Ballads urged the poetic use of a selection of the language actually spoken by men. The Conversational Poems of Coleridge, such as 'This Lime Tree Bower My Prison', introduced a more natural idiom to verse than the somewhat jarring polish of Augustan poetry; Wordsworth desired more sensuous descriptions for Nature than, say, Pope's sensibility allowed. There was now a much greater emphasis on the revealed personality and interests of the writer as fit subjects for verse. Of great fascination to subsequent avant-gardes have been Coleridge and de Quincey's opium addictions; Blake's visionary states; Wordsworth's identification with transcendent Nature;

Shelley's political radicalism, and Byron's sexual athleticism.

By the mid-to-late nineteenth century avant-gardism had become more fully developed. The French Symbolists conceived the poet as essentially alienated from the commercial values of society, a figure capable of being spiritually both displaced aristocrat and social pariah. Baudelaire courted low-life Paris and the substances which he termed 'artificial paradises', while Rimbaud urged le dérèglement de tous les sens; the artist was now able to celebrate and lament this ethical, psychological and economic estrangement from mainstream society. Symbolism was often formally experimental, departing from the classical modes of French poetry to embrace Free Verse, Prose Poetry, and the release of poetic language from paraphrasable meanings. All these hostilities to conformity encouraged desires to épater les bourgeois and cultivate a Revolution of the Word, features which have passed on to most of this century's avant-garde movements and personnel.

For example, the Beat writers used mood-altering drugs, as had the Surrealists, and prized certain extremist, even unbalanced figures from previous generations such as Louis Ferdinand Céline and Antonin Artaud. It was a part of the Beat myth-kitty that madness, and other escapes from ordinary perception induced by drugs or meditation, offered potential wisdom. The minor Beat writer Carl Solomon attended a reading of Artaud's work in Paris during 1947, among an audience which included André Gide and André Breton; they regarded Artaud as 'a genius who had extended Rimbaud's vision of the poet-seer'.[3] Presumably this reading took place shortly before Solomon's first meeting with Allen Ginsberg during a temporary stay in a

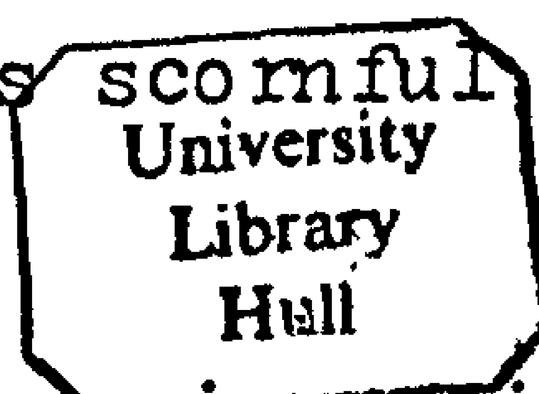
New York mental hospital - paralleling Artaud's fate - and the subsequent apotheosis of Solomon in 'Howl'. The Beats all experimented with drug concoctions, some with serious purposes and consequences. William Burroughs went to the jungles of South America in search of yage, a powerful hallucinogen prepared by indians, and he also became a heroin addict; Ginsberg and Kerouac took regular doses of benzedrine, amphetamines, and smoked marijuana, before and after turning to contemplative Eastern religion. Ken Kesey, well-connected with the Beats, was one of the first people in the United States to sample L.S.D., and distributed it freely amongst the Merry Pranksters, his travelling band which included Neal Cassady for a while.

The pattern of the avant-garde has always been that of a historical succession of movements, new ones arising to challenge and replace those movements and individuals saluted, rewarded and tamed by the status quo. The artistic-political Establishment is usually ready to discuss, buy or subsidize the work of almost all dissident, unusual or innovative artists, after a safe time-lag of around twenty or thirty years. This process of cultural absorption may not take place within an artist's lifetime (as with Artaud, Franz Kafka, the Anglo-American poet Mina Loy, etc), but is often well under way by the time that an innovator gets to the latter half of middle age, though recognition and reward by a wider audience may still represent a gross inequality between financial and artistic worth. The careers of Basil Bunting and Louis Zukofsky are cases in point; 'strugglers in the desert' during their youth, the attention they attracted in the 1960s and 1970s from poets, readers, and academics scarcely lessened the penury of life circumstances to which they had become accustomed.[4]

Many avant-garde writers suffer the slings and arrows of rejection by commercial publishers,at least until they have accumulated sufficient kudos or name-recognition,a process which may take decades. William Carlos Williams frequently had to subsidize the publication of his works until New Directions,set up by James Laughlin on Ezra Pound's advice,took on the task; a British edition of Williams' verse did not appear until after his death in 1963. Of course,Dr Williams did not depend for a living on his fortunes as a writer; avant-gardists are rarely able to earn very much from their efforts,let alone live at all comfortably,during the years in which their most creative work is often being done. Hence Pound's well-intentioned fundraising drives on behalf of Eliot,Joyce,Lewis,Bunting, Zukofsky and others. Such figures,in Irving Howe's words, 'share the burdens of intransigence,estrangement and dislocation...and...are ready to pay the costs of their choices'.[5] During the lengthy period in which an artist's brilliance and originality may be an open secret among his or her fellow-practitioners but has yet to be acknowledged by the status quo,or recompensed financially to some extent by consumer capitalism,he or she is sustained by consciousness of the ideology of the avant-garde.

This ideology is first and foremost an oppositional one,avant-gardists often being regarded as radicals,rebels, or even iconoclasts. However,emerging avant-garde movements are not merely barbarous or blindly reactive against stale orthodoxies,but are,as the critic John Weightman has observed,'usually accompanied by a theory of literature'.[6] The Anglo-American Vorticist writers and painters began by blasting the windy rhetoric,sentimentality,social conformism and sloppy craftsmanship of their Victorian and

Edwardian predecessors. One of Blast's resounding calls was to Kill John Bull With Art; such a declaration was designed to cover competent if uncontroversial groupings such as The Rhymers' Club poets and the Georgians,but also then well known versifiers whose influence was felt to be particularly reactionary: Sir Henry Newbolt,for instance,or Lascelles Abercrombie. Pound and Lewis were certainly of the opinion that artists in whatever medium could and should learn from the best traditions of the past,and from contemporaneous continental avant-gardes. Vorticism itself owed a good deal to Lewis' love-hate relationship with Italian Futurism,and astute observation of developments in Paris. In addition,Modernists found it necessary to quarry essential building materials for their own authentic styles,identify true predecessors,and deal with current concerns in a thoroughly reformist manner,by delving back into the past and into other cultures. Pound and Eliot discovered that neglected French Symbolist poets Jules Laforgue and Tristan Corbière offered highly useful elements of style and authorial identity; Pound himself reached back much further,recognizing the enabling qualities of Dante,the Troubadours,and ancient Chinese poets,for his own purposes. As has often been remarked, Modernism took the attitude that the great art of the past and present existed in a vital,cross-fertilizing relation, that the great artists were all in a sense contemporaries. The view taken of academic taste,official culture,popular opinion and complacent artistic orthodoxies by Modernists in general was critical,sometimes scornful,almost always prescriptive.



Avant-gardists are like orphans inventing an exotic family history for themselves. What has been termed

'the transmission of consciousness and ideas through time' and 'the invincible silent freemasonry of the creative' operates through a network of informal contacts between artistic groups,influences and friendships between successive generations.[7] In seeking to define what they are for and against,and which artistic figures and elements will speed their own development,avant-garde movements and individuals seek to establish their own legitimacy and continuity. Some may delve into the past or into different cultures,while others may equally seek to revive the reputations of senior artists currently being unfairly neglected and ignored by prevailing fashions. For example, the espousal of the Fascist cause during the Second World War by Ezra Pound and Louis-Ferdinand Céline had tainted their art,in the view of the liberal intelligensia,and their reputations as artistic innovators had suffered accordingly in the Post War period. But within the avant-garde,its internal 'politics' generally hold sway over party politics; Allen Ginsberg visited both Céline and Pound in their old age,paying homage and,as it were, receiving their blessing. As Ginsberg recalled,the Beat personnel and other avant-gardists such as Charles Olson and Robert Creeley sought out most of the surviving Modernists,'the living masters',for purposes of 'technique, information and inspiration. The academic people were ignoring Williams and ignoring Pound and Louis Zukofsky and Mina Loy and Basil Bunting and most of the major rough writers of the Whitmanic,open form tradition in America'.[8] Creeley remarked during the course of a 1961 interview with David Ossman that 'it's curious to remember that somewhere around 1950-55 I remember reading an article in The Hudson Review in which he [William Carlos Williams]

was dismissed as a "paranoid mumbler"".[9]

The undoubted divergences between the American literary avant-garde and academic fashions in the 1940s and 1950s, (indeed, the currently vast academic interest in virtually all the major and minor Modernists did not really get going until the mid-1960s) can be attributed to the wide acceptance of New Critical values during these years. This tendency to de-emphasize literature's personal elements, and to emphasize literature's capacity to provide apparently autonomous aesthetic objects for study, had been in part derived from notions of High Seriousness and Impersonality attributed simplistically to the example of T.S.Eliot. The most prominent New Critics, some of whom were poets of distinction such as John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate and William Empson, are recognized as I.A.Richards, Kenneth Burke, R.P.Blackmur, Cleanth Brooks, Yvor Winters and, in England, F.R.Leavis. One effect of their pervasive effect on the reception and reputation of writing from the late 1930s onwards was to confine Modernism itself to a few figures only - Eliot, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and D.H.Lawrence perhaps - and to relegate more problematic Modernists to the margins of critical attention. By the time that the Beats came onto the scene, their attitude was that excessive theorizing, explication and analysis had been smothering and inhibiting literary activity, blunting its impact on the emotions and neutralizing its societal critique. Kenneth Rexroth maintained in his essay 'Disengagement: The Art of the Beat Generation' that 'no avant-garde American poet [now] accepts the I.A.Richards-Valéry thesis that a poem is an end in itself, an anonymous machine for providing aesthetic experiences. All believe in poetry as communication, statement from one

person to another'.[10] If New Criticism was unsympathetic to certain less easily absorbed Modernist writers,it was initially dismissive of the Beats; Lionel Trilling,and Mark Van Doren who had known of Ginsberg as a student at Columbia University,were hardly enamoured of his literary efforts. In spite of Ginsberg's international celebrity since the early 1960s,only Diana Trilling and Helen Vendler among the second generation New Critics have been at all hospitable to his poetry. For their part,the Beats affected to be as hostile to University-based magazines dominated by New Criticism - _The Hudson Review_,_The Kenyon Review_, _Shenandoah_, etc - as they were to mass-market,middlebrow entities such as _Time_,_Life_ and _Fortune_.

Bukowski himself has consistently delivered diatribes against the academic approach to writing throughout his career. In 1988,he was still persuaded that 'the academics are...standing still,playing secret and staid games,snob and inbred games which are finally anti-life and anti-truth'.[11] An essay written nearly thirty years before had sounded the same note of disaffection,identifying himself with 'loiterers in pool halls and back alleys',and distancing himself from the University critics who 'have lost in pulling the blinds around their little ivy world' but 'have gained in direction and prestige'.[12] While these are oversimplified,perhaps even thoroughly stereotyped views - then and now - they do indicate an equivocal and wary attitude to academia that is not untypical among Bukowski's literary generation. Academia habitually appears to the avant-gardist as an Aunt Sally waiting to be knocked over,a convenient focus for oppositional energies. One may also observe in passing that a number of the most perceptive critical responses to Bukowski's work have come from

University teachers of long standing, such as Hugh Fox, J.W.Corrington and Gerald Locklin, though of these enlightened academics only Corrington has written in a recognizably New Critical manner.

Moreover, these easy adversarial identifications are themselves rather misleading; the oft-quoted division of American writers by Philip Rahv into Palefaces and Redskins has proved to be simplistic. Those writers usually associated with what one Beat sympathiser called 'set pieces about minimal fragments of life...reaching a small coterie who alone could decipher the symbols' were by no means totally estranged from the interests of the avant-garde.[13] Robert Lowell and Allen Ginsberg both had a high regard for Hart Crane's poetry, while Lowell and Charles Olson were both responsible to some extent for the increase in the reputation of Herman Melville in the Post War era. Poets as apparently diverse as John Berryman, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Bukowski himself were excited by the magnificent readings given by Dylan Thomas during his American tours. Bukowski has also confessed to an early fondness for the works of Conrad Aiken, Archibald MacLeish and W.H.Auden. In addition, a number of poets writing with New Critical values very much in mind were stimulated to break up the careful syntaxes and literariness of their earlier work. This may have been a natural consequence of the emotional strains suffered by Robert Lowell, John Berryman and Sylvia Plath, but may also arguably be attributed to the swing in poetic praxis effected by the Beats' freer rhythms, seemingly subjective manner, and enthusiasm for declaiming in public. Robert Lowell observed that in the late 1950s,

> By the time I came to Life Studies I'd been writing my autobiography and also writing poems that broke meter. I'd been doing a lot of reading aloud. I went on a trip to the West Coast and read at least once a day and sometimes twice for fourteen days, and more and more I found I was simplifying my poems....When I was writing Life Studies, a good number of the poems were started in very strict meter, and I found that, more than the rhymes, the regular beat was what I didn't want.[14]

Lowell, Berryman, Plath, Randall Jarrell, Delmore Schwartz, Theodore Roethke, and other American poets skilled in the use of regular metres inherited from English literature are often depicted as constituting an opposition to the open form tradition of the American literary avant-garde in the Post War period. But there were inevitably many personal and literary connections between the so-called Redskins and Palefaces, who all had a high regard, even veneration for major Modernists. Ezra Pound was visited in St. Elizabeth's Hospital by many writers, from old friends T.S. Eliot and Marianne Moore to young acquaintances who kept him in touch with literary developments - Charles Olson, Robert Lowell, and John Berryman (the latter in connection with writing an introduction to an American edition of Pound's selected poems). When Allen Ginsberg saw the aged, now largely silent catalyst of Anglo-American Modernism in 1967, he conveyed greetings from Sheri Martinelli, a painter and writer who had befriended Pound during the period of his incarceration. She had subsequently gone to live at Big Sur, California and interestingly was a reviewer of one of Bukowski's earliest chapbooks, the piece appearing in an appropriately eccentric publication, The Anagogic and Paideumic Review, a San Francisco little magazine with interests in literature and astrology.[15]

Avant-garde coteries are often formed by the accident or design of a number of artists finding themselves in close proximity for a period,whether this proximity is a geographical one,or consists of shared ideas or friends. The Imagists,Dada in its various locations (Zurich,Cologne, Paris,New York),the Surrealist Group,the Berkeley Renaissance poets,the Black Mountain School,and the Beats in New York and San Francisco all point to the creative efficacy of having bands of artist-activists held together long enough to spark each other off. There is usually a dominant,catalytic figure within the group,whose energy and knowledge cajoles,encourages,criticizes and compels others to sharpen their art and ambitions. André Breton performed this critical function for Paris Dada,alongside Tristan Tzara,before becoming 'The Pope' of the Surrealist Group. Ezra Pound was a similarly energetic,generous and didactic type,helping the Vorticists,Imagists and the Objectivist poets to crystallize their aesthetics. Indeed, the latter group - Louis Zukofsky,Charles Reznikoff,Carl Rakosi,George Oppen and Kenneth Rexroth - never held a meeting at which each member was present (some did not meet until old age and personal quarrels had overtaken their youthful sense of shared convictions) and were stimulated by dialectical correspondences between themselves and Bunting,Williams and Pound.

Even when such coteries are dispersed,the contacts made are often sustained over lifetimes and continually producing cultural ripples. The presence of exiled Surrealists in New York during the Second World War,most notably Breton and the painters Dali,Tanguy,Ernst,led to some fruitful contacts with American painters and writers, and encouraged Surrealist magazines <u>Blues</u>,<u>View</u> (edited by

Charles Henri Ford,who had been an expatriate American in Paris during the 1920s),and _VVV_. Breton specifically took an interest in the work of the young Philip Lamantia,who went on to have close links with the Berkeley Renaissance and the Beats during the 1950s. Kenneth Rexroth gave invaluable assistance to the Beats by acting as a wise elder counsel,affording them a wealth of literary contacts in San Francisco,and famously compering the first reading of 'Howl' at the Six Gallery in 1955.

Another significant cultural ripple occurred when the 17 year old Tom Pickard knocked on Basil Bunting's door at Christmas 1963. Bunting had been an active participant in avant-garde circles in London,Paris and Rapallo,had known a great many literary figures (Ford Madox Ford,Ernest Hemingway,W.B.Yeats,T.S.Eliot,etc) but was currently living in penurious obscurity near Newcastle and had largely stopped writing poems. Pickard proceeded to galvanize Bunting's dormant gifts by setting up a small magazine partly devoted to Bunting called _King Ida's Watch Chain_,then starting readings at Newcastle's Morden Tower featuring leading avant-garde British and American poets,and most effectively by simply asking for advice on the writing of verse. The writing of Bunting's masterwork _Briggflatts_ (1966) was originally begun as an exercise in the Modernist long poem,designed to be of instructive assistance to Pickard. Thus the Bunting-Pickard friendship was of mutual benefit. Bunting produced his greatest poem after a lifetime devoted to the craft of poetry,and his isolation was ameliorated by the renewed attention from critics and admiration from other writers. Pickard gained a wonderful legacy - numerous contacts within the avant-garde,a definite sense of his own work as lying within a

Modernist continuity - and the manuscript of Briggflatts. Bunting had been a close associate of Ezra Pound, maintaining an intermittent correspondence since their last meeting in 1933. When Allen Ginsberg saw Pound in 1967, he found him still in touch with his old friend's career: 'I went on to describe recent history of Bunting - I'd before asked him if he'd seen Briggflatts and he had nodded, swiftly, affirmative'.[16] A similar instance of such poetic revitalization between generations can be identified in the renewed activity of Carl Rakosi during the 1960s and 1970s, following contact by the English poet and academic Andrew Crozier.

Bukowski has also helped focus attention upon a senior writer whom he felt to be vastly underrated and under-published. The Los Angeles novelist John Fante made a living for many years as a Hollywood screenwriter, with credits including Walk on the Wild Side and Full of Life, the latter adapted from his 1952 novel of the same name. His early novels and stories, written and published throughout the 1930s and 1940s, can be described as picaresque low-rent perspectives on the Californian Dream. Their main protagonist 'Arturo Bandini', the most enduring of Fante's creations, is a would-be writer continually dreaming of a better life who is conspicuously unsuccessful at dealing with the workaday world.

> One night I was sitting on my bed in my hotel room on Bunker Hill, down in the very middle of Los Angeles. It was an important night in my life, because I had to make a decision about the hotel. Either I paid up or got out; that was what the note said, the note the landlady had put under my door. A great problem, deserving acute attention. I solved it by turning out the lights and going to bed.[17]

One would not be surprised to find this passage in a Bukowski novel or short story, but it is actually the opening paragraph of Fante's novel Ask the Dust (1939, 1979) whose new Black Sparrow edition carried an introduction by Bukowski. He had long urged the virtues of Fante's work, warmly commending a man and writer 'not afraid of emotion. The humor and the pain...intermixed with a superb simplicity', and it is highly probable that Bukowski's interest was instrumental in the reissue by Black Sparrow Press of all Fante's out of print volumes, and the renewed attention they have received.[18] The elderly, blind Fante (who died in 1983) showed a great revival of his narrative skills in the completion of his novels The Brotherhood of the Grape and A Dream of Bunker Hill; an early manuscript, The Road to Los Angeles, was published posthumously in 1985. Though Fante's prose pays much closer attention to the traditional virtues of narrative and character development than Bukowski's does, he does bequeath certain essentials to the younger writer's work. 'Arturo Bandini', denizen of cheap hotels in seedy areas of Los Angeles, is in many ways a prototype for Bukowski's narrators - economically desperate, promiscuous in his cultural allusiveness, forever enduring pratfalls of sex and circumstance. Fante's lucid, clear, almost simplistic prose descriptions, making Los Angeles into a colourful fictional world, were also highly congenial to Bukowski. Fante can be regarded as an inspiration, rather than a mentor, for Bukowski; they did not meet until 1970s, but their relationship may be seen as another instance of artistic sympathies stretching across years, of mutually beneficial writerly encouragement and acquisitiveness.

Emerging trends and developments in advanced literature are heralded by the appearance of new magazines and small presses, set up in the first instance to meet the publishing needs of a particular group of writers. It is a perpetual thesis of the avant-garde that a publishing wilderness exists, and that they must correct the situation. Periodic, sometimes shortlived, attempts at providing oases of cultural refreshment and contention ensue. Such enterprises are vital proving grounds for young writers, and spaces for experimental or otherwise dissident writing that is as yet unable to attract a commercial publisher. Collectively, this alternative outlet and marketplace for artists, ideas and styles is the means by which official organs of culture are by-passed, and stagnation challenged. Strong-minded artistic intellects battle each other and the status quo, attracting attention to themselves, their work and the general intention of revitalizing contemporary culture. As Jochen Schulte-Sasse has observed, 'the active, even aggressive manifesto - an address to fellow artists and society - became the preferred medium of expression for the avant-garde artist of the twentieth century'.[19]

Editors are the stakhanovites of this energetic, often exciting, but marginalized and unprofitable environment. Their magazines and small presses survive by enthusiasm, contacts, the depth of personal pockets as well as the ability to attract outside funding. Many magazines are one-person operations, on whom fall the burdens of editorship, publication, distribution and financial risk, though these are likely to be alleviated by like-minded friends, spouses, or public subsidy. Some of the most vital magazines of the Modernist era, most notably Blast and the transatlantic review, operated on a hand-to-mouth basis and survived

several funding crises before folding. Similarly important publications - Others (edited by Alfred Kreymbourg), transition (Eugene Jolas), and The Little Review (Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap) were scarcely more solvent. Harriet Shaw Weaver's The Egoist, Harriet Monroe's Poetry, Robert McAlmon's Contact and T.S.Eliot's The Criterion were sustained either by private income or the patronage of benevolent aristocrats and Capitalists who wanted the kudos of association with an artistic, intellectual elite. One might surmise that such publications obey the laws of Natural Selection, arising and dying with their ability to attract good writers and a viable audience, but in practice magazines last as long as the editors consider that their aims are being served. To take two American little magazines of the Post War period as examples: J.B.May's Trace, based near Hollywood, California from 1952 to 1970 showed an accumulated deficit to its editor of more than forty thousand dollars. Another magazine hospitable to the work of Charles Bukowski, and currently the longest-running magazine of its type in the United States, is The Wormwood Review. Its cheaply-produced but neat format, the consistency of its editorial policy and constant discovery of interesting younger writers, has caused the editor Marvin Malone to keep going for over a quarter of a century. This longevity is exceptional; most literary magazines have a more natural life-span of a few years.

The editorial focus of a magazine is vital. Robert Bly's series The Fifties, The Sixties, etc aimed to present Chicago-based writers alongside translations of European and Latin American authors, thus being able to combine a regional approach with international perspectives. In the cases of Tony Buttitta's Contempo or Jack Conroy's

The Anvil during the 1930s, that focus was provided by leftist ideology. The subtitle of the latter publication was 'Stories for Workers', but it transcended the perhaps simplistic connotations of that phrase, printing political commentary amongst writers such as Langston Hughes, Maxim Gorky and the so-called proletarian poets Joseph Kalar and Kenneth Fearing. It eventually merged in the late 1930s with the up-and-coming Partisan Review. Descendants of The Anvil during the 1960s were Kurt Johnson's December and Morris Edelson's Quixote, providing coverage of the issues and divisions amongst the New Left but also being open to non ideologically-committed writers - d.a.levy, and Bukowski himself. Some magazines seek to make an impact by an intrinsic clash of diverse contributors. Neurotica, edited by Jay Landesman in the late 1940s as a kind of non-respectable counterpart to Commentary and The Partisan Review is an example of this type. Landesman's main sources of controversy were contributions from the sex historian Gershon Legman, though Norman Mailer and Leonard Bernstein also featured, as did early work by Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac.

Continuities between generations of the avant-garde were brought to mind by Caresse Crosby's Portfolio: An International Review which was brought out from Washington D.C. and retained the services of Henry Miller as a Contributing Editor. It published one of the first short stories by Bukowski to appear in print, '20 Tanks from Kasseldown', within a 1946 issue which also also contained work by Sartre, Lorca, Picasso and Miller. Caresse and Harry Crosby's Black Sun Press had been an important imprint in 1920s Paris, producing works by Proust, D.H.Lawrence, Joyce, Pound, Hart Crane, Hemingway, Faulkner and Harry Crosby. The

Black Sun Press was re-established for a period after the Second World War, giving book form to one of Charles Olson's earliest collections, Y & X (1949). Other influential presses in Paris of the 1920s included John Rodker's Ovid Press, Nancy Cunard's Hours Press, the TO Press of George Oppen, and William Bird's Three Mountains Press, Robert McAlmon's Contact Editions; the latter two most notable for having facilitated Hemingway's first steps as a published author. The bookseller Sylvia Beach turned publisher in order to bring out the first edition of James Joyce's Ulysses in 1922, a legal and financial trauma that she was unwilling to repeat with works of lesser importance.

The regional avant-gardes in Post War American poetry all had their own magazines, and some their own presses. Robert Creeley created the Divers Press whilst resident in Mallorca, Spain and while stimulated by voluminous exchanges of letters with Charles Olson; books by Olson, Irving Layton Paul Blackburn and Creeley himself appeared. When he went onto Black Mountain College in North Carolina to teach and edit their magazine, the so-called Black Mountain School gained a focus. The resident artists, only nominally separated into Staff and Students, provided much of the material therein, though outsiders (Kenneth Rexroth, Denise Levertov) were also likely to find favour. Black Mountain and Modernist approaches were welcomed by Cid Corman's Origin, Clayton Eshleman's Caterpillar and current Sulphur. The New York School of Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler and Kenward Elmslie were serviced by Locus Solus - a title which recalled the eccentric Raymond Roussel's 1924 play. Second generation New York School poets Ted Berrigan (C) and Anne Waldman (Angel Hair) also

edited little magazines of some utility.

The essential Beat magazines were Paul Carroll's Big Table,Leroi Jones' Yugen and Bob Kaufman's Beatitude, though Evergreen Review (edited by Barney Rosset) and The City Lights Journal became showcases for the Beats. Most of the Beat personnel had nurtured ambitions to be published by mainstream houses in New York; as Ginsberg recalled,when he took rejected manuscripts by Kerouac, Burroughs and himself to San Francisco he received a much more sympathetic response:'Rexroth and [Robert] Duncan saw them and immediately understood them as being...good writing,classic'.[20] The City Lights Bookstore was set up by Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Peter Dean Martin in 1953, and subsequently a publishing venture came into being, the immediate beneficiaries being the Beats and the Berkeley Renaissance poets. Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books remains one of the most vital independent small presses in the United States,alongside James Laughlin's New Directions,Jonathan Williams' Jargon Society,and John Martin's Black Sparrow Press which will be more fully discussed in chapters two and six.

The Directory of Poetry Publishers has over 1,500 entries in its 1986-1987 edition,testifying to the vast and immensely variable activity within the American poetry scene,catering for the thousands of published poets,most of whom will inevitably be of little interest or originality. But many Bukowski poems have appeared in eccentric and ephemeral publications; interesting young writers will always appear in an editor's mail from time to time,so the ongoing task of sorting out literature in its most elemental state continues. Publishing opportunities matter most,in the first instance; talent eventually gets through.

Avant-garde artists and movements often seek to gain attention by,as it were,setting fire to bourgeois trousers. This desire to _épater les bourgeois_ has been an established feature since the Symbolists,when the distinctly odd Gerard de Nerval,Tristan Corbière and Alfred Jarry were at large. This may be explained as part of an oppositional stance,seeking to shock,harangue and mystify a stolid public that is suspicious of new art and artists,and perhaps dismissive of what it does not understand. The theorist of the avant-garde Renato Poggioli saw this kind of outrageous and antagonistic behaviour towards the public as a form of alienation mixed with self-deprecation: the avant-gardist 'conscious of the fact that bourgeois society considers him nothing but a charlatan...he voluntarily and ostentatiously assumes the role of comic actor'.[21] Most avant-garde coteries have had figures whose dangerous antics have added to the gaiety,if not the artistic achievments,of the movement. Arthur Cravan,a minor figure associated with Dada who was married to the poet Mina Loy, once drunkenly stripped before an audience and arrived similarly incapacitated to challenge the formidable black boxer Jack Johnson. The Baronness Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven,'her shaved head...in and out of the offices of _The Little Review_' flaunted her extravagant sexuality by wearing a brassiere made of milk tins connected by dogchains.[22]

Dada most effectively incorporated eccentric behaviour in public as part of their aesthetic,becoming masters at exciting the interest of audiences and curious art-lovers, only to deliberately disappoint them. They saw themselves as shock-troops of an anti-art,anti-bourgeois revolution, reacting against the art produced by rational humanist

values,which the slaughter of the First World War was confounding. Among their slogans were the splendid 'Art falls asleep,Dada replaces it',and 'Dada has launched an attack on the fine arts,an enema to the Venus de Milo'.[23] Dada began at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich during I9I6, then sprouted satellites with various adherents in Berlin, Cologne and New York. It arrived in Paris on 23 January I920,when an audience gathered for a poetry reading heard instead Tristan Tzara recite a political speech from that morning's paper 'as Breton and Aragon rang bells that covered Tzara's Rumanian accent'.[24] Other Dada events that year promised the presence of Charlie Chaplin. The advance publicity for the Dada Festival,to be held at the Salle Gaueau on 26 May I920,enticingly promised that

> 'sodomistic' music was to be played,all Dadas were to cut off their hair in public; the 'sex' of Dada was to be revealed. This turned out to be a large cardboard cylinder affixed to two shrinking balloons...Ribemont-Dessaignes wore an inverted funnel on his head that caught the vegetables,egg,and beefsteak thrown by the spectators....Eggs were tossed once again as Tzara concluded the Festival with his 'Vaseline Symphony' with ten players entoning (sic) 'Cra...Cra' and 'Cri...Cri'.[25]

Dadaism fragmented in Paris due to the increasing rivalry between Tzara and Breton,tensions which erupted into violence at the first night of a play by Tzara on 6 July I923. Breton's followers,some undoubtedly soon to be identified as the Surrealists,'jumped on the stage,injuring performers and smashing set pieces....Breton himself was arrested for breaking the arm of a new Dada poet'.[26]

The avant-garde artist may be a super-aesthete or a tough-guy,a bohemian or a dandy,in each case flaunting their difference from run-of-the-mill modes of fashion and

action. Wilde and Gautier were noted dandies,as was Ezra Pound in his tulip-eating London phase,when Ford Madox Ford spotted him wearing earrings,handpainted ties and trousers made of green billiard cloth. Waiters at the Eiffel Tower Restaurant hurried to put up screens when Pound stood on a table and shouted out his poem 'Sestina: Altaforte'. But there is little evidence that Pound's infrequent public performances of his poems,which were apparently intoned with exaggerated,Yeatsian rhythms,ever excited much antagonism or indeed interest. In passing, it is worth noting that The Cantos,regarded by many as a paradigm of Modernist High Seriousness,contains numerous abusive terms and epithets - buggering,fucking,piss-rotten, arse-wiped,the abbreviation g.d.m.f.,etc - but the main worries of his publishers concerned the libel laws.

With the advent of the socially-conformist Eisenhower years in America,the potential to antagonize the public seemed to be there once again. Allen Ginsberg sometimes treated audiences to the sight of his nakedness,and was often so nervously worn out and shocked by the public reaction to early readings of 'Howl',according to Robert Creeley,that he would vomit afterwards.[27] Ginsberg also recited an explicit poem about homosexual bondage to a squirming Albert Hall audience.

There has always been a tendency for alcohol-induced bad behaviour and madcap antics in public by writers,from Villon to Behan,Rochester to Dylan Thomas. The poet as drunken slob is a familiar occurrence,perhaps even an expected one. Soberly responsible writers often take a great,vicarious delight in recounting the doings of more unbuttoned bards: one thinks of John Malcolm Brinnin's account of Dylan Thomas in America. In his declining years,

Jack Kerouac appeared several times on popular American television chat shows very obviously soused. His arguments with William F.Buckley Jr and Ed Sanders,and the reactionary views he delivered himself of,must have given a jolt to idolaters of <u>On the Road</u> and other seemingly liberationist works. During a 1978 visit to Europe,Charles Bukowski became surely one of the few writers to have been forcibly removed from the set of a live television discussion programme. Bukowski's laconic account of this alcoholic melodrama is taken from his aptly-titled travelogue <u>Shakespeare Never Did This</u> (1979):

> I was the honored guest so the moderator started with me. My first statement was: 'I know a great many American writers who would like to be on this program now. It doesn't mean so much to me...' With that,the moderator quickly switched to another writer.... Then a lady writer started talking. I was fairly into the wine and wasn't so sure what she wrote about.... I told her that if she would show me more of her legs I might be able to tell if she were a good writer or not....The shrink who had given the shock treatments to Artaud kept staring at me....The next thing I remember I am in the streets of Paris and there is this startling and continuous roar and lights everywhere.[28]

But perhaps the most consistent arena where the avant-garde has attempted to outrage public decorum has been in its attitude to sex. Indeed,the few instances of advanced literature coming immediately to the attention of a wider public has generally been due to its sexual content or outspokenness. Only in the comparatively recent past has sex become the standard fare of bestsellers and other pulp fiction; for most of this century it has been of concern to leading writers. Well-publicised court cases established the rights of <u>Ulysses</u>,<u>Lady Chatterley's Lover</u> and <u>Last Exit to Brooklyn</u> to appear without censorship. However,most of

Henry Miller's books remained banned in the United States until the 1960s, and the only publisher willing to print the first editions of Burroughs' Naked Lunch and Nabokov's Lolita - now seen as classic texts - was a Paris pornographer, Maurice Girodias. The second printing of 'Howl' was seized by U.S. Customs on 25 March 1957, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Shig Murao were arrested at the City Lights bookstore shortly thereafter. After a short trial in the Summer of that year, it was found that the work's literary interest made it fit for public consumption, even though it contained flagrantly homo-erotic language:

> who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and
> screamed with joy,
> who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors,
> caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love,
> who balled in the morning in the evening in rosegardens and the grass
> of public parks and cemeteries scattering their semen freely to
> whomever come who may,[29]

'Howl''s succès de scandale was translated into sales that now total over a million copies. Within a year of the trial Ginsberg's hairy visage stared out from the cover of Time magazine. The work was culturally significant, signalling as it did the start of a liberal phase in the societal values of the United States.

Though Bukowski has had the reputation of being a sexually controversial writer, and his poems and stories certainly contain a great deal of anarchic sexual activity, his works are outspoken rather than explicit. The possible titillation of the reader is almost always undermined by idiosyncratic, even grotesque details. A number of his poems of the 1970s are specific in their depiction of sexual

encounters,but they are too schematized to be sensuous:

> I took her standing up.
> as we struggled around the room
> (I'm fucking the grave,I thought,I'm
> bringing the dead back to life,marvellous
> so marvellous
> like eating cold olives at 3 a.m.
> with half the town on fire)
> I came.[30]

The main characteristic of Bukowski's treatment of sex is humour,its positive relishing of scurrility and bawdiness. Few contemporary poets have taken up the tradition of Chaucer,Villon,Rochester,Burns and Byron in this regard as well as Bukowski has. Certain of his poems are wonderful at capturing human foibles and vulgarity,as in 'Trying to Get Even':

> it was sticking up there and we were both
> looking at it.
> 'ah,come on',I said,'my girlfriend fucked
> 2 different guys this week and I'm trying to
> get even'.
>
> 'don't get me involved in your domestic
> horseshit! now what I want you to do is
> to BEAT that thing OFF while I WATCH!
> I want to WATCH while you beat that thing
> OFF! I want to see it shoot JUICE![31]

These kind of works have not brought the author into conflict with the authorities on the grounds of obscenity, reflecting the fact that they do not challenge any taboos, and are quite within social bounds of acceptability. His poems contain a lot of sexually-based slang and swearing, with streetwise expressions (jerk-off,blow-job,etc) being pervasively used. Even his early poems,which are quite restrained by comparison with his I970s efforts,contain many uneuphemistic phrases: 'An Empire of Coins',for instance,ends its observations by stating 'Fuck everybody'.

On one occasion,Bukowski's literary judgement did result in charges of obscenity being visited upon Open City,the Los Angeles Underground newspaper for whom Bukowski wrote an uninhibited prose column during the two years of its existence. He edited a Supplement within a September 1968 issue of the paper,including a story by Jack Micheline entitled 'Skinny Dynamite' - described tactfully by Tony Quagliano as being 'written in the vivid manner of Hubert Selby'.[32] An earlier issue of Open City having been suppressed because of an allegedly obscene photograph, this latest misdemeanour resulted in the editor John Bryan having to fold the paper in the face of a thousand dollar fine. The legal decision was reversed on appeal in August 1969,five months after Open City's last issue. But Bukowski's books,with the possible exception of his 1972 volume of stories Erections,Ejaculations,Exhibitions and General Tales of Ordinary Madness,have never been likely to profit the legal profession. As its title suggests, Bukowski's intentions are provocative; this is what appeals to his readers.

The avant-garde's dissent from mainstream culture and its values can be regarded as implicitly political. In many instances this dissent has become explicitly political,the interests of certain artist-activists moving from a Revolution of the Word to attempts to influence changes within society. Roland Barthes maintained that the impact of such involvements was negigible: 'what the avant-garde contests is the bourgeois in art or morals - the shopkeeper, the Philistine,as in the heyday of Romanticism; but as for political contestation,there is none'.[33] Nonetheless,there

are clear patterns among advanced artistic groups for both anarchism and engagement (literally,'taking sides'); the manifold political misjudgements of avant-gardists have frequently proved an embarassment to their admirers,and in some cases have blighted the reception of their works. The reputations of Ezra Pound,Louis-Ferdinand Céline were dented by their collaboration with Fascist regimes under which they lived during the Second World War; Wyndham Lewis' brief advocacy of Hitler,his authoritarian contempt for many facets of bourgeois-liberal democracy,certainly contributed to the undervaluing of his writing and painting for many years. By contrast,T.S.Eliot's implied anti-semitism and Jean-Paul Sartre's persistent apology for Stalin have been treated as peccadillos. The Scottish Modernist poet Hugh MacDiarmid quixotically re-joined the Communist Party after the invasion of Hungary by Soviet forces in 1956,an event that had caused many artists and intellectual activists to finally sever their links with the Party.

The most typical attitude within the avant-garde is that whatever regime is in power,there are good reasons for criticising it. During the 1920s Ezra Pound,not yet speaking from the Fascist ideological shore,commented in his magazine The Exile,'The artist,the maker is always too far ahead of any revolution,or reaction,or counter-revolution or counter-re-action for his vote to have any immediate result; and no party program ever contains enough of his program to give him the least satisfaction'.[34] But this is not a plea for anarchism; more exactly,it is a recognition that the goals of the artist and the government can never be precisely congruent. In a letter to the Soviet critic Ivan Kashkeen in 1955,Ernest Hemingway remarked that a writer is 'like a Gypsy. He owes no allegiance to any

government. If he is a good writer he will never like the government he lives under. His hand should be against it and its hand will always be against him'.[35] Again, Hemingway was no anarchist; he is here demanding that the writer should be free from government interference. When in Civil War-ravaged Spain in support of the Republican cause (under Communist leadership) he hated the Anarchist Brigades more than the Fascist foe. Yet he lived contentedly for years in Cuba under the ruthless and corrupt Batista regime, though he never publically supported it; he welcomed the Castro takeover as a fresh start for the Cuban people, but left the country not long afterwards. This was not due to ideological disagreement but because of the encroachment of officials onto his estate.[36]

It has long been apparent that avant-garde art seems to flourish best in bourgeois-liberal democracies, though this freedom, as will be elucidated, is also subject to certain restrictions and consequences. Renato Poggioli made the point that avant-gardism is 'incapable of surviving not only the persecution, but even the protection or the official patronage of a totalitarian state, whereas the hostility of public opinion can be useful to it'.[37] The Nazis were efficient book burners and ridiculers of 'decadent' Modern Art, preferring instead a naive type of Heroic Realism. Hitler, it should be remembered, was a painter of banal, realist pictures in his youth, and some of the other European dictators - Stalin, Mussolini, Franco - dabbled with poetry or the novel. Stalinism and Fascism made a point of murdering dissident, experimental artists of stature - Lorca, Meyerhold, Mandelstam - or cowing them into suicide. Bertolt Brecht, who combined his twin loyalties to Communism and Modernism by subtle manoeuvers,

was high on the Nazi extermination list, and fled to Vienna on the day after the Reichstag fire. Wartime exile in the United States gave him freedom to write, but afforded few opportunities to have his plays performed; he managed to bamboozle the Un-American Activities Committee about his Communist Party associations but left the country shortly thereafter. When resident in East Germany, Brecht's art and actions bespake an uneasy relationship with the dogmatic Party line. Other figures of stature such as Breton, Neruda and Picasso showed varying degrees of adherence to Communist ideology, and reflected the ideological splits that developed in the Post War period.

During the late 1920s, however, when the righteous Breton declared his conversion to the Communist Party, along with Péret, Aragon, Éluard and other Surrealists, those members who refused to go along with this were invited to leave the Group. Salvador Dali seceded into the arms of Gala, and the lucrative promotion of his art and image. Dali professed apolitical anarchism, but this stance enabled him to live comfortably under the Franco dictatorship; he ended his days fabulously rich, a much-decorated ardent Royalist. The critic Edward B. Germain told an amusing and revealing anecdote: 'When the Museum of Modern Art in New York held a Dada and Surrealism retrospective in 1968, the opening was picketed by politically radical "Yippies" who claimed that they were the living surrealists. Inside the museum, Salvador Dali reportedly agreed, adding with an uncharacteristic sigh, "but we were always aristocrats"'.[38] Surrealism's original programme, to transform art and then society by imaginative means, and later by political commitment, had long been lost. Surrealism progressed from radicalism to becoming the darling of the Art Market, the

Advertising Industry and even Hollywood. This process of neutralization of critique, of defusing artistic dissent not by repression but by stuffing the mouths of the most significant artists with gold, is the typical fate of avant-garde movements and individuals in bourgeois societies energized by Consumer Capitalism. The capacity of such societies to ingest political dissent by what Marcuse termed Repressive Tolerance is perhaps an analogous phenomenon. For, as Peter Bürger argues, the status of art in bourgeois societies is not that of absolute freedom, but rather what he calls 'autonomy', 'its (relative) independence in the face of demands that it be socially useful.... That status can always be called into question by society (more precisely society's rulers) when it seems useful to harness it once more'.[39]

In a recent essay which looks at the effect of Consumer Capitalism on the New York Art scene during the 1960s and beyond, the critic John Osborne has set out the argument that the ideology of the avant-garde itself has provided for the commoditification of artworks and made the artists themselves unable to resist the blandishments of success, thus rendering the element of societal critique within both artist and artwork ever more deracinated. As he notes, the process which can be seen happening to Pop Art, the works of Andy Warhol and even more recent avant-gardists in the American art world, applies to an earlier movement, the Abstract Expressionists:

> Even if it is later rather than sooner, the bourgeois has...always been able to reclaim innovative art and turn it into a new form of academicism. With the advent of consumer capitalism the whole process of neutralizing the avant-garde was ruthlessly accelerated....The very avant-garde ideology which had

> sustained the Abstract Expressionists through the dark days of the Depression, the Second World War and the McCarthyite era, rendered them hopelessly vulnerable - mastodonic - when the new ruling class started competing for their wares and according them guru status.[40]

Though such observations can be applied to the American literary avant-garde during the same Post War period, the amounts of money involved are obviously less spectacular. But the same journey from artistic, quasi-political radicalism, or supposedly apolitical anarchism, to high status, wealth and the Museum of Culture is usually made. As a writer living in a bourgeois-liberal democracy, Bukowski's work and career shows every sign of following this contradictory, perhaps inevitable, pattern; despite, or perhaps because of, the vehemence of his anti-bourgeois rhetoric and oppositional stance.

Bukowski is one of those avant-gardists who push an endemic uneasiness with party politics and political ideology into thorough-going anarchism. Many examples come to mind: e.e. cummings, for instance, or the English poet George Barker. The latter declared in one of his entertaining essays that society is 'an institution dedicated wholeheartedly to the pursuit of its own lies. It is the moral duty of the poet to speak about these lies; it is what makes him a poet and it is also what makes him an enemy of society'.[41] These anarchistic writers usually present themselves as pragmatic, non-ideological observers of the human condition, but of course the art that they produce indubitably does have ideological meanings. Bukowski's poems give ample evidence that his contempt for politics masks an essential, if contradictory, conservatism. His quintessential individualism sometimes

leads to the adoption of positions which can be construed as reactionary. But many of his poems can equally be seen as scoring liberationist points against tyrannies of all kinds, and particularly social conformity. His greatest successes are often written as much against Right-On liberal sentiment as they are against repression.

Bukowski is of the same generation as the Beats. They all grew up during the Depression years and then the Second World War; Bukowski, like William Burroughs, was a non-combatant, being declared '4-F' by the Draft Board, i.e. psychologically unfit for military service. These writers began to find their feet as artists during the period of the Eisenhower Presidency, years of Cold War conformism, rising middle-class affluence and middlebrow bestsellers. John Clellon Holmes remembered Nelson Algren's remark that 'if The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit and Marjorie Morningstar were being married down the block he wouldn't go to the wedding'.[42] The Beats' relation to Bukowski's work will be more fully elaborated in the third chapter; here it is sufficient to state that they both espoused an idea of disaffiliation from societal norms. Bukowski's speakers habitually fulminate against an America whose material concerns seem to lead to Work without Life, and choose instead Life without Work. The title of his poem 'Machineguns, Towers and Timeclocks', for instance, makes an implied equation between workcamp and workplace. The narrator makes it clear that, unlike most people, he is

> not wanting cocktail parties
> a front lawn
> sing-togethers
> new shoes, Christmas presents
> life insurance, NEWSWEEK
> 162 baseball games
> a vacation in Bermuda.

not wanting,not wanting
and I judge the purple flowers
better off than I.[43]

The final two lines of this passage seem to recall Christ's admonitions in the New Testament to regard the lilies of the valley,who neither toil nor give thought to the morrow. Christ's message of spiritual rather than material values is by implication invoked,though not of course any religious solution to such societal operations. A more apposite literary comparison might be with Ezra Pound's early poem 'Salutation',whose opening lines are addressed to a solidly bourgeois public: 'O Generation of the thoroughly smug/and thoroughly uncomfortable'. Its speaker is clearly an artist-figure equally estranged from bourgeois values as from the working people whom he sketches for the reader; he comically points out the unstriving existence of the fish:

And I am happier than you are,
And they were happier than I am;
And the fish swim in the lake
and do not even own clothing.[44]

Bukowski's narrators similarly suffer from these dual estrangements,though they are more economically desperate.

I might be reading Proust
if someone slips Proust under my door
or one of his bones for my stew,...
hard times are upon us all
only I am not trying to raise a family
to send through Harvard
or buy hunting land,
I am not aiming high
I am only trying to keep myself alive
just a little longer[45]

Quite a number of Bukowski's early poems adopt the voice of a downtrodden industrial worker trapped in mundane employment,or concern themselves with such subjects. In 'Winter Comes to a Lot of Places in August',the workers are 'bitter,brave and numb'; in 'Bring Down the Beams',the speaker exclaims 'I would bring down the beams of sick warehouses/I have counted/with each year's life'.[46] A noteworthy poem from the early phase of his production, 'Poem For Personnel Managers' (published in 1957) is spoken by a daylabourer waiting for casual employment,perhaps in California's fruit or cotton fields. He affects to speak on behalf of all such exploited itinerant pickers:

> Our faces are cracked lineoleum
> cracked through with the heavy,sure
> feet of our masters.
>
> We are shot through with carrot tops
> and poppyseed and tilted grammar;
> we waste days like mad blackbirds
> and pray for alcoholic nights.
> Our silk-sick human smiles wrap around
> us like someone else's confetti:
> we do not even belong to the Party.[47]

These slightly stilted,simile-laden lines do not really convince as presenting an imaginative reality,a realized picture of the daylabouring experience; what the speaker is announcing is in fact Bukowski's own status as a writer who does not 'belong' to the (Communist) Party. The status of the daylabourers cries out for collective solutions,such as being formed into a Trade Union. But Bukowski is only interested in individual beings,not with the Working Class as a group or the lumpen characters below it. The denizens of Bukowski's fictional world are ensnared in their condition,but always interpret it as an Existential problem not a political one. Bukowski seldom recognizes

that for individuals who are, say, black, female, gay, or employed at the bottom of the economic system, their societal problems and experiences have a collective dimension.

That Bukowski does not locate human dilemmas within the class structure of society but within human nature is shown by looking at his jokey poem 'I Wanted to Overthrow the Government But All I Brought Down Was Somebody's Wife'. Its opening briefly notes criticisms, from others more politically interested, of the author-narrator's apolitical standpoint:

> and look here, they write,
> you are a dupe for the state, the church,
> you are in the ego dream,
> read your history, study the monetary system,
> note that the racial war is 23,000 years old.

The narrator proceeds to tell a story at the expense of all concerned - his younger self, his fellow armchair plotters, the bored wife of one of them, but more especially the efforts of political radicals in general. The characters within are seen as ridiculous or self-serving; an old Jewish tailor 'his nose in the lamplight like a cannon sighted on the enemy', an Italian pharmacist who lived in an expensive apartment 'in the best part of town'. The narrator sees his naive younger self through the eye of hindsight, and of experience:

> a tottering dynasty myself, always drunk as possible,
> well-read, starving, depressed, but actually
> a good young piece of ass would have solved all my
> rancor,
> but I didn't know this;

The assertion that 'a good young piece of ass' would have solved all the 'rancor' is clearly wrongheaded: sex may be a sure-fire solution for depression,but not for starvation. The voice that expresses this cynical view is apparently now well-acquainted with the hypocritical activities of radicals; his dealings with mankind has evaporated hopes of beneficial political change. Following his seduction of the pharmacist's wife,the speaker goes on to imply just that:

> she was tired of bombs under the pillow and hissing
> the Pope,
> and she had a very nice figure,very good legs,
> but I guess she felt as I: that the weakness was not
> Government
> but Man,one at a time,that men were never as strong as
> their ideas
> and that ideas were governments turned into men;
> and so it began on the couch with a spilled martini
> and it ended in the bedroom: desire,revolution,
> nonsense ended[48]

It is stated that 'the weakness was not Government', in the way societies are governed,but in 'Man',that is,the intrinsic,unchanging nature of mankind. This amounts to a reactionary critique. The lesson drawn is that because men are individually weak ('never as strong as/their ideas') and always likely to betray their principles,it is futile to attempt to change the powers-that-be. Such notions, though they are framed inside an entertainingly anecdotal narrative (especially entertaining to the male reader),can be seen as bolstering the status quo,or even highly repressive regimes; the poem appears to imply that mankind is a highly dubious anarchy which needs strong government. Prisoners stuck in the Gulags,the H-Blocks or on Robben Island would not welcome the statement that their efforts are bound to be self-defeating.

On other poetic occasions, Bukowski's celebration of individualism can be liberating, subversive and funny. His poem 'Ivan the Terrible' fully answers Whitman's plea that poets should cheer up slaves and horrify despots. The despot that the poem seeks to cut down to size is not so much the awful Ivan, who has been safely dead since 1584, but the straitjacket that rigid Party policy had imposed on art in the Soviet Union. The work opens with a seemingly banal recitation of Ivan's grotesque physical attributes, and his cruelty, an account which might have been taken from an official history book. A long, thin progress down the page helps focus attention on the ironies implicit in some of the observations by isolating words. The last thirteen lines abruptly shift from the past to the present, and propel the reader into laughter as he or she enjoys the surprise resolution of such a development:

last summer
they removed his
skeleton
from the Arkhangelsk Church
in the Kremlin
to make a
life-like
bust

now
he's almost done
and looks like
a 20th century
bus driver[49]

The hilarity of this anachronistic but apt simile is designed not just to humble Ivan with a lexical sucker-punch, but to make a point against Soviet doctrine and collectivizing forces in general. The message is that the Soviets, enforcing the officially-sanctioned style of Socialist Realism ('a/life-like/bust') has deliberately

ordered a bust of Ivan that will appeal to the Russian masses,possibly wishing to draw parallels between his uniting of the Russian Empire and their own. The anti-climactic eye of the poet has seen the inane result of such an artistic and political policy: an arch-individualist and rogue such as Ivan the Terrible has ended up indistinguishable from the man in the street - or bus. This is a distortion of the truth almost as damnable as Gerasimov's notoriously heroic portraits of Stalin as the benevolent protector of the smiling peasants. The poem is not a defence of Ivan but of individualism itself,and particularly of the individual artist's freedom to avoid having to toe the Party line. Casual as its delivery is, the poem is fully in keeping with the anarchic spirit of the avant-garde,particularly appropriate since it was Party orders which crushed Modernism out of Russian artists for several generations.

Roland Barthes reminded those readers 'who want a text (an art,a painting) without a shadow,without the dominant ideology; but this is to want a text without fecundity, without productivity,a sterile text'. Bukowski's texts are contradictory,sometimes subversive but perhaps more often carrying a reactionary ideology. His *oeuvre* contains many splendidly enjoyable examples of both;the reader's pleasure when consuming literary texts 'does not prefer one ideology to another'.[50] This is typical of the avant-garde, most of whose greatest figures have hardly been models of ideological consistency or political rectitude. Bukowski and his writerly stance correspond to many of the most obvious characteristics of the avant-garde; indeed,when active among the Underground culture of the 1960s,his involvements and literary example exemplified avant-gardism.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

I. Foreword by Jochen Schulte-Sasse, 'Theory of Modernism versus Theory of the Avant-Garde' in Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant-Garde, translated by Michael Shaw, Theory and History of Literature, Volume 4, (Manchester, 1984), p.ix.

2. Schulte-Sasse, Theory of the Avant-Garde, p.xii.

3. Carl Solomon comment in Allen Ginsberg, Howl, Original Draft Facsimile, edited by Barry Miles, (New York, 1987), p.II8.

4. Ezra Pound, dedication 'To LOUIS ZUKOFSKY and BASIL BUNTING strugglers in the desert', in Guide to Kulchur, (I938; London, I960).

5. Irving Howe, Decline of the New, (New York, I970), p.I8.

6. John Weightman, The Concept of the Avant-Garde, (London, I973), p.I3.

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CHAPTER TWO: BUKOWSKI'S CAREER AS UNDERGROUND HERO

The natural constituency of Bukowski's writing has proved to be that of little magazines, small presses and Underground newspapers. Far from being an isolated figure, Bukowski's involvements with the editors of and contributors to each of these literary phenomena were wide-ranging, especially during the 1960s, and are continuing. Through their agency his work began a rise to prominence, even notoriety; the output of increasingly distinctive verse and prose brought him regard among avant-garde coteries and the enthusiastic attention of young activists such as Douglas Blazek, Kirby Congdon, Morris Edelson, Hugh Fox, Rich Mangelsdorff, Steve Richmond, William Wantling and Carl Weissner. The continual advocacy of his admirers, and the contacts that they brought him, transformed his standing from that of a little magazine poet to a nationally-known figure in the Underground press. This process eventually created the conditions in which independent publishers could spring up and deliver his work to wider audiences. Though tangential to his development as a poet, the column that Bukowski wrote for his local Underground papers _Open City_ and _L.A. Free Press_, and the stories that began appearing in papers all over the country, transformed the subsequent reception of his verse, boosted his public image, and prepared the way for him to become a full-time writer. Many of those who attended Bukowski's live readings from 1970 onwards, and bought his books, first came across his name in the Underground press.

In a newspaper advertisement for the 1965 collection _Crucifix in a Deathhand_, Henry Miller endorsed Bukowski as 'the poet-satyr of today's Underground'; Walter Lowenfels

called Bukowski 'the Houdini of the Literary Underground'. Even as late as I980, the British critic David Montrose still felt obliged to refer to him as 'the quintessential Underground Man of American Letters'.[I] This recurrent term 'Underground' is a convenient phrase having several possible connotations. It can be taken to mean that late phase of the avant-garde active during the I960s American scene; the Beats, the Black Mountaineers, etc and their younger successors involved with various little magazines and small presses which were often mimeographed entities, of low production values and haphazard methods of distribution. It can also refer to the phenomenon of Underground newspapers, which emerged in the mid-I960s on the West Coast of the United States and rapidly spread to cities all over the continent and Europe. They were a heady mixture, offering information about drugs, alternative life-styles encouraged by the Hippy movement, political coverage, as well as discussing Black Power, Women's Liberation, and often carrying advertisements for sexual contacts. These organs of the so-called Counterculture originally had a political/cultural purpose, offering a critique of mass societal values and institutions, though their ideas now appear naive and simplistic. But their rapid and often stimulating turnover of ideas and material gave them a considerable vogue, before they began petering out in the mid-to-late I970s as social conditions and the political climate changed. In the I960s, there was a continual cross-over between avant-gardists, little magazines and Underground papers. John Bryan had edited two poetry magazines of the period, _Renaissance_ (based in San Francisco from I96I) and _Notes From Underground_ (published in Los Angeles _circa_ I966), before working on the _L.A. Free Press_. He then

decided to set up an alternative to this 'Alternative' paper, which became Open City from 1967 to 1969. Bukowski, who had contributed poems to each of Bryan's earlier publications, was induced to contribute a prose column, which appeared in eighty-seven out of ninety-two issues. Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, Ed Sanders and numerous other writers were often to be found within the pages of Underground papers, but none achieved the consistent appearance record of Bukowski. As well as his prose, up to half-a-dozen poems were appearing in some sequential numbers of the L.A. Free Press during the 1970s. Because his work appeared in so many of the papers, including The National Underground Review based in New York, the associations of 'The Underground' have continued to cling to his work.

Most accounts of Bukowski's career, including those perpetrated by Black Sparrow Press, stress his comparatively late start in the writing game, maintaining that he did not begin creating poems until his mid-thirties. This is not quite the truth of the matter. Though most of his first appearances in print were short stories, and the first poems that bear an authentically Bukowskian stamp date from the mid-to-late 1950s, he was in fact a precociously successful young talent. Several of his apprentice poems and stories appeared in leading magazines of the 1940s; for instance, the story 'Aftermath of a Lengthy Rejection Slip' was published in a March 1944 issue of Story magazine, when its author was a mere twenty-three years of age. Story, a New York magazine run by Whit Burnett on a commercial basis, had a fairly high profile and inclusion within it carried some prestige. As has been stated, another of his stories

was taken by Portfolio, and placed it in the same company as internationally-famous poets, painters and novelists. The first poems he had accepted were in Matrix, which was edited by Joseph Moray and S.E.Mackay in varying locations (New York to Pleasanton, California) from I938 to the early I950s. Two of them have recently been reprinted, and make fascinating reading to the Bukowskianophile, but in truth the content and technique of both is thin. To some extent their themes - a young writer's struggle with the temptations of suicide, the alien nature of things - are akin to his later work, but the impression the two poems make is strangely indirect and muted.

'Object Lesson' appeared in Matrix's Winter I946 issue. An unknown speaker conducts a rather dull monologue about a depressed, bitter subject who is perhaps contemplating an early death:-

> Tell him to seek the stars
> and he will kill himself with climbing.
>
> Tell him about Chatterton. Villon.
>
> Make suggestions.
> Take your time.
> He will do it himself.[2]

The identification with persecuted writers (Chatterton, Villon) is characteristic, as is the relative simplicity of the language, but the poem shows none of the verve that Bukowskian texts later showed in abundance - humour, unexpected language and situation reversals. It is an indistinct, unemphatic piece. By contrast, 'The Look', which was published in Matrix during I95I, is a short, slight but comical poem. If it has a discernible meaning beyond that stated within it, it may be an Existential perception of the gap between objects and human consciousness. This enigmatic

piece reads thus, in its entirety:

> I once bought a toy rabbit
> at a department store
> and now he sits and ponders
> me with pink sheer eyes.
> He wants golfballs and glass
> walls.
> I want quiet thunder.
>
> Our disappointment sits between us.[3]

'The Look' was followed by a complete publication break of five years, a period of terra incognita until the future appearance of an authoritative biography. It was ended by a pivotal event in what one might call The Bukowski Legend. According to this - frequently referred to by the author - a near fatal spell in hospital galvanized a release into creativity. Whatever the exact circumstances, one might compare Bukowski's perforated ulcer to the severe shrapnel wounds suffered by Hemingway at Fossalta on the Italian-Austrian war front. Changed perspectives afforded by a close brush with the grave characterize most of Hemingway's subsequent fictional creations - such as Nick Adams and Jake Barnes - who are traumatized, hypnotized by death, and cynical about everyday concerns. Bukowski's speakers, though often cast in the first-person as 'himself' are highly sensitive to the fragility of human existence, the omnipresence of death within human affairs. The inauthentic social conformity of work and regular routine is scorned by characters who have their attention fixed on more essential matters.

The beginnings of his mature career as a writer have been the subject of a great deal of embellishment. This deals with the energetic response the author made to near-death, and also his struggles to gain acceptance for

a 'non-lyrical,non-singing' type of verse. Bukowski wrote of his hospital release,in a letter reprinted in the third issue of The Outsider,'A couple of days later I had the first drink,the one they said would kill me. A week or so later I got a typewriter,and after a 10 yr-blank (sic)... I found my fingers making the poem. Or rather,the bar talk. The non-lyrical,non-singing thing. The rejects came quickly enough'.[4] This statement shows several features of the combative image that Bukowski has always striven to encourage,and of the art that he has endeavoured to make. Firstly,there is a disrespect for official opinion (that is,of the doctors) and also of death itself. Drink is to be a way of dramatizing existence,taking a risk and living up to the full. There is then a description of his poetic efforts as coming from overheard speech,though they are self-deprecated as 'bar talk'. Non-lyrical,unliterary in character,they are 'quickly' rejected by more tradition-bound magazine editors. Bukowski's poems,and the authorial self he creates,carry a consciousness of Rejection in both social and artistic terms,a defiant resentment against mainstream authority. Nonetheless,this rejection - which is only to be expected - can be 'good for the soul',as he once told the Canadian poet Al Purdy,'if you are not a quitter'. Bukowski's speakers wear their badge of rejection with pride; to echo Jean Genet,they reject those who have rejected them.[5]

One of the earliest poems to emerge out of his resumed creativity was accepted by a little magazine called The Naked Ear,situated in Taos,New Mexico (D.H.Lawrence territory) in 1956. 'Layover' is set in an environment of cheap roominghouses,desperate enclaves 'where poor men poke for bottles'. These beings regard bourgeois work habits as

deluded ('poor fools'), and are scornful of 'headlines/and Cadillacs'. The speaker is remembering a former lover, and the experience of 'making love by a photograph of Paris/ and an open pack of Chesterfields'. The poem's two paragraphic stanzas employ reiterations to impart some rhythmic pattern to its uneven line-lengths. The phrase 'making love' begins six out of the first stanza's twelve lines; the word 'and' stands at the front of five out of fourteen lines in the second stanza. Of all the words in the poem, only the title, 'Chesterfields' and 'Cadillacs' are of more than one or two syllables. It thereby establishes the predominant pattern employed in Bukowski's verse, which invariably involves structurally simple language. The poem's second paragraph achieves an affecting air of regret, an elegiac remembrance of the past that tries to arrest the fatal flow of time:

> That moment - to this -
> may be years in the way they measure,
> but it's only one sentence back in my mind -
> there are so many days
> when living stops and pulls up and sits
> and waits like a train on the rails.
> I pass the hotel at 8
> and at 5; there are cats in the alleys
> and bottles and bums,
> and I look up at the window and think,
> I no longer know where you are,
> and I walk on and wonder where
> the living goes
> when it stops.[6]

The poem's idiom is relatively conventional, however, and there is as yet no intimation of future narrative aggrandizements. Musings on mortality and long-lost love are, again, the standard fare of art-works, and so hardly presage radical departures in terms of subject matter. Quite pleasing to read, it is nevertheless one-dimensional and

restrained.

Those magazines which regularly accepted Bukowski's verse in the first few years of its renaissance were mainly local (Californian) and hospitable to Open Forms. Gene Frumkin's Coastlines and J.B.May's Trace were situated almost on Bukowski's doorstep in Hollywood,Los Angeles. George Hitchcock's San Francisco Review was active just up the coast,near Wallace Berman's important magazine Semina (1957-1964). Barbara Fry's publication Harlequin devoted twenty-six pages to Bukowski's poems and stories within a 1957 issue. By the start of the 1960s,his work had percolated through to a wide geographical spread of magazines: Carl Larsen's Rongwrong (New York),Margaret Randall's El Corno Emplumado (Mexico City),Andrew Linick's Nomad (San Francisco),Felix Stephanile's The Sparrow (Flushing,New York),Harry Smith's The Smith,and Midwest, edited by R.R.Cuscaden - to name but a few out of dozens.

But Bukowski certainly accumulated the inevitable rejection slips from editors of similar poetry magazines. Reflecting on this,Bukowski scorned their judgement in the introduction to one of his first collections: 'I found out that the editors wanted everything in a cage....Boil it down,they said. You're all over the placenta (sic). But... all they wanted was dullness and the poetic pose'.[7] He further lambasted the careful,conservative tastes of literary folk in a letter to his friend Jon Edgar Webb, which was dated 2 September 1962.

> Went someplace last night against my wishes and listened to being told I do not write lyric poetry, and that my pessimism was exaggerated etc. Hell,I know I don't write lyric poetry....I am sick of the mess, and g.d.sick of being told 'how' I should write with my 'talent' and what POETRY IZ (sic). I don't care what POETRY IZ. I work from my own marble and f.everybody.[8]

All of Bukowski's first chapbooks were brought out under the auspices of little magazines, and were published in edition sizes of no more than two hundred copies. Most were given away to subscribers, or to friends of the editors or the poet. Sales were probably negligible. Few now survive, and those that do fetch high prices on the Rare Book market. By 1982, according to a brief guide written by the Bukowskian collector Al Fogel, certain items in good condition could fetch up to three thousand dollars. Flower, Fist and Bestial Wail was published by Hearse Press (based in the quaintly-named town of Eureka, California) in November 1960. Two years later, three further publications appeared. Poems and Drawings came from Epos Press (edited by Evelyn Thorne and Will Tullos in Crescent City, Florida); Longshot Pomes for Broke Players from Carl Larsen's 7 Poets Press in New York, and Run With the Hunted emerged out of Chicago as one of R.R.Cuscaden's Midwest Poetry Chapbooks.[9]

Bukowski was no doubt grateful to these editors for their interest, time and care, but he was becoming impatient with his position as a small press poet attracting scant attention outside small readerships, and the lack of money to be gained from his art. He could also be scathing about the endemic infighting within the small press world, and its highly variable standards of editorial integrity. In an article written for Len Fulton's Small Press Review, Bukowski stated that little magazines in his experience had evolved into 'a vast grinding lonely hearts club of no talents', in which the editors were 'a worse breed than the writers'. He conceded though that, 'if you are a writer seriously interested in creating an art instead of a foolishness', there are at least 'a few littles' where the

editing is 'professional rather than personal'.[IO]

Bukowski found what he was looking for in terms of editorship in the person of Jon Edgar Webb, the most important single figure within the development of his early writing career. Webb, and his wife 'Gypsy Lou', became Bukowski's editors, friends, and confidantes, helping to sustain his morale and sense of purpose as a writer. The Webbs' magazine The Outsider championed Bukowski's work, and placed it among an eclectic mix of avant-gardists past and present, while the Loujon Press became his first influential publisher. Apparently, Webb and Bukowski had established contact through a young writer called Jory Sherman who lived in Los Angeles, and had been approached by Webb to ask if he would be The Outsider's representative on the West Coast.[II]

Jon Edgar Webb's lively experiences as a journalist, novelist, teacher, convict, and editor included friendships with numerous literary figures during the I930s and I940s, notably Sherwood Anderson, Henry Miller and Walter Lowenfels; he also made the acquaintance of Hemingway. The British writer Jim Burns wrote an informative piece on Webb's activities for a I979 issue of the magazine Poetry Information. The Wormwood Review devoted an entire issue to Webb in I972. In the latter publication, Bukowski praised Jon Edgar Webb, comparing his editorial gifts with those of Whit Burnett and even H.L.Mencken. With gratitude, and a fair amount of affectionate exaggeration, Bukowski claimed that in the brief span of its existence, 'THE OUTSIDER made more of a landing upon our literature than any other magazine....it was literature jumping and screaming, it was a record of voices and...a record of the time'.[I2] Befitting its base in New Orleans, the magazine's subtitle was

'Today's Poetry and Prose,Yesterday's Jazz'. Hand-printed in an edition of around three thousand copies per issue, its combination of excellent writing and splendid design meant that The Outsider attracted high praise,and many copies found their way into University libraries,bookstores specializing in avant-garde literature,and into the hands of grateful readers and collectors. But the project continually lost money; three numbers appeared between 1961 and 1963,with the final flourish,a double issue featuring the work of the poet and painter Kenneth Patchen, delayed until 1969. Webb himself died in June 1971.

The first Outsider made its appearance,dated Fall 1961, and among those whose work was featured were Ginsberg, Corso,Olson,Creeley,Kerouac,Snyder,and Gilbert Sorrentino. Bukowski was given by far the largest space,with eleven poems appearing. A selection of the 1930s correspondence between Henry Miller and Walter Lowenfels was printed,as was fairly detailed descriptive prose covering the New Orleans Trad Jazz scene. The second issue contained many of the same names,plus William Burroughs,Howard Nemerov, Jonathan Williams,and the Scottish poet Edwin Morgan. Two poems by Bukowski were printed.

But it was the third Outsider which had most resonance for Bukowski. It carried three new poems,but more vitally it gathered together a wide range of critical responses to his work,reprinted some rather poignant letters sent by Bukowski to the Webbs,and included several photographs of the poet - in which he looks not unlike a young Humphrey Bogart. All in all,it was an intelligent tribute to their 'Outsider of the Year'. Under the heading 'Editors Congratulate Bukowski',Gene Frumkin wrote that Bukowski had 'made the sense of spontaneity his trademark....he is

the only poet I can think of who can be utterly raw, and, at the same time, genuinely poetic'. Joseph Friedman, the editor of Venture, remarked upon Bukowski's 'offensive laughter', by which he meant its 'attack, an impertinent zany attack on death, for like the farthest out of the Outsiders he is keenly sensitive to the innermost innards of being alive'.[13]

The two critical essays printed in this issue remain among the best short assessments of Bukowski's verse, though the observations apply, of course, only to the earliest phase of his work. 'Charles Bukowski: Poet in a Ruined Landscape' by R.R. Cuscaden drew attention to a 'Jeffers-like pessimism', an 'obsession' with Art and Music, and what was identified as Bukowski's 'sense of a desolate, abandoned world'. Cuscaden concluded with a comment on the poet's stance as both anarchist and maker: 'Bukowski is a poet of the permanent opposition. He opposes "the ruin" on a basis of personal anarchy which must attempt the impossible and create its own order'.[14] J.W. Corrington's essay was a fairly straightforward literary-critical explication of three poems, 'The Tragedy of the Leaves', 'The Priest and the Matador' and 'Old Man, Dead in a Room'. Corrington saw them as Existentialist documents, linking the poems with certain of the ideas of Sartre and Camus, and the dilemmas of T.S. Eliot's alienated characters.[15]

Bukowski's prize for being 'Outsider of the Year' was to have his first full-length collection meticulously printed by the Webb's Loujon Press. This was a volume of new and selected poems, titled It Catches My Heart in Its Hands from a line by Robinson Jeffers - whose isolato existence at Carmel, California and didactic poems Bukowski had expressed admiration for. This handsome book appeared

in an edition of 777 copies during 1963. The poetic energy which the Webbs' interest had catalyzed was captured in another volume of superb production values, commissioned from the Loujon Press by Lyle Stuart with an edition size of 3,100 copies: Crucifix in a Deathhand (1965). Webb noted Bukowski's astounding productivity, stating that the book was 'a painstakingly pruned selection from the 326 poems Bukowski submitted for this title between October 1963 and March 1965'. Bukowski later formed a small chapbook out of those poems that 'Webb didn't want for CRUCIFIX and that I didn't feel like throwing away', published by Charles Potts as Poems Written Before Jumping Out of an 8 Story Window.[16]

During the latter stages of the production of Crucifix in a Deathhand Bukowski went to stay with the Webbs in New Orleans, and recorded progress to a correspondent, the Canadian poet Al Purdy. The depiction of the conditions under which the Loujon Press operated is perhaps a little exaggerated, but there is no mistaking the exuberance of the communication, in which Bukowski expresses mock-regret over his behaviour, and appreciation for the Webbs' care:

> The Webbs are miracles in flesh. The[y] work in this dive full of roaches and rats and paper and press and no room - they have hung the wall with a bed and climb up there on a ladder and they starve and print pages of poetry and a magazine...and no thought of anything but the work. and me - I roar into town drunk as 90 sailors and piss over everybody. god.[17]

One of the favourable reviews of the book appeared in a New Orleans newspaper, The Vieux Carre Courier. The reviewer was drawn to comment that the book had taken nine months to prepare, with seven shades of paper being fed by hand into an antique press, the end result of which was described as 'a labor of heat, ink, glue and love'.[18]

The exposure of his work in The Outsider, the two books from the Loujon Press, and Bukowski's well-established name in the little magazine world, had begun to garner attention, especially from other writers. As he told Al Purdy, this was something of a mixed blessing: 'I keep getting more and more letters from young poets...who talk on and enclose poems - most of them rather thin as if drizzled through a fog with a hackneyed sense of the melodramatic'.[19] Writing with the hindsight of the late 1970s, Joe Wolberg commented that even by 1965, Bukowski's 'underground reputation was remarkable, considering how few people actually knew him personally. That situation changed as more young poets, fans and sycophants began to seek out the now-notorious "dirty old man" in his East Hollywood tenement'.[20] In fact, Wolberg is here anticipating the reputation engendered by Bukowski's exploits within Open City, which did not begin until May 1967 - when the 'dirty old man' was a mere 46. A more accurate chronology of Bukowski's career must record that the next significant contact made after Jon Edgar Webb was with the small press activist Douglas Blazek.

Blazek, once colourfully described as 'an iconoclastic, scatalogical low man on the literary totem pole...energetic and full of fire', was one of a number of young writers whose high regard for Bukowski's example led them to correspond with him, and each other.[21] Blazek, Charles Potts, and William Wantling each came from various places in Illinois, though Potts and Blazek moved to the West Coast in the latter half of the 1960s. All had links with figures in Cleveland, Ohio - d.a.levy, t.l.kryss, d.r.wagner (these writer-publishers usually affected a lowercase form for their names when in print, á la e.e.cummings). Other names that must be mentioned as participants in their various

magazine and publishing projects include Steve Richmond, Clarence Major, Brown Miller and Marcus J. Grapes. These figures were forever writing 'A Defence' or 'An Appreciation' of Bukowski's life and art, seeing the one as bound up inextricably with the other; their eulogistic commentaries did much to raise the profile of his literary example. Blazek's vociferous endorsement of Bukowski's importance, the contacts among young literary (or, as they saw themselves, anti-literary) activists that he gave Bukowski, as well as a crucial re-kindling of his interest in prose, were highly useful stimuli to the older man. The proliferation of cheäply mimeographed magazines all over the United States during the I960s owed much to Blazek and levy's examples. In Felix Pollak's view, they were a 'vital force', representing 'a kind of populist thrust that held that anyman could be a publisher and, perhaps, a poet too'.[22] Though their literary perceptions now seem simplistic, and much of their own writing frankly weak, their activities within the small press scene of that time remain of fascinating interest.

Douglas Blazek first surfaces in Bukowski's letters during late I964, when he wrote asking for poems, in regard to his new magazine <u>Olé</u>. Al Purdy was facetiously informed of this 'kid with his mimeo machine in the kitchin (sic) in Illinois', who 'seemed full of beans so I sent him some verse which he took. I do wish he'd learn to operate the machine better'. Nonetheless, Bukowski was soon impressed enough to solicit material from Purdy: 'I wouldn't have wanted your poems for OLE if I didn't think the mag was a kind of powerhouse'.[23] Bukowski contributed poems and reviews to the magazine throughout the three years of its existence from I964 to I967. The subtitle to <u>Olé</u> was

'the original consciousness-expansion magazine', indicating its origins in the burgeoning Hippy era and the related drug subculture. As a neo-Beat magazine, Olé prized work redolent of psychological extremity, or the alteration of everyday states of mind by alcohol and hallucinogenic substances. It is probably no coincidence that three of the writers most often featured within its pages - Gil Orlovitz, William Wantling, Ray Newton and d.a.levy - all died prematurely, either from drug overdoses or suicide. The attitudes espoused in Olé were defiantly anarchistic, yet Blazek combined this with the somewhat naive hopes of a literary entrepreneur. As he stated in the first editorial,

> C.B. [Bukowski] once said 'Poetry is dying on the vine like a whore on the end stool on a Monday night'.... He knows that good writing is merely good opinion. Style wise the same thing goes....All we intend to do is join the already present revolution. By mass force, good poetry & a belief in our cause we hope to make poetry respected in this country & make it into a financially independent art form with a new audience who will purchase our work....We shun the word 'literary'...poetry must disturb and upset.[24]

The magazine was mimeographed on garish shades of blue or purple paper, with exuberant typography and many spelling mistakes. The writing to be found therein was often crude, but occasionally striking, as with an untitled piece by Steve Richmond which appeared in 1965 and perhaps was inspired by the growing campaign against the Vietnam War:

> prior to
> his concert pablo casals asked
> 'Do you like war?' they roared 'No'
> and i, leaping to the podium,
>   split his bald head
> open

at the hair line - dipped
my tongue
in his cream
of wheat brains,and tickled
his tiny
tumour of hate.[25]

However,much of the material in Olé now seems a very dated mish-mash of third-hand surreal imagery,crassly sexist sentiment and sloppy technique. Blazek's own poems,which were widely printed in little magazines of the period, show a rather tin-eared sensibility,a clogged diction being used to describe sexual and psychological states,and a consistent complaint against the world of work:

a new sun is churning the ore in its cradle
while birds are interpreting the anal screams
of wrecked bowl-men snug in every bed,
their ritual eating into my motley sleep-eye
because their realization is no greater than
a machine's as to why they perform[26]

This can be attributed to Blazek's own aesthetic,the principles of which he termed 'Meat Poetry',urging the poet to 'find out where the bones break,get down...to where the hair is,where the blood spurts like ejaculating whales and lay it on the line whatever you feel you see'. Blazek summarised his ambitions in the phrase 'I WANT POETRY THAT IS LIFE NOT POETRY.'[27]

Most of Bukowski's poems in Olé have been reprinted, though at least one has re-surfaced in a slightly cut version. The magazine gave Bukowski absolute freedom to write as loosely and indulgently as he wished,even to the extent of printing thinly-veiled satirical digs at the posturing alienation of certain of Olé's other writers. This may be the case in an entertaining blast entitled 'O We are the Outcasts,O We Burn in Wondrous Flame',which

has recently been reprinted with the words 'bung-hole' and 'cock' curiously omitted.

> ah, christ, what a bung-hole crew:
> more poetry
> poetry, always more
> P O E T R Y
>
> if it doesn't come, squeeze it out with a
> laxative. get your name in LIGHTS,
> get it up there in
> 8½ x II mimeo.
>
> keep it coming like a miracle
> cock.
>
> ah christ, writers are the most sickening
> of all the louts.
> yellow-toothed, jackoff, slump-shouldered,
> gutless, flea-bitten and
> obvious...in tinker-toy rooms
> with their flabby hearts
> they tell us
> what's wrong with the world -
> as if we didn't know that a cop's club
> could crack the head
> and that war was a dirtier game than
> marriage....28

The reviews that Bukowski wrote for the magazine were hardly informed responses to the books in question, but they contained some entertainingly offhand comments. For instance, of Kathleen Fraser's Change of Address and Other Poems he simply observed 'No wonder the world has gone to hell - stick a knife in the average poet and he (she) will only hiccup'. These pieces are also interesting for the more-than-occasional reflections on his own aesthetic and practice. In one of them, Bukowski described the act of composition rather vividly as an endurance test, a last-ditch stand doomed to defeat:

> Its (sic) sweet stale shit, this poeming...none of us knows what it is...its like awakening in the morning with a boil on your back and it won't go away....But there sure as hell aren't any fuhrers of enlightenment, baby, and sometimes it makes for long evenings, sharp

> razors,accident while cleaning shotguns...good writing,without fucking relent,is nothing but g.d. trying to bust through a wall of steel,and we are just not going to make it.[29]

The reference to an 'accident while cleaning shotguns' is presumably to Ernest Hemingway,whose suicide was initially presented to the world as just such an accident; equally Hemingwayan,of course,is the concept of writing as a losing game,an Existential test intimately linked to life. The phrase 'fuhrers of enlightenment' may be indebted to a line in a poem by Harold Norse,who was the subject of a special issue of Olé in 1965. Norse,a correspondent of Bukowski's for many years,had close links with most of the Beat writers,especially William Burroughs and Gregory Corso. Indeed,Norse lived in the so-called 'Beat Hotel' at 9 rue-git-le-coeur in Paris,'a fleabitten roominghouse' whose stairs were 'sweetened by the green fragrance of cannabis being smoked in practically every room',for more than three years. William Burroughs recalled that he, Harold Norse,Ian Sommerville,and Brion Gysin 'held constant meetings and conferences' in the Beat Hotel,'with exchange of ideas and comparisons of cut-up writing,painting,and tape-recorder experiments'.[30] Another of the indigent artists who lived in the Beat Hotel with ties of correspondence to Bukowski was the painter and poet Kay Johnson, usually known as 'kaja'. She was originally from New Orleans,and her work appeared in The Outsider,so it is likely that links were forged through that circumstance. Several of Bukowski's poems apparently make reference to Kay Johnson's expatriate existence and collection of poems entitled Human Songs.[31]

Bukowski's involvements with Olé helped spread his name to Europe,since it was stocked in 'Alternative'

bookshops in London and elsewhere; Olé contained messages from British poetry activists of the time, such as Glyn Pursglove, Dave Cunliffe (editor of Poetmeat) and Barry Miles, editor of International Times. Douglas Blazek also helped turn Bukowski's mind towards the writing of prose, which he had abandoned for many years since the apprentice efforts of the 1940s. One of Bukowski's first letters to Blazek opens by referring to just such a suggestion, albeit negatively: 'write a book? a novel? I am too lazy, too sick, and such a waste of words, and they wouldn't print it, so why not break it down into poetic toothaches...I doubt I could stick to the subject'.[32] But Blazek's Mimeo Press was able to bring out the first fruits of this stimulus as the chapbooks Confessions of a Man Insane Enough To Live With Beasts (1965) and All the Assholes in the World and Mine in 1966. Blazek also edited A Bukowski Sampler for Morris Edelson's Quixote Press in 1969, the volume collecting together some poems from his out-of-print early books, a prose extract, letters, and observations on Bukowski by Blazek, Wantling and Lowenfels. Bukowski's reaction was not wholly appreciative; in a letter to Carl Weissner, his German friend and future translator, Bukowski described 'the SAMPLER thing' as 'all mixed up', and the comments on his work and example as 'burblings', though 'they meant well'.[33]

But Bukowski was supportive of Blazek and levy when they were faced with charges and police harassment relating to their small press activities. Blazek's next project after Olé was a magazine of correspondence between writers, most of whom were part of the Blazek-levy circle. The F.B.I. apparently visited Blazek, and informed him that they were 'formally investigating' his new magazine, Open Skull:

'seems as tho (sic) someone has turned me in for publishing pornography....he [the F.B.I. agent] asked for Buk's [Bukowski's] address & a list of my subscribers. i (sic) refused to give either. he said he would be back. i am waiting'.[34] It is unclear, however, whether Blazek was ever charged. The court cases involving d.a.levy, and the bookseller Jim Lowell, became cause-célèbres of the American small press scene.

The editor-publisher of The Marrawannah Quarterly d.a.levy was arrested after a poetry reading at 'The Gate', a Cleveland coffee shop. The police charge stated, with unintentional comedy, that the subject matter of the reading had included 'death, suicide, use of marijuana and LSD, unnatural sex, immoral acts, and [had] described the city administration in foul terms'. In Eric Mottram's account of the following proceedings, he quotes a letter written to a Cleveland newspaper, justifying the prosecution in the following way: 'Levy is alleged to have read poetry to juveniles. That being the case, the police have a right to arrest him'.[35] Bukowski and levy had been acquainted through levy's magazine, and his small presses; 7 Flowers Press brought out a hand-printed edition of one of Bukowski's poems, 'The Genius of the Crowd', in 1966. An anthology of poems and tributes to levy, entitled ukanhavyrfuckincitibak, was printed by Ghost Press, and Bukowski contributed to that.

Jim Lowell was the proprietor of 'The Asphodel', a Cleveland bookstore stocking a wide range of small press material, which had been raided by the police in late 1966. Ghost Press, supervized by t.l.kryss, came up with a volume of statements of support, A Tribute to Jim Lowell (1967). These were from established literary figures - Dwight

MacDonald, Robert Lowell, James Laughlin, Guy Davenport, Hubert Selby, Denise Levertov, Gilbert Sorrentino - as well as little magazine names. Charles Bukowski's contribution was one of the most thoughtful in A Tribute, raising the more general issues of relations between the artist, the public, and political authorities. It can be read as an archetypal statement of the mythology of the avant-garde, claiming an embattled but independent status for the artist in the face of hostility from the forces of social conformity and ignorance:

> Good Art, Creation, is generally 2 decades to 2 centuries ahead of its time in relationship to the establishment ...good Art is not only not understood but also feared because to make the future better it must state that the present is bad, very bad, and this is hardly an endearment to those in control....'Obscenity' is the word they use to excuse their own rot in order to raid the works and outposts of creative men....The creative artist has always been continually harassed by officialdom and the public itself - Van Gogh was hooted by children who threw stones against his window....I do not ask mercy for the artist, I do not ask public funds, I do not even ask understanding; I only ask that they leave us alone in the joy and horror and mystery of our work.[36]

'The Asphodel' was alluded to in a cryptic flyer sent out by levy and kryss which stated, with a nice line in irony, that the shop 'is being torn down as part of which (sic) is called an "urban renewal" project and is being replaced by a modern CULT-yrall (sic) center which will be known as "parking lot"'. But Lowell managed to continue trading; indeed, 'The Asphodel' celebrated its twenty-fifth year of existence in 1988. But levy's fate was more sombre; he began advocating bizarre forms of direct action against the authorities. One of Open Skull's correspondents claimed to have 'heard on the radio...that Kent Taylor and d.a. levy were just cited by a special committee of the National

Food & Drug Commission as local leaders of the neo-American church advocating "political assassinations by drugs" and "dumping hallucinogens in public water supplies"'.[37] Eric Mottram,one of the few critics to give levy's innovative work its critical due,observed that levy - who was found shot dead on 24 November 1968 - 'had come to believe that the country was "programmed to fall apart",and that state of the nation reaches into his poems,many of which contemplate the possibility of suicide as the accurate response to the 1960s'.[38] Among levy's works are <u>The North American Book of the Dead</u> (1966) and <u>Suburban Monastery Death Poem</u> (1968).

During the late 1960s and early 1970s,Bukowski's poems continued to appear in many quixotically-named publications - <u>Acid</u>,<u>Meatball</u>,<u>Copkiller</u>,<u>Sixpack</u>,etc - and many which were short-lived. But he was increasingly represented in some of the more significant magazines, including Len Fulton's <u>Dust</u>,Allen de Loach's <u>Intrepid</u>, Jerome Rothenberg's <u>Some/Thing</u>,Barney Rosset's <u>Evergreen Review</u>,and <u>Intransit</u> (edited by Andy Warhol and Gerard Malanga in New York). Morris Edelson's avowedly leftist little magazine <u>Quixote</u> regularly printed work by Bukowski, levy,Blazek,Charles Potts,William Wantling; it carried interviews with figures in the New Left,and discussed its splits and confrontations; and arranged benefit performances for various causes by Allen Ginsberg,Ed Sanders' group The Fugs,and radical theatre groups - Brand X Theatre, The Human Race,and The San Francisco Mime Troupe. Morris Edelson's magazine defined its aim as 'working to create a climate for art as well as art itself - by which we mean revolutionary art'.[39]

That Bukowski's work was highly acceptable to small

press editors of radical,liberal and anarchistic political persuasions is clear; two of his poems were included in Walter Lowenfels' two polemical anthologies of current American verse,Poets of Today (1964) and Where is Vietnam? (1967). By 1968,the critic Hugh Fox explained this appeal by remarking that 'the underground editor...himself isolated from the dubious "mainstream" of American life and letters,found in Bukowski a spokesman for his own nihilism'. But Fox went on to claim that Bukowski,'anti-war,anti-bomb,anti-blind patriotism,anti-practically everything' had become 'a spokesman for the growing rebelliousness of the Sixties'.[40] This last statement is an oversimplification. In fact,Bukowski maintained a sceptical distance from the ideals of the Counterculture,and the political viewpoints of the Underground. This scepticism can be seen implicitly within his poems of the period,and also explicitly in his dealings with Underground papers.

The first Underground papers emerged on the West Coast; L.A.Free Press began in 1964,to be followed by The Berkeley Barb,The San Francisco Chronicle and a rash of similar operations all over the United States. Keen to seize the libertarian opportunities of their cultural moment,such publications wanted to act as sounding-boards for ideas, focus opposition to Government machinations in general and the Vietnam War in particular,and communicate freely the aims and philosophies of the Counterculture - its mores, music,literature,drugs,and political standpoints. They were supposed to be run on strictly egalitarian lines,with every worker receiving the same (low) amount of remuneration whatever their part in the production process. But, like their mainstream cousins,they had to build up a circulation,attract advertising revenue,and pay for the

costs of printing, staffing and distribution. They wished to fulfil a social role, and make money. Other features of the papers may be discerned by looking at Bukowski's contacts with a few of them.

Open City exemplified much that was exciting, yet contradictory about the Underground press. The front page headlines for its issue dated 20 December 1968 conveys an anarchic style: 'Campus Revolt Hits L.A. High Schools', and 'Yapping Sam's Red Baiting Strikes Out Again'. An editorial welcomed a situation where 'the halls and quadrangles of academe now echo with the sounds of sit-ins, building occupations, strikes, sanctuaries and disruptions of many kinds'. The paper operated a seemingly radical and liberationist policy, the coverage extending to Black Power, the New Left, student unrest, resistance to the Vietnam Draft, exposes of local civic and police corruption, information about drugs, and carried advertisements for sexual partners and services. It was, however, indifferent to feminist issues or Gay Liberation.[41]

The column that the editor John Bryan persuaded a slightly reluctant Bukowski to contribute opened on 5 May 1967 with a piece on A.E.Hotchner's reminiscent book Papa Hemingway, under the heading 'An Old Drunk Who Ran Out of Luck'. While a detailed assessment of Bukowski's exuberant prose cocktail of fiction-mixed-with-opinion lies outside the scope of this study, one can venture to suggest that Bukowski's column could be compared to Flann O'Brien's excursions into fantasy on behalf of the readers of The Irish Times, in terms of hilarity though not of language. The uninhibited authorial reflections contained in Notes of a Dirty Old Man might encompass sex with a three hundred pound whore; an angel turned baseball hero

brought down by women and drink; the risks involved in accepting a ride in a car driven by Neal Cassady; a man who wakes to find his skin turned gold with green polka dots (recalling Kafka's Metamorphosis); sex, revolution, and literature; drunkenly mistaken anal intercourse; demonology; the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King; and a superbly gross cast of bit-players including comically inept muggers, murderers and gangsters, rapacious whores and landladies, struggling writers, bums, and misunderstood geniuses. Writing for Open City had several attractions for Bukowski, not least that of a sizeable popular audience and rapid access to it:

> For action, it has poetry beat all to hell. Get a poem accepted and chances are it will come out 2 to 5 years later, and a 50-50 shot it will never appear.... But with NOTES, III sit down with a beer and hit the typer on a Friday or a Saturday or a Sunday and by Wednesday the thing is all over the city. I get letters from people who have never read poetry, mine or anyone else's. People come to my door.[42]

After the demise of Open City in 1969, Bukowski continued the column for a while in L.A. Free Press, and also used his space for poems, and eventually excerpts or drafts of a forthcoming novel. His stories were appearing in papers and magazines regularly now - The Berkeley Barb, Adam, Pix, Knight and Evergreen Review. Another paper hospitable to Bukowski was Nola Express, published fortnightly from New Orleans and edited by Darlene Fife and Bob Head. An issue dated 25 December listed Bukowski amongst such folk as William Wantling, Charles Plymell, Claude Pelieu, but also The Weather Underground (then conducting a bombing blitz) and The Family, associates of the murderous Charles Manson. Another issue advertised cassettes of Bukowski - billed as

'The King of the Hard-Mouthed Poets' - reading a selection of poems, available for six dollars and ninety-eight cents.

Bukowski's dealings with Underground papers quite properly had a strong streak of self-interest, advancing his own career more than the socio-political aims of the papers themselves. He told Charles Potts on 16 April 1968 that Open City was 'going to miss a column now and then', and that he had just sold '2 Notes columns to the National Underground Review for 25 bucks a piece....I need money. Bryan slips me a tenner now and then but I sell out to the highest bidder'.[43] In a 1974 interview, Bukowski stated that in his view the Underground papers had 'turned into a business, and the real revolutionaries were never there ....I can't think of one Underground newspaper that meant anything, shook anybody'.[44] His cynically funny story 'The Birth, Life and Death of an Underground Newspaper' is a loosely fictionalized account of the chaos that was Open City. In truth, something of an age and culture gap existed between Bukowski and most of the workers on the paper, most of whom were at least twenty years younger than he was. Bukowski told Michael Andrews in 1980 that although Open City was 'an interesting sheet', its staff would often be 'all sitting around smoking pot, you know, and I'd come roaring in with my six packs of beer. God-damn hippies puffing on the grass, a bunch of assholes'.[45] When events were staged to raise money for the Open City legal fund, including a benefit reading at the Ash Grove Theater in Los Angeles, Bukowski did not turn up to support the cause. This supposedly archetypal 'drop-out' from straight values had to work his evening shift at the Los Angeles Post Office.

Though Bukowski may have been temporarily radicalized

by the Free Speech and anti-Vietnam War campaigns of the time, his occasional attempts to write poems on behalf of these liberal causes almost invariably resulted in dull, sloppy work, as in 'Communists' or 'Poem for the Death of an American Serviceman in Vietnam'. There is ample proof that his imagination is simply not of the polemical or didactic sort. He strikes a more appropriately cynical and humorous note in 'The Underground', originally to be found in The Wormwood Review in 1968. The poem's narrator 'Charley' attends a crowded meeting summoned to discuss a campaign for the Underground paper; the subjects raised include both 'advertising' and 'revolution'. In this company, his own attitudes are seen as repellent by hippies intent on Civil Disobedience:

> the girl next to me said,
> 'we ought to evacuate the city,
> that's what we ought to do'.
>
> I said, 'I'd rather listen to Joseph Haydn'.
>
> she said, 'just think of it,
> if everybody left the city!'
>
> 'they'd only be someplace else
> stinking it up', I said.
>
> 'I don't think you like
> people', she said, pulling her short skirt down
> as much as possible.
>
> 'just to fuck with', I said.
>
> then I went to the bar next door and
> bought 3 more packs of beer.
> when I got back they were talking Revolution.
> so here I was back in 1935 again,
> only I was old and they were young.[46]

One might contrast this debunking of Hippy, would-be radical attitudes with the public stance taken by other writers at approximately the same time. For instance, the much more ideologically-committed Lawrence Ferlinghetti sent an

Open Letter to the Committee of Small Press Magazine Editors and Publishers (COSMEP) at their 1970 conference, as a contribution to the debate about whether to accept government money at the height of the Vietnam War:

> I as a poet and City Lights as a publisher have from the first consistently refused to participate in any organisation or program funded directly or indirectly by U.S.Government money....One thing...acceptance of government subsidies would seem to make clear is that the avant-garde in this country is not necessarily to be equated with the political left,and certainly not with the radical left.[47]

The conference was attended by figures of the order of Allen Ginsberg,Robert Creeley,Leslie Fiedler,Allen de Loach,Hugh Fox,William Wantling,and divided up between those who wanted to build genuinely alternative and independent cultural structures,and those who wanted to be literary entrepreneurs. A third position,which would have been adopted by Bukowski in all likeliehood (had he been the clubbable type who attends writers' congresses),held that a Federal dollar in the pocket of a writer was a dollar unavailable to further the war effort. As proof of this contention,one notes that Bukowski gratefully accepted a grant from The National Endowment For The Arts in 1972. An image of Bukowski as a kind of Saint of Permanent Opposition to the Establishment was accepted by many of his young admirers during the 1960s,but it has proved to be wishful thinking; his anarchism has always expressed itself as politically quietistic.

The responses to Bukowski's verse contained in the third issue of The Outsider constituted the first sustained attempt to understand it, but there had been numerous short reviews of his early publications. Among those who had commented on the individuality of Bukowski's work were Jack Conroy, Thomas McGrath, Kenneth Rexroth and Al Purdy. Robert Creeley briefly mentioned the collection Run With the Hunted when reviewing several books for Poetry Chicago in April 1963. He confined his enthusiasm well within bounds, making an observation that Bukowski 'uses very open speech, and common sentiments and references....The starved, the poor, the bewildered, the dragged, sullen reality of usual life does not want, nor not want to be a poem. The work is still to be done'.[48] Writing in the same magazine a year later, Dabney Stuart (later editor of Shenandoah) was more straightforward in his dismissal of It Catches My Heart In Its Hands:

> About the world Bukowski feels forced to say ché sàra, sàra; to say that about language is a capitulation of another sort, unwise, uncreative. The American language, as Bukowski hears it, can be nailed to paper rather easily....If Bukowski has arrived at the door to something great, he has knocked very lightly for entrance....Escapists don't write great poetry.[49]

This was probably in reaction to J.W. Corrington's introduction to the volume. Corrington had fulsomely praised Bukowski's poetic use of the 'human speaking voice' and his language 'devoid of the affectations, devices and mannerisms that have taken over academic verse and packed the university and commercial quarterlies....What Wordsworth claimed to have in mind, what William Carlos Williams claimed to have done, what Rimbaud actually did do in French, Bukowski has accomplished for the English language'.

Corrington taught at Northwestern University and was a correspondent of Bukowski, Jon Edgar Webb and Jory Sherman during the 1960s. As well as writing the introduction to It Catches and an essay in The Outsider, Corrington published an interesting article, 'Charles Bukowski and the Savage Surfaces', in Northwestern Review during the Fall of 1963. He identified Bukowski's 'refusal to become trapped in the cerebral' that marked 'the savage quality, the surface dynamism of his poetry'.[50]

Hugh Fox was another academic active in the small press scene known to Bukowski, Blazek and levy; he edited Ghost Dance magazine and taught at Michigan State University. In 1968, Abyss Books of Somerville, Massachussets, brought out his Charles Bukowski: A Critical and Bibliographical Study. This useful, short preliminary assessment included a listing of the earliest publishing events of Bukowski's career, and also a bibliography of many already-obscure magazine appearances. Fox came up with some insightful observations on his work of a general nature, but the discussion of the merits and meanings of individual poems is often wayward; in addition, the occasional interjections of Hippy jargon make the study rather a period piece. The critic did note Bukowski's death-centered, Existential concerns, which he attributed to an 'Eastern-European slant...a kind of slavic nihilism that completely rejects everything that forms the American Way....a dark negative world-view'. There was also the careful, predictably incongruous imagery of his early work to be commented upon; Fox stated that in spite of a claimed fidelity to 'reality', it is 'always escaping its normal rules and procedures, and under Bukowski's guidance it swells to fantastic dream proportions'. In conclusion, Fox confidently called him 'Henry Miller's

successor on the American literary scene', and crowned him 'King of the meat and cement poets' (that is, Blazek, levy and company) who were 'a continuation and extension of the reality-opening aspects of the Beats without moving into their psychedelically filtered sense of wonder and beauty. In Bukowski's world there is little wonder, and beauty has its foundations deeply sunk into ugliness'.[51]

The bibliographical section of Fox's work was almost immediately superseded by the appearance of Sanford Dorbin, whose A Bibliography of Charles Bukowski (1969) records details of Bukowski's publications and magazine appearances (441 poems published up to September 1969), plus critical commentary and ephemera. This careful work is an invaluable source of information and reference. Since then, only Al Fogel's Charles Bukowski: A Comprehensive Checklist (1982) has attempted some updating of the book details, though Bradford Morrow and Seamus Cooney's A Bibliography of the Black Sparrow Press (1982) does contain useful information on Bukowski's publications with the press.

The origins of the Black Sparrow Press go back to the mid-1960s and the friendship between Bukowski and John Martin, who first met at the home of the Los Angeles poet John Thomas. This pivotal event in Bukowski's career was once described as 'Mr Rolls meeting Mr Royce'.[52] At that time, Martin was 'the manager of an office furniture supply company and...a collector of rare books'.[53] He began to print broadside Bukowski poems in signed, limited editions on good quality paper. The first of these, 'True Story', appeared during April 1966 and a further six followed over the course of the next year. Joe Wolberg quotes Martin as saying that these first efforts were not for sale. 'I had nobody to sell them to. I think I did thirty in

each edition, so I would give him [Bukowski] thirty dollars, but that, amazingly, was very encouraging...it was like business'.[54] By 1963, the newly-formed press was ready to become Bukowski's regular publisher. As Bukowski tells the story, John Thomas was responsible for typing up a manuscript of new poems that became At Terror Street and Agony Way, using a private tape recording after the originals had been thrown out into the garbage can. This debut volume was published in seventy-five hardcover and 800 softcover copies, with a signed, limited edition and de-luxe copies besides.

Bukowski's breakthrough to international repute was presaged by the inclusion of his work in the Penguin Modern Poets series in 1969, in a volume which he shared with Harold Norse and Philip Lamantia. Essex House, a North Hollywood press, brought out a selection of his Open City columns in an edition size of 28,000 copies. This was reissued by City Lights Books in 1973. A huge collection of his stories, most of which had appeared in the Underground press, was also published by City Lights Books, thus cementing a nominal link with the Beats.

The reputation that Bukowski had long enjoyed in the American small press scene had by the early 1970s begun to be noticed in Britain and Europe. The Welsh magazine 2nd Aeon was particularly attentive to his work, printing several poems, and reviewing his books. John Tripp responded affirmatively to Mockingbird Wish Me Luck (1972) and called its author 'the high priest of the disinherited'. In another issue, a review of Erections... recognized Bukowski as 'a good writer, a tale spinner of the finest fashion', in spite of the repetitiousness that caused the stories to be 'mostly centered around horse racing, women, drinking, women,

drinking,women & drinking'.[55]

But the most significant European champion of Bukowski was the West German writer and translator Carl Weissner, who had spent some time in the United States during the 1960s and was well-connected amongst the small press scene. He and Bukowski had corresponded since 1966,when the young West German set up a little magazine called Klactoveedsedsteen. Weissner had in fact first noticed Bukowski's verse in a British magazine,Iconolatre,(edited by Alex Hand in West Hartlepool),an issue which also contained work by George Dowden and Kevin Crossley-Holland. In a fascinating recent interview with Jay Dougherty,Weissner outlined the contexts of his passion for contemporary American writing, and the progress of his career as a translator. As well as most of Bukowski's books,Weissner has made available to German readers the works of Allen Ginsberg,William Burroughs,Nelson Algren,Denton Welch,Bob Dylan,Frank Zappa, Hunter Thompson and Gerald Locklin. His first Bukowskian translation,Notes of a Dirty Old Man,was done for the commercial publisher Melzer Verlag; sales were disappointing,only 1,200 copies sold of the first edition. The impact that Bukowski's work was to make in West Germany did not manifest itself until the 1974 appearance of a volume of poems,stories,correspondence and photographs with the title Gedichte die einer schrieb bevor er im 8. Stockwerk aus dem Fenster sprang (auspiciously borrowed from the 1968 Poetry XChange chapbook Poems Written Before Jumping Out of an 8 Story Window.)The book sold over 50,000 copies,and marked the beginning of Bukowski's ascent to bestseller status in that country.[56]

One further aspect of Bukowski's dealings with the small press and Underground newspaper environment is worth commenting on: the numerous interviews given by the author from 1963 onwards, which have helped explain his purposes, but more particularly have built up the Bukowski image in readers' minds. His idiosyncratic replies and deadpan pronouncements, sometimes using the interviewer as a 'straight man' for his comic gifts, are often amusing and thoughtful. The first such interview was given to Arnold L.Kaye of the Chicago Literary Times in 1963. The preamble described Bukowski as looking like 'a retired junkie', with 'sad eyes, weary voice and [a] silk dressing gown'. The interviewer demanded to know how much of his work was 'frankly autobiographical', to which Bukowski replied, 'Almost all. Ninety-nine out of a hundred, if I have written a hundred. The other one was dreamed up. I was never in the Belgian Congo'. The author was then asked whether residence in Los Angeles helped or hindered his writing: 'It doesn't matter where you write so long as you have the walls, typewriter, paper, beer. You can write out of a volcano pit. Say, do you think I could get 20 poets to chip in a buck a week to keep me out of jail?'. When Kaye asked him to give a view on 'the role of the poet in this world-mess', the response seemed to be that the poet was irrelevant to modern society: 'the role of the poet is almost nothing... drearily nothing. And when he steps outside of his boots and tries to get tough as our dear Ezra [Pound] did, he will get his pink little ass slapped'. As a parting shot, Bukowski reflected that 'Mickey Mouse had a greater influence on the American public than Shakespeare, Milton, Dante, Rabelais, Schostakovitch, Lenin and/or Van Gogh. Which says "What?" about the American public. Disneyland remains

the central attraction of Southern California, but the graveyard remains our reality'.[57]

An interview with Don Strachan which appeared in L.A. Free Press (23 July 1971) found Bukowski in more depressed mood, a state which Strachan called 'a pulpy receptacle of bad karma, self-pity and vengeance'. He noted Bukowski's seemingly laisser-faire attitude to drugs and drink: 'I guess anything that lets you get out of your head, it's good to take it'. The author then 'started explaining to Linda King, a sculptor and his then-current girlfriend, the logic of committing suicide until she got upset'.[58]

Perhaps the most wide-ranging interview that Bukowski has thus far given was with Robert Wennersten, which appeared in a 1974 issue of London Magazine; the publication had brought out a British edition of his stories, under the title of one of the most striking of them, Life and Death in the Charity Ward (1974). Bukowski's comments on his writing methods and attitudes are illuminating, but equally interesting are his hints as to the psychological background of his work. For instance, he refers to an itinerant phase of his life, presumably the immediate Post War period:

> I've done my travelling...at one time I had this idea that one could live on a bus forever: travelling, eating, getting off, shitting, getting back on that bus ....I had the strange idea that one could stay in motion forever....Of course, I deliberately went to New York broke. I went to every town broke in order to learn that town from the bottom....I got a bottom view, which I didn't like; but I was more interested in what was going on at the bottom.

One might speculate that this early search for a coherent identity as a person and as a writer was realized only when Bukowski arrived back at his adoptive home-town,

Los Angeles, and the work of his mature career began, informed by his travel experiences, in particular 'what was going on at the bottom'.

Bukowski is apt to compare the writer to a soldier, or a boxer, or athlete (as Bertolt Brecht sometimes did), any occupation that combines physical and mental activity. This is perhaps why he remarked to Wennersten that 'I can't write except off a typewriter. The typewriter keeps it strict and confined....I've tried to write long hand: it doesn't work....No machine-gun sounds, you know. No action'. The list of his early literary heroes is perhaps a little surprising, but Bukowski's attitude to them is not.

> Auden was pretty good. When I was young and I read, I liked a lot of Auden...I liked that whole gang: Auden, MacLeish, Eliot...but when I come back on them now, they don't strike me the same way....They say good things, and they write it well; but they're too careful for me now....I admire Conrad Aiken very much ....Ginsberg...writes a lot of good lines....I hit the Library pretty hard in my early days.... J.D. Salinger, early Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson... but they all got bad.[59]

An upbeat Bukowski re-surfaced in a 1980 interview in the West Coast publication Easy Reader. He told Michael Andrews, 'We have our heroes, you know - John Dillinger, Humphrey Bogart, even Clark Gable....Cagney, yeah. I try to stay away from writers. Writers are to be avoided. Rule number one. I don't know what rule number two is'. Touching on the reasons for his attendance at racetracks (which when speaking to Wennersten he had explicitly compared to Hemingway's obsession with bullfights), Bukowski explained that it was indeed connected to his life as a writer. 'I go to the track, [and] try to get a rhythm going. Then I come back and drink and type. If I stayed in all day

looking at the typewriter,it wouldn't work....There's a lot of death at the track,a lot of dead people. Maybe that's what I want to see.[60]

Though it took Bukowski many years to gain recognition from a wider reading public,and to some extent he still remains a cult figure,the fact that his writing evolved within the sphere of little magazines,small presses and Underground newspapers has been entirely beneficial to him. His contacts,critics,admirers and publishers within this environment have freely promoted his mystique of literary Outsiderdom,his image of antagonism to polite writing and established authority. Moreover,Bukowski has not had to compromise his work in order to satisfy pre-existing mainstream publishers. Black Sparrow Press,now an important publishing entity,was set up precisely to cater for Bukowski's burgeoning creativity in both verse and prose, at a time in the latter part of the 1960s when his repute was gaining momentum nationally and internationally. Over the last two decades he has been able to garner increased attention and remuneration from his ideal publishing circumstances,while retaining contacts among the literary avant-garde in the United States which have served him so well. Bukowski has stuck relentlessly to the task of writing to satisfy himself,of working from his own marble, as he told Jon Edgar Webb. By doing so he has attained considerable kudos for his art and remuneration from it, freedom as a writer,and a continuing status as an Underground hero.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

I. Henry Miller comment in Jory Sherman, Bukowski: Friendship, Fame and Bestial Myth, (Augusta, Georgia, I98I), p.29. Walter Lowenfels comment in A Bukowski Sampler, edited by Douglas Blazek, (Madison, Wisconsin, I969; reprinted with essay, Houston, Texas, I979), p.7. David Montrose, 'Third Coming', New Edinburgh Review, 52, (I980) 30-3I, (p.30).

2. 'Object Lesson', The Roominghouse Madrigals, (Santa Rosa California, I988), pp.82-83.

3. 'The Look', The Roominghouse Madrigals, p.II4.

4. Charles Bukowski, letter to Jon Edgar Webb, in The Outsider, 3, (I963), p.92.

5. The Bukowski/Purdy Letters I964-I974, edited by Seamus Cooney, (Sutton West and Santa Barbara, I983), p.88.

6. 'Layover', A Bukowski Sampler, p.50.

7. Quoted in Hugh Fox, Charles Bukowski, A Critical and Bibliographical Study, (Somerville, Massachussets, I968), p.4.

8. Charles Bukowski, letter to Webb, The Outsider, 3, p.78.

9. Al Fogel, Charles Bukowski: A Comprehensive Checklist I946-I982, (Miami, Florida, I982).

I0. Sherman, Friendship, Fame and Bestial Myth, p.I3.

II. 'When Jon Webb began emerging from the New Orleans literary underground, he wrote me and his son, Jon Jr. came by my pad in San Francisco. They asked me to be the West Coast Editor for the first issue of THE OUTSIDER. First on my list of contributors was Bukowski'. Sherman, Friendship, Fame and Bestial Myth, p.I9.

I2. Charles Bukowski essay, in The Wormwood Review, Jon Edgar Webb Memorial Issue, 45, (I972), 3-II, (p.5).

I3. Gene Frumkin, Joseph Friedman comments in The Outsider, 3, p.58, p.60.

I4. R.R. Cuscaden, 'Charles Bukowski: Poet In a Ruined Landscape', The Outsider, 3, 62-65, (p.65).

I5. J.W. Corrington, 'Charles Bukowski: Three Poems', The Outsider, 3, pp.66-70.

I6. Jon Edgar Webb comment on flyer attached to a copy of Crucifix in a Deathhand (New York, I965).
Bukowski comment in The Bukowski/Purdy Letters, p.89.

I7. The Bukowski/Purdy Letters, p.55.

I8. Ormonde Plater, 'Tough Poems', Vieux Carre Courier, 2, no.I4, (I965), p.6.

I9. The Bukowski/Purdy Letters,p.78.

20. Joe Wolberg, 'Bukowski: The People's Poet', Oui,(c.I980) 44-49,II8-I20 (p.II8).

2I. Hugh Fox, A Critical and Bibliographical Study,p.6.

22. Len Fulton comment in Morris Edelson, 'Six Little Magazines',(unpublished doctoral dissertation,University of Wisconsin,I973),p.30.

23. The Bukowski/Purdy Letters,p.29,p.88.

24. Douglas Blazek,editorial,Olé,I,(I964),n.p.

25. Steve Richmond,untitled poem,Olé,3,(I965),n.p.

26. Douglas Blazek,'State of the Writer Message at 5 a.m.', Climbing Blind, (Cardiff,I968),pp.8-9.

27. Douglas Blazek,letters dated 24 and 29 December I965, in Life In a Common Gun, (Madison,Wisconsin,I968),n.p.

28. 'O,We Are the Outcasts,O We Burn in Wondrous Flame', Olé,4,(I966),n.p.

29. Bukowski reviewed Allen Ginsberg,Empty Mirror;Kathleen Fraser,Change of Address and Other Poems;Louis Zukofsky, A Test of Poetry;J.W.Corrington,The Anatomy of Love and Other Poems in Olé,7,(I967),n.p.
Charles Bukowski essay,'The Old Pro',in Olé,3,(I965),n.p. (Harold Norse Special Issue).

30. William Burroughs,introduction,in Harold Chapman, The Beat Hotel, (Montpellier,France,I984),p.6.

3I. The Bukowski poems which may make reference to her art,life,and suicide,include 'Letter From Too Far' in Burning in Water...p.84,and 'For One I Knew' and 'An Almost Made-Up Poem' in Love Is a Dog From Hell.

32. Bukowski letter to Blazek,A Bukowski Sampler,pp.3-5.

33. Bukowski letter to Carl Weissner,reprinted in Dougherty/Bukowski interview,Gargoyle,35,p.I02.

34. Douglas Blazek,letter to Brown Miller,reprinted in A Tribute to Jim Lowell, (Cleveland,Ohio,I967),n.p.

35. Eric Mottram,'Sixties American Poetry,Poetics and Poetic Movements',in History of Literature in the English Language,9,American Literature Since I900, (London,I975), pp.27I-3II,(p.30I).

36. Charles Bukowski essay,'Good Art,Creation...', in A Tribute to Jim Lowell,n.p.

37. Flyer sent out by levy and kryss,given to the present author by the poet and bookseller Alan Halsey.
Letter re levy in Open Skull,I,(I967),p.27.

38. Eric Mottram,'Sixties American Poetry...',p.302.

39. Morris Edelson, 'Six Little Magazines', p.234.

40. Hugh Fox, A Critical and Bibliographical Study, p.33.

41. Open City, 83, (20 December 1968), p.3.
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42. Charles Bukowski, Notes of a Dirty Old Man, (North Hollywood, California, 1969; reissued San Francisco, 1973), p.7.

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45. Charles Bukowski, interview with Michael Andrews, Easy Reader, X, no.31, (April 10, 1980), 1, 9-12, (p.11).

46. 'The Underground', The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over the Hills, (Los Angeles, 1969), pp.144-145.

47. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, letter to COSMEP Conference, reprinted in Intrepid, 21/22, (1971), pp.12-13.

48. Robert Creeley, 'Think What's Got Away', Poetry Chicago, 102, no.1, (April 1963), p.48.

49. Dabney Stuart, '7 Poets & a Playwright', Poetry Chicago, 104, no.4, (July 1964), pp.263-264.

50. Corrington introduction to It Catches... quoted in Glenn Esterley, 'The Pock-Marked Poetry of Charles Bukowski' Rolling Stone, 215, (1976) 10-17, (p.15).
J.W. Corrington, 'Charles Bukowski and the Savage Surfaces', Northwest Review, VI, no.4, (Fall 1963), 123-129.

51. Hugh Fox, A Critical and Bibliographical Study, p.10, p.11, p.94.

52. Joe Wolberg, 'Bukowski: The People's Poet', Oui, p.119.

53. Charles Bukowski, 'Author's Introduction', Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame, n.p.

54. Wolberg, Oui, p.119.

55. John Tripp, review of Mockingbird Wish Me Luck, in 2nd Aeon, 19/21, (1974)
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56. Jay Dougherty, 'Translating Bukowski and the Beats: An Interview with Carl Weissner', Gargoyle, 35, (1988) 68-86.

57. Arnold L.Kaye, 'Charles Bukowski Speaks Out', _Chicago Literary Times_, 2,no.4, (March I963) pp.I-2.

58. Don Strachan, 'An Evening with Chuck Buk', _L.A.Free Press,_ (23 July I97I),p.4.

59. Wennersten/Bukowski interview, _London Magazine_, pp.35-54.

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CHAPTER THREE: MODERNISM, SURREALISM, EXISTENTIALISM AND BEATNESS

Like his contemporaries in the post-1945 American literary generation, Bukowski has evolved as a writer in the period after the heyday of Modernism, but while the artistic and philosophical effects of Surrealism and Existentialism were still marked. As with the Beat writers, the inherent Romanticism of Bukowski's work has been crucially qualified by absorption of these earlier movements' tactics and ideologies - much to its benefit. The task in this chapter is to tease out borrowings from each of these movements in his early work, show their discernible trace in the praxis of the mature writer, and to discuss certain affinities with and differences from the Beats.

Though Bukowski's main access to Modernism is through the Carlos Williams line of Open Form American verse, and also the structural model provided by Hemingway's early prose, he took freely from the Modernist tactic-bag as a tyro. The Moderns provided the models, and inspiration, he needed to find his own voice as a writer. Moreover, when reading Bukowski's work in bulk one is struck by the vast number of references to Moderns in all the arts, albeit often couched in terms of affectionate irreverence. Even a novelist whom Bukowski would seem to have little time for, such as William Faulkner, is occasionally alluded to. 'As I Lay Dying' is a minor poem of the mid-1960s whose speaker recalls the youthful impact of reading Faulkner's novel of the same title. The humour of an episode in 'The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over the Hills' depends upon the incongruity of Faulkner being mistaken for a horse-race jockey by 'the rummy downstairs':

'you're in a bad mood',he said.
'sure',I said,'haven't you heard? Faulkner's dead'.
'Faulkner? wasn't he a bullring jock? Pomona Fairgr-
ounds?
Rudioso? Caliente? you knew the kid?'
'I knew the kid',I said
and then walked on upstairs.
I

A I982 poem,'The Last Generation',contrasts the situation of contemporary poets with that of the Heroic Age of Modernism,whose chief figures are treated with familiarity, but certainly not with contempt:

as I read of the suicide of Harry Crosby in his hotel
room
with his whore
that seems as real to me as the faucet dripping now
in my bathroom sink.

I like to read about them:. Joyce blind and prowling the
bookstores like a tarantula,they said.
Dos Passos with his clipped newscasts using a pink type-
writer ribbon.
D.H. horny and pissed-off,H.D. being smart enough to
use
her initials which seemed much more literary than Hilda
Doolittle...
there were other curious creatures: Richard
Aldington,Teddy Dreiser,F.Scott,Hart Crane,Wyndham
Lewis,the
Black Sun Press.

but to me,the twenties centered mostly on Hemingway
coming out of the war and beginning to type. 2

But before discussing Bukowski's engagement with certain aspects of Modernism,it is necessary to briefly recapitulate the movement itself.

Modernism was an international cultural force embracing all of the arts,whose first riotous stirrings were felt in the years immediately preceding the First World War. It is an umbrella term for a plethora of distinct groups - the Imagists,Vorticists,Futurists,Cubists,etc - and individual artists united by an interest in formal innovation. Such

is the galaxy of artworks vivified by Modernism, and the stature of those associated with it - Pound, Eliot, Williams, Joyce, Woolf, Hemingway, Faulkner, Lewis, Brecht, Lorca, Pessoa, Picasso, Moore, Gaudier-Brzeska, Matisse, Stravinsky, Eisenstein *et alios* - that definitions of the movement's aims, and its achievements, are still being argued. But many specific elements of the Modernist reforming legacy have been identified and analyzed with great subtlety by critics like Hugh Kenner, Guy Davenport, Irving Howe, and others generally enthused by its ambitions. It is generally agreed that Modernist art is characterized by a desire to problematize the relationship between artistic language and human perception in ways adequate to the change, complexity and uncertainty of this century. Yet, in Irving Howe's words, there is an antithesis at the heart of the project of Modernism; on the one hand 'a choking nausea before the idea of culture', and on the other, 'the enormous ambition not to remake the world...but to reinvent the terms of reality'.[3]

More exactly, Modernism constituted a revolution in artistic techniques. Typical features of Modernist tactics in literature, for example, include the use of montage to juxtapose differing narratives (as in Faulkner's novels, or Hemingway's *In Our Time*); collage (found in *Paterson*, or *The Cantos*) where differing sorts of material, such as letters or Chinese ideograms, are incorporated into a text; palimpsest, where a new work is written, or re-written over the top of a pre-existing entity (as in *Ulysses*, which parallels Homer's *Odyssey* and parodies many styles of writing); and typographical experiments, using the typewriter to direct lineation (e.e. cummings' verse is an obvious example of this, but Carlos Williams, Olson and

Zukofsky also make prevalent use of the device).

There are a number of instances of these devices in Bukowski's work of the 1950s and 1960s, though they rarely contribute to his strongest verse. A poem released as a Hearse broadside in 1960, 'His Wife, the Painter', exhibits both collage and montage. It juxtaposes a conversation between a couple with the bitter internal monologue of one of them, and also incorporates details of paintings by Daumier, Corot, and Orozco.[4] His poem 'Sunflower' clearly seeks to combine surreal imagery with palimpsestic layering.

> the bird time of honey
> bangs hello
> we are going everywhere into the
> SKY
> now
> without
> grief or criticism
>
> good night
> sea elephant
> good night
> Greta Garbo
> good night
> steam shovel
> good night
> spaghetti and beer[5]

This passage may well be a re-write and send-up of the ending of 'The Game of Chess' section in The Waste Land ('good night, sweet ladies', etc), which itself is an echo of Ophelia's last words before her death in Hamlet. One may detect similarly parodic intentions at work in 'An Argument Over Marshal Foch', whose unknown interlocutors fight over the merits of the First World War commander:

> I slapped a wet rubber glove down
> his mouth and cut the wire.
> outside the crickets were chirping like
> mad: Foch, Foch, Foch, Foch!
> they chirped.[6]

Again, this could well be an ironic invocation of lines in The Waste Land - 'Twit twit twit/ Jug jug jug jug jug jug' - which refer to the rape of Philomel, 'by the barbarous king/ So rudely forced'.[7] While Bukowski's verse usually keeps itself to the left-hand margin of the page, some do play with typographical freedoms when the subject seems appropriate. A 1966 poem, 'The Hairy, Hairy Fist, and Love Will Die', ranges over the page in an attempt to capture the mental disorientation described by its narrator, who is manically depressed:

```
there will be no
           bottom
                the soul will fall like a wounded
                bird of Paradise
           into
the most horrible stinking swill of
           shit
and
still      no death
                still no
           death
               you will fail at
             death
           too
```
[8]

The lineation is clearly a product of the typewriter's facility to align words exactly; the apparently random field of words in this excerpt in fact requires only four vertical settings. Some of the line-endings in others of his poems seem to occur simply because the parameter of the typewriter line has been reached.

The metrical experiments conducted by the Anglo-American Modernist poets have long been a vital resource for contemporary poets. The Imagists proposed a break with many literary conventions, their ideas being summarised in a manifesto drafted by Ezra Pound:

> To use the language of common speech....To create new rhythms....We do not insist upon 'free verse' as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as a principle of liberty. We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free-verse than in conventional forms. In poetry, a new cadence means a new idea....We believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous.[9]

Pound's own verse of that period evolved away from the use rhyme-schemes, regular line-lengths and rhythms, and moved in the direction (summed up by F.S.Flint, now a somewhat neglected poet) as 'composition in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome'.[10] Those stay-at-home American Modernists excellently discussed in Hugh Kenner's <u>A Homemade World</u> (1975) sought still more radical ways of structuring their poetry, cutting features inherited from English verse practice (inimical to their literary nationalism), while retaining essential patternings intrinsic to verse. Kenner dissects the ingenuity of Marianne Moore's syllabic grids, the Objectivists' dogged engineering of their machines made of words, and Carlos Williams' insistence that a New Measure for American poetry could and should come from speech. Lines might be divided and spaced so as to indicate rhythmic breaks in spoken language. Williams expressed himself thus: 'where else can what we are seeking arise from but speech, from American speech as distinct from English speech...from what we hear in America'.[11] Such concerns run back to Whitman and the Romantics, and forward into the Post-Modern era in American verse. The use that poets following the Williams line have made of the American language has been most various. The critic Stephen Fredman has pointed out that

> Critics often point to the employment of open form as a defense against European precedent; the other, less-remarked, side of such usage has been the gradual creation of a formal vocabulary and poetic stance of our own. For instance, the lines of Whitman, Pound, Williams, Olson, and Creeley are all available to poets in this tradition as distinct formal possibilities; these various poetic lines carry along with them characteristic American poetic stances, from the operatic or oratorical to the meditational or notational.[12]

Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara, Robert Duncan, Ed Dorn *et al* can all be seen as Open Form poets, in the sense of writing an energized, often scrupulously observed type of free verse that draws for its dynamic on the sounds and contours of American speech. They have all produced distinctively different work from the raw material. Bukowski should be regarded as another, though less-theorized, writer of this tradition. The Williams line makes a detour through Bukowski territory.

Early on, Bukowski carried out several exercises in the Williams mode. 'I Taste the Ashes of Your Death', a poem published in 1959, is strongly reminiscent of Williams' rigorous vowel music. A lyric poem, that *rara avis* in Bukowski's *oeuvre*, it records a moment of poignant awareness as an accidental soaking from a wet tree crosses with the memory of a dead lover:

> the blossoms shake
> sudden water
> down my sleeve,
> sudden water
> cool and clean
> as snow -
> as the stem-sharp
> swords
> go in
> against your breast
> and the sweet wild
> rocks
> leap over
> and lock us in.[13]

Formally, the poem is a dance for words of one or two syllables. A backbone of internal rhymes is organized around what is generally a four-syllable line, but clearly this is a patterning not achieved through any rigid syllabic grid, but played by ear. Alliterative and assonantal effects are in evidence throughout; a selection of 's' and 'c' sounds, some full rhymes and half-rhymes ('rocks'/'lock' 'against'/'breast') are laid out for listening pleasure. The poem itself, however, is something of a dead-end. The blossoms, snow, swords and sweet wild rocks were soon to be jettisoned in favour of a harsher rub against existence.

The deceptively simple 'I Cannot Stand Tears' was in fact published a year before 'I Taste the Ashes of Your Death', but it is much more significant in showing the way ahead for his work. A story of life, death, art and confusion is told in the voice of a painter of rural landscapes:

> there were several hundred fools
> around the goose who broke his leg
> trying to decide
> what to do
> when the guard walked up
> and pulled out his cannon
> and the issue was finished
> except for a woman
> who ran out of a hut
> claiming he'd killed her pet
> but the guard rubbed his straps
> and told her
> kiss my ass
> take it to the president;
> the bird was crying
> and I cannot stand tears.
> I folded my canvas
> and went further down the road:
> the bastards had ruined
> my landscape.[14]

The poem enacts itself very rapidly. By slowing down the processes, one first notes the language employed: extreme simplicity is the key feature, allied to a significant use

of slang terms and sexual innuendos. The word 'cannon' is American slang for the penis, while the use of the word 'issue' almost immediately afterwards is suggestive of male ejaculation; the guard pulls out his gun and it is, in both senses, all over. These innuendos reinforce other vernacular expressions ('take it to the president', 'kiss my ass', 'the bastards'), all of which have the effect of lowering the rhetorical tone. Though the poem's speaker may sneer at the 'several hundred fools', he is not linguistically divorced from them.

The poem consists of two sentences, each of which has two clauses. Only two words are of more than one or two syllables; line-lengths vary between three and eight syllables; it hovers around, but rarely fulfils, a six-syllable line. The first sentence piles up subsidiary clauses, while the second sentence is short and to the point. Again, the first sentence is syntactically complex, but the discrete phrases are yoked together by simple conjunctions (when, and, but) and is about 'them' and 'their' reaction, whilst the second is about 'me' and 'my' reaction. Another language ambiguity is allowed to arise: the opening four lines resolve themselves around a split-infinitive. Is it the goose or the crowd trying to decide what to do? This is precisely the sort of error common in speech but usually erased from written texts. By leaving it in, Bukowski is signalling an intention to align his verse with spoken practices, with the conventions of speech rather than of writing. This aspect of his praxis is more fully discussed in the fourth chapter.

The poem explores the uneasy relation of art and life, between masculine sensitivity and aggression. The guard is a sensitive tough guy, who 'cannot stand tears'. He

shoots the bird, asserts his authority, and is bombastic, even leeringly suggestive ('the guard rubbed his straps/ ...kiss my ass') towards the woman. The painter-narrator laments the intrusion of the world, with all its disturbing anarchy and sexually-driven life forces, into his previously untroubled landscape, which has now been ruined. Yet the poem is actually written against just such an aesthete who regrets human realities; four-fifths of the poem is taken up by the kind of scene that the painter has no use for. By implication, the art that is favoured is that which tries to capture some of the vibrant, messy experience that makes up life; tasteful artworks detached from humanity are not for this particular author a viable option. The poem's ambiguous language, its themes of sexuality, violence, art, are fused together superbly; understated, simple, and brief as it is, 'I Cannot Stand Tears' looks forward to his mature manner of narratorial aggrandizement.

Certainly the deepest influence on Bukowski's development came from Ernest Hemingway, perhaps the most accessible Modernist writer, the prose technician whose work still reached a popular audience. Hemingway's capacity to disguise artifice in a stripped-down, patterned language, the Existentialism realm that his work typically inhabits, the masculine role model and public image as 'Papa'; all this has been important to Bukowski. References to his mentor abound all through Bukowski's works, especially in early poems where the hat-doffing and attitudinizing can be tiresome. The speaker of 'Parts of an Opera, Parts of a Guitar, Parts of Nowhere' fights in an alley with 'a little Mexican mean as a tarantula' and casually remarks that 'I took him quite/easily and I felt like Hemingway'. The poem 'Suicide' favourably compares Hemingway with Robert

Frost, suggesting that 'Ernie tagging himself/when the time was ready' was a more admirable course of action than Frost 'going on,/licking the boots of politicians'. The rather trite conclusion reached is that 'well, Ernie's won/ another round'.[15]

Hugh Kenner noticed that Hemingway's accounts of his beginnings as a writer portray a 'martyr to literature, starving while he sought to write One True Sentence'. In very similar vein, Bukowski emphasizes the physical hardship endured for the sake of his art. One of his essays opens as follows: 'In the days when I thought I was a genius and starved and nobody published me I used to waste much more time in the libraries than I do now'.[16] Both writers tend to express their aesthetics in terms of Existential authenticity, maintaining that the artist must engage with the world, and be eroded and shaped by it, in order to produce worthwhile work. Hemingway's preface to The First Forty-Nine Stories (I944) claimed that 'In going where you have to go, and doing what you have to do, and seeing what you have to see, you dull and blunt the instrument you write with. But I would rather have it bent and dulled...and know that I had something to write about, than to have it bright and shining and nothing to say'. In I973, Bukowski referred to his work in these terms, 'the hard life created the hard line and by the hard line I mean the true line devoid of ornament'.[17]

Certain early Bukowski poems concern the bullfight, a Hemingwayan obsession, but they take a rather less heroic view of such spectacles than Hemingway was apt to do in Death in the Afternoon (I932). In 'Brave Bull', the speaker is bewildered, not knowing 'that the Mexicans/did this'. His sympathies are with the dead bull, and, preoccupied with

with brooding thoughts,he hardly notices the matador:

and through the long tunnels and minatory glances,
the elbows and feet and eyes,I prayed for California,
and the dead bull
in man
and in me,
and I clasped my hands
deep within my
pockets,seized darkness,
and moved on.
18

Bukowski published two poems on the subject of bullfighting in 1961,the year of the exhausted Hemingway's suicide. These are again set in Mexico,and once more the tone is subdued. 'The Priest and the Matador' opens with a meditation on the pathos of the bull's demise:

in the slow Mexican air I watched the bull die
and they cut off his ear,and his great head held
no more terror than a rock.

The description implies an estrangement from the baying crowds,'they' who demand that the ritual of cutting off the bull's ear be gone through. In the rather sonorous poem 'Side of the Sun',this mistrust is even more marked:

the bulls are grand as the side of the sun
and although they kill them for the stale crowds,
it is the bull that burns the fire,
and although there are cowardly bulls as
there are cowardly matadors and cowardly men,
generally the bull stands pure
and dies pure
untouched by symbols or cliques or false loves,
and when they drag him out
nothing has died
something has passed
and the eventual stench
is the world.
19

This is not a description of the bullfight so much as a version of its moral content. The bull is a vital life

force, sacrificed to 'the stale crowds', whose 'cliques and false loves' equally sicken the speaker. He is alone in that crowd convinced by all that he sees that Hell - as Sartre observed - is other people. The sour misanthropic tone is occasioned by the sight of humanity at their bloodthirsty worst, and the knowledge of 'the eventual stench' which 'is' the world itself.

Bukowski was never simply another Hemingway idolator or impersonator, content to trudge round in the large footsteps of 'Papa' and endorse received attitudes. Even more importantly, he shrewdly used certain building blocks of Hemingway's prose art as the basis for his own purposes in verse. Hemingway's structural model of repetition-with-artful variation proved a valuable asset in this respect. To trace a line of stylistic progress accurately, one must first turn back to Hemingway's own chief teacher, Gertrude Stein. In a rare moment of generosity to Stein in his Paris memoir <u>A Moveable Feast</u>, published posthumously in 1964, Hemingway identified the elements that attracted him to her experimental work, and why he was prepared to propagandize for it - and persuade Ford Madox Ford to serialize <u>The Making of Americans</u> in <u>the transatlantic review</u>:

> She had...discovered many truths about rhythms and the uses of words in repetition that were valid and valuable and she talked well about them. But she disliked the drudgery of revision and the obligation to make her writing intelligible, although she needed to have publication and official acceptance, especially for the unbelievably long book called <u>The Making of Americans</u>. This book began magnificently, went on very well for a long way with great stretches of great brilliance and then went on endlessly in repetitions that a more conscientious writer would have put in the waste basket.[20]

Hemingway also mentions his admiration for Stein's book

Three Lives (I909), which adopts a deliberately naive tone to tell the stories of its three main characters. The Steinian method of repetition and summary can be glimpsed on the first page of 'The Good Anna':

> Anna managed the whole little house for Miss Mathilda. It was a funny little house....They were funny little houses, two stories high, with red brick fronts and long white steps. This one little house was always very full with Miss Mathilda, an under servant, stray dogs and cats and Anna's voice that scolded, managed, grumbled all day long.[2I]
>
> (my underlinings)

The rhythm of this banal narrative is insistent; the repetitions differ slightly each time they occur, and the trio of verbs in the final phrase ('scolded, managed, grumbled') has the effect of binding the passage together. Hemingway's first novel The Sun Also Rises (I926) was written at a time when he was still very impressed by Stein and her prose methods. The book's structural relation to the example of the previous passage can easily be seen.

> The fiesta was really started. It kept up day and night for seven days. The dancing kept up, the drinking kept up, the noise went on. The things that happened could only have happened during a fiesta. Everything became quite unreal finally and it seemed as though nothing could have any consequences. It seemed out of place to think of consequences during the fiesta. All during the fiesta you had the feeling even when it was quiet, that you had to shout any remark to make it heard. It was the same feeling about any action. It was a fiesta and it went on for seven days.[22]
>
> (my underlinings)

This is a remarkably economical prose description, yet it is full of rhythmical effects generally associated with verse. Hemingway achieves this by the pattern of the repetitions. The word 'fiesta' is repeated five times, occuring strategically in the first and last sentences; 'seemed' and 'happened' are rapidly repeated, as are 'consequences' and

'feeling'. The phrase 'kept up' is used three times at the start of the passage, while 'seven days' joins 'fiesta' to commence and summarise the action described. The minor word 'it' recurs no less than eight times, and with increasing frequency towards the end. Hemingway's stylistic debt to Stein in terms of 'rhythms and the uses of words in repetition' is obvious, but the pupil has attained a much greater complexity of effect and readerly interest. It is unfair to consider Hemingway as Stein was wont to do - as her creation, her poodle - since there were compensatory influences on his work from European literature, as well as from the powerful artistic intellects of Pound and Ford. But one is here following a structural model. The story 'Up in Michigan' can be instructively compared to one of Bukowski's most celebrated and anthologized poems, 'Something For the Touts, the Nuns, the Grocery Clerks and You'.

Hemingway's story - which Gertrude Stein found <u>inaccrochable</u> (obscene) - tells of the clumsy seduction of a love-struck waitress by a drunken hunter recently returned from a successful trip. As one of his fictional icebergs, it becomes a fable of the hunter and the hunted, its real meaning that of the ultimate desolation of human relations. Structurally the tale moves through five sequential phases, which one can represent as follows:

<u>What Jim Gilmore does</u>
He bought the blacksmith shop....He was a good horse-shoer....He lived upstairs....He liked her face because

<u>What Liz Coates likes about Jim</u>
She liked it the way he walked....She liked it about his moustache....She liked it about how white his teeth were....She liked it very much that he didn't look like a blacksmith....She liked it how much D.J. Smith.... She liked it the way the hair

<u>How much Liz thinks about Jim</u>
Liz was thinking about Jim....Liz thought about him....

She couldn't sleep well for thinking about him....
It was fun to think about him

<u>Liz's fear as Jim seduces her</u>
Liz was terribly frightened....She was so frightened ....She was frightened....She was very frightened

<u>What Liz does while Jim sleeps</u>
Liz pushed him....She worked out from under him....
Liz leaned over and kissed him....She lifted his head a little....Liz started to cry [23]

While there are other sentence types dispersed amongst those listed,the unmistakeable pattern is for short sentences to be grouped together in paragraphic 'stanzas'. The shift from one sentence type to the next takes place precisely at the point at which the repetitions are in danger of becoming distractingly dull for the reader. The mood of the narrative alters slightly as the changeover occurs,developing interest further. The final sentence in most of these paragraphs tends to summarize what has gone before,thus binding the evoked associations together. As David Lodge perceived,though Hemingway resolved to purge his style of metaphors,he nevertheless 'contrived to retain in it the emotive resonance of metaphorical writing'.[24] Indeed,Ezra Pound originally hailed Hemingway as an Imagist poet in the medium of prose.

Bukowski's poem of the mid-I960s operates in a similar structural manner,though with more linguistic complexity. Its sixteen sequential phases can be schematized thus:

we have everything and we have nothing...
some men do it...
something at 8 a.m....
it's always early enough...
days with glass edges...
men who...
at a harbor...
or disgust or age or...
what do you see?...
sometimes the first...
the vacant lots are not bad...

trying to be red...
no wonder sometimes the women cry...
some of them want cocoa...
and if you go inside...
some do it naturally...[25]

Each of these sentence types is repeated two or three times, but Bukowski crucially departs from the Hemingwayan model. The poem has many more syntactic phases, sometimes parallel units within the same sentence, and the poem ends exactly as it had begun, with its most thematically potent statement, namely 'we have everything and we have nothing'. This is repeated, more or less entire, on five occasions and has several incomplete echoes - 'and nothing, and nothing'. The repetitions serve to underscore the poem's continual exposition of the omnipresence of death within life, and the ultimately illusory nature of what Pascal identified as _divèrtissements_. These are the temporary distractions - wine, women and song - employed and enjoyed by humankind, which have the effect of dulling the certain knowledge of impending death, in the passage of time. This is of course Hemingway's theme; _Death in the Afternoon_ reminds readers that 'all stories, if continued far enough, end in death, and he is no true story teller who would keep that from you'.[26]

'Something For the Touts...' waxes repetitiously eloquent on the subject of mortality.

we have everything and we have nothing.
some do it well enough for a while and
then give way. fame gets them or disgust
or age or lack of proper diet or ink...
or just natural change and decay -
the man you knew yesterday hooking
for ten rounds or drinking for 3 days and
3 nights by the Sawtooth mountains now
just something under a sheet or a cross
or a stone or under an easy delusion,
or packing a bible or a golf bag or a
briefcase: how they go, how they go - all
the ones you thought would never go.

Bukowski's poem builds up a compelling momentum in its survey of human life lived under sentence of death, but it contrives not to be at all bleak. On the contrary, it shows a great relish for existence, a desire to seize the moment:

> good days too of wine and shouting, fights
> in alleys, fat legs of women striven around
> your bowels buried in moans

Bukowski's poem embraces messy life and stoically accepts death; Hemingway's attitude to life and death was rather more brutal and fatalistic, his fictional creations being haunted (Nick Adams, Jake Barnes) by past encounters and forced to seek constant confrontation with Existential facts. Life is a losing game, but the style of the defeat seems important to Hemingway - hence the need for constant proof of masculine courage in the face of danger. Bukowski Man is much less heroic, much more of a natural survivor. But they are still beset by the same Existential anxieties, and later Bukowskian narrators tell their jokes, as it were, to cover over the same yawning crevasses under existence.

Bukowski uses the structural device of repetition and variation throughout his verse, but latterly this has been pared down and an element of humour is often present. Such a combination can be seen at work in a sardonic poem of the mid-I970s entitled 'Leaning On Wood'. Now there are only three sentence types used for purposes of repetition.

> there are 4 or 5 guys at the
> racetrack bar...
> there is a mirror behind the
> bar...
> the reflections are not
> kind...

The first statement is repeated,or has echoes,on four occasions. The second occurs twice,the third three times. For the losing punters,life indeed seems a game doomed to defeat. Very little action takes place in the narrative. Three pieces of advice about horse race betting are given, but it is not made clear whether this is a dialogue,or an obsessive monologue by one of the punters. The 'guys' order drinks,stare at their unkind reflections,hear the race buzzer and leave to place their bets. With experience of life and betting behind him,the narrator concludes

> what shit. nobody
> wins. ask
> Caesar.
> 27

The gallows-humour of the quip,placing Julius Caesar on the lips of a racetrack-goer,is a cover for the point that 'nobody/wins'. We lose everything eventually,including life itself. It is yet another echo of the phrase,perhaps the most resonant in all Bukowski's writing,that 'we have everything and we have nothing'.

Within 'Something For the Touts...' there are some interpolations of surreal imagery ('days with glass edges', 'the signs in bullrings like diamonds hollering/ Mother Capri') and an illogical,dreamlike syntax.

> up a road where a madman sits waiting among
> bluejays and wrens netted in and sucked a flakey
> grey...
> the vacant lots are not bad. churches in
> Europe on postcards are not bad. people in
> wax museums frozen into their best sterility
> are not bad,horrible but not bad. the

cannon,think of the cannon...
in the most decent sometimes sun
there is the softsmoke feeling from urns
and the canned sounds of old battleplanes

Surrealism constitutes a fairly minor tributary in the Bukowskian river of words,and is the enemy of the general lucidity of his work,but it is an influence within it. Tinges of Surrealism are most apparent in his early,more derivative verse but persist in many a poem of the I970s, whose plain matter-of-factness is leavened by the often felicitous appearance of an exotic,surreal simile or metaphor - with humorous effect.

It is a matter of conjecture as to where and when Bukowski picked up on Surrealism,but such a fancy was by no means uncommon amongst his generation. John Ashbery,Frank O'Hara,Robert Duncan and the majority of the Beats were sometime admirers of French Surrealist bards of the I920s such as Paul Éluard,Phillippe Soupault,Louis Aragon,Pierre Reverdy,Jacques Prévèrt and Henri Michaux. Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books made available certain works by these authors to American readers from the late I950s onwards. It is equally possible that Bukowski might have imbibed an inkling of Surrealism's methods second-hand through British poets of the I930s and I940s who enjoyed a vogue for a time - Edith Sitwell,David Gascoyne,George Barker, and,most likely,Dylan Thomas. The rhetorical and surreal verse with which Thomas made his reputation gained notice in the United States because of the sensational success of his several reading tours. Young poets fell under the hypnotic spell of Thomas' lyric gift,among whom one can single out John Berryman (a personal acquaintance of the Welsh poet) and Lawrence Ferlinghetti,who attended readings

by Thomas in San Francisco. Bukowski,too,has professed a certain amount of affection for Thomas' work; in the poem 'I am With the Roots of Flowers' one may detect an echo of the famous lines

> The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
> Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
> Is my destroyer
> And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
> My youth is bent by the same wintry fever
> 28

Surrealism's effect on the American literary avant-garde was delayed at least twenty years after its origins in Europe. But there had been earlier connections between Surrealism and American avant-gardists. Man Ray and the photographer/model Lee Miller had been members of the Surrealist Group in Paris. Harry Crosby,also resident in the city,wrote a species of Surrealist verse; Charles Henri Ford,Henry Miller and Kenneth Patchen were very much alive to the impact of Surrealism. Even those American writers who did not live in or visit Europe,for example Wallace Stevens or Nathanael West,were able to keep up with Surrealist art and writing in the pages of Broom,transition and The Little Review. Carlos Williams was very enthused by Dada and Surrealism,and later wrote for the American-based magazines Blues and View; Pound championed the poet and painter Francis Picabia for a time; Ernest Hemingway was acquainted with Jōan Mirō,and purchased his paintings. A number of the leading Surrealists,including Breton and Dali,were resident in New York during the years of the Second World War,and made many artistic contacts.

Surrealism had been launched with the appearance of La Révolution Surréaliste from I924 onwards. Originally a French literary movement under the baton of its chief

conductor André Breton, its influence rapidly spread into painting, sculpture and films produced among the international avant-garde; the best-known Surrealists have proved to be painters (Salvador Dali, Jõan Miró, Max Ernst, Rene Magritte) and a film-maker, Luis Buñuel, of varied nationalities. As conceived by its initiators, Surrealism was an expression of Pure Psychic Automatism, an inexhaustible, free-flowing reservoir of words and imagery dredged up from the subconscious mind, the source for them - as for Freud, with whom Breton had corresponded - of the most important human drives. The Surrealists tried to tap into this source by transcribing dreams, practising Automatic writing, free association games with words, drug-taking, and fantasy of all kinds. Breton outlined the precise method of Automatic writing in his 'First Manifesto':

> Put yourself in as passive, or receptive, a state of mind as you can. Forget about your genius, your talents, and the talents of everyone else. Keep reminding yourself that literature is one of the saddest roads that leads to everything. Write quickly, without any preconceived subject, fast enough so that you will not remember what you've written and be tempted to reread what you have written. The first sentence will come spontaneously, so compelling is the truth that with every passing second there is a sentence unknown to our consciousness which is only crying out to be heard. ...Go on as long as you like. Put your trust in the inexhaustible nature of the murmur.
> 29

Breton was convinced that Automatic writing could be 'especially conducive to the production of the most beautiful images', but whilst these images were sometimes surprising, they were nearly always sexual. The unstructured flow of thought is habitually libidinal. Consider the beginning and end of André Breton's poem 'Postman Cheval', as translated by David Gascoyne:

We are the birds always charmed by you from the top of these
belvederes
And that each night form a blossoming branch between your
shoulders and the arms of your well beloved wheel-barrow
Which we tear out swifter than sparks at your wrist
We are the sighs of the glass statue that raises itself on its elbow
when man sleeps
And shining holes appear in his bed
Holes through which stags with coral antlers can be seen in a glade
And naked women at the bottom of a mine....
Without turning round you seized the trowel with which breasts
are made
We smiled at you you held us round the waist
And we took the positions of your pleasure
Motionless under our lids for ever as woman delights to see man
After having made love.[30]

The ubiquity of such libidinous descriptions,the consequent danger of predictability,can be seen in a lot of Surrealist writing not of the first rank. Edward B.Germain has pointed out that Surrealist formulas quickly became established: '"the - of the -": "the craters of his eyes","the threads of her heart","the snakes of her hair","the lids of her windows","the houses of their blood","the key-hole of your eye","her thoughts of heat-lightning"'.[31]

An over-reliance on such formulae is indeed what one observes in the work of an American follower of Breton's, the poet Philip Lamantia,who was well-known to the Beats and San Francisco poetic circles of the 1950s and 1960s. His verse of that period now seems very imitative,as in 'The Enormous Window':

Within closets filled with nebulae
the blood shot eyes
swim upward for the sun

This world of serpents and weeping women
is crushed in the violence
of a swamp large enough to contain

the enormous razorblade of the night

Lamantia's poem 'I Touch You' seems at once predictable and unintelligible, though its enigmatic eroticism is slightly more pleasing. Within it, one finds phrases such as 'the hour that drips scent', 'the chain of immaculate lice', 'the wind heaving the breasts of the morning'.[32] Lamantia's initial collection of poems was entitled _Erotic Poems_ (I946), but many of his attempts to summon such elements result in unintentional humour. 'I Touch You', for instance, contains the frankly laughable line 'your legs secrete the essence of wheat', and the even worse 'You are more beautiful than the black buttocks of dawn'. Surrealism does, in fact, have considerable potential for the comic spirit. A number of Bukowski poems recognize and exploit this rather well, as in 'Vegas', first published in _Quicksilver_ magazine in I96I. It sends up the sort of poetic language that its narrator expects to find in a 'poetry class'; he decides to leave Las Vegas because 'the windows screamed like doves moaning the bombing of Milan'. When hitch-hiking back to Los Angeles, he unwisely talks surreal gibberish to a laconic truckdriver who offers him a lift:

> I'm not going all the way to L.A., the truckdriver said.
>
> it's all right, I said, the calla lilies nod to our minds
> and someday we'll all go home
> together.
>
> in fact, he said, this is as far
> as we go.
> so I let him have it; old withered whore of time
> your breasts taste the sour cream of dreaming... [33]

He is let out in the middle of the desert. When an 'old Ford' picks him up forty-five minutes later, he tells the reader, 'this time,/I kept my mouth/shut'. This jokey

work debunks not just an outdated Surrealist diction, but also any notion that poetry's language should be hystrionically divorced from, say, the speech of truckdrivers.

Though a lot of the work produced by American poets when under the influence of Surrealism's intoxication is not that startling, at least to judge by the contents of Edward B. Germain's anthology English and American Surrealist Poetry (1978), there are some authentic poetic works attributable to Surrealism's general ambit. Chief among these is Allen Ginsberg's Howl, which contains numerous passages where reiterative rhetorical statement and surreal imagery combine to create a hallucinatory intensity.

> who sank all night in submarine light of Bickford's floated out and sat
> through the stale beer afternoon in desolate Fugazzi's listening to
> the crack of doom on the hydrogen jukebox....
> who disappeared into the volcanoes of Mexico leaving behind nothing
> but the shadow of dungarees and the lava and ash of poetry
> scattered in fireplace Chicago [34]

It must be said that most of the early poems written by Bukowski which use identifiably Surrealist language show a predictable inconguity, and are fairly dreary pieces. The suicidal narrator of 'Old Man, Dead in a Room' stares at 'clouds, at seas of gaunt/sepulcher' between his toes, and imagines all his past 'lovely women' 'break like engines/ into some steam of sorrow', at the news of his death, perhaps. The sexy panache of the opening of 'I Wait in the White Rain' is not sustained, and in any event is ultimately rather superficial, even meaningless:

> I wait in the white rain for knives like your tongue

> I see the spiral clowns fountain up with myths untrue,
> I wrestle spasms in the dark on dark stairways
> while dollar crazy landladies
> are threaded with the hot needles of sperm
> 35

But a poem such as 'A Report Upon the Consumption of Myself' is a fine example of Surrealist inclinations disciplined enough to be meaningful,a work of highly mobile rhythms and a dream-like,illogical landscape. Its unnamed speaker feels stimulated by sex,death,and consumer durables on a 'blue evening'.

> and my heart like something cut away from
> cancer will feel and beat again feel
> and beat again - but now
> the blue evening is cinched like old
> muskets and the dangling sex rope hangs
> as the tree stands up and calls:
> July. and the dust of hope in the bottom of paper cups
> along with small spiders that have names like ancient
> European cities; cuckoo-spit and dross,heavy wheels;
> oilwells stuck between fish and sucking up grey gas
> of love and the palms up on the cliff waving
> 36

The imagery has much of the 'arbitrary' nature that Breton would have endorsed. There is no logical connection that allows an evening to be described as 'cinched like old muskets'; the 'dangling sex rope' could be a phallic symbol taken from a Freudian dream-notebook,which hangs as the tree - another symbol - 'stands up'. The phrase 'dust of hope' could have been coined by any of the French poets of the I920s. These small spiders do not have,say,Latin names but those like ancient European cities,a distinctly odd simile; the oilwells suck up 'grey gas/of love',a pleasing metaphorical phrase. The poem ends with a surreal image that one could imagine would have appealed to painters such as Max Ernst:

> they've blown up the Y.W.C.A. like a giant balloon and
> sent it out to sea full of screaming lovely lonely
> girls

In later works, the traces of Surrealism that remain are chiefly employed for humorous effects, as when an exotic simile or metaphor suddenly throws a mundane scene into another realm altogether. The I98I poem 'Table for Two' finds a couple having a drink before a quiet meal at a restaurant. The bartender is described as looking like 'a piece of silk/tacked over a doorway leading/nowhere'. The quotidian evening takes distinctly odd turns. In the mens' toilet a midget emerges from behind a door, throws a tennis ball, catches it in his mouth, does a tap dance and is gone. The narrator engages in weird dialogue with a foul-mouthed woman on a bar-stool, then coerces his female companion to leave the restaurant with him. As they do so, another couple simultaneously enter.

> the man who had opened the door had
> a head like a pumpkin and he was with
> a woman whose face looked like a seal's
> face and she had on a little hat
> only the little hat looked like a large
> wristwatch had been fastened to the top of it.[37]

This episode is clearly played for laughs rather than as a surreal insight into the horrors that lurk beneath the surface of ordinary social intercourse. In Bukowski's early phase, the Surrealist larder is raided by alienated speakers who try to describe their world but only come up with formulaic responses of little originality. In the work of his maturity, Bukowski rarely resorts to such language. When he does, it is often aptly used for comic purposes. One says 'aptly' because Surrealism itself can be seen, as John Osborne does, as Modernism laughing at itself.[38]

If Modernism contributes to Bukowski's poetic structures, and Surrealism can be found infiltrating his language at times, then Existentialism informs the philosophies of his texts. He received a native American Existential ethos from Hemingway's works, but Bukowski was also of an appropriate age to be impressed by influential writers and philosophers - Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Andre Malraux - of the immediate Post War period. Bukowski is definitely known to be an admirer of the non-theorized, more problematic Existentialists Jean Genet and Louis-Ferdinand Céline. Certain blurbs on Bukowski's books inform the reader that, from their view, both Sartre and Genet judged Bukowski to be the 'Best Poet in America'. It is instructive to look at how Bukowski's Existentialism pervades his texts, but one must first establish what the term itself involves.

Existentialism can be traced back to Pascal's Pensées, but for contemporary purposes its origins lie in the religious philosophy of Kierkegaard, and the anti-religious philosophy of Nietzshe. Kierkegaard posited the anguished separation of God and Mankind, and the essential absurdity of their relationship. Nietzsche proclaimed not merely the death of God, but identified Mankind as the assassins. The major Existentialist philosophers of this century, Heidegger and Sartre, have been atheistic, viewing humans as self-creating beings who can, or must, choose an authentic life, in the knowledge that the only certainty is death. But Existentialism can also be seen as a quasi-religious tradition of pessimism in theology, philosophy and literature that is concerned with the perception of an ethical void at the heart of human affairs. Of course, the search

for the means to authenticate existence, and confront extinction, varies widely. Sartre, Camus, and Malraux, for example, came to see political involvement, _engàgement_, as one answer. But to Céline, the notion that there were any 'solutions' to human existence was manifestly false, and even part of the problem itself.

The speaker of an early Bukowski work, 'Wrong Number', states explicitly that 'there is no church for me,/no sanctuary; no God, no love, no roses to rust'. Another poem insists that 'all our necessities', including love, 'rest on foundations of sand'.[39] This sense of the provisionality of all human values that bind them together, to ideals, projects and societal institutions, is close to Albert Camus' concept of The Absurd. Namely, that once deprived of God and other illusions, man feels an essential alienation from the universe, and must live life without hope, or reason outside of existence itself.

Cast adrift in a world of alien objects and impersonal social processes, the individual is isolated, obliged to question existence and to experience ontological disquiet. This is the situation of the narrator of Albert Camus' novel _L'Étranger_ (1942), variously translated as _The Stranger_ or _The Outsider_, one of the most popular literary works associated with Existentialism. Its hero-narrator Meursault is found guilty by a court not just of killing an arab in cold blood, but of violating the sacred shibboleths of society. He is condemned for not making a show of emotion at his mother's funeral, for taking up the pleasure of a sensual relationship and a comic film so soon afterwards, but equally for treating all these occurrences, - together with the charge, the court, the priest's God - with indifference.

Meursault is an Outsider in the sense of being outside all of these cherished phenomena,and refusing to invest any of them with emotional importance. Even when he has shot an arab with whom he had no personal quarrel,Meursault can only confess that,'I know I'd shattered the balance of the day,the spacious calm of this beach on which I had been happy'. All courses of action and the consequences which they engender are judged by him to be empty of meaning, since they all lead to the same end,death,sooner or later. Only when he is in the condemned cell,knowing that his life now has a definite limit,does Meursault experience a sense of freedom,the insight that 'Every man alive was privileged'. At the very end,he is able to lay his heart 'open to the benign indifference of the universe. To feel it so like myself,indeed so brotherly,made me realize that I'd been happy,and that I was happy still'.[40]

The novel's acute diagnosis of the human predicament is what has appealed to Bukowski,not Camus' urgings of human solidarity and political committment as a means of surmounting alienation. Bukowski's tongue-in-cheek poem 'All Right,So Camus Had to Give Speeches Before the Academies and Get His Ass Killed in a Car-Wreck' is an irreverent commentary on the novel,and also on Camus' career as a Public Man. It was printed in a 1970 issue of Chicago Review and has not thus far been included in his verse collections. The work announces its setting,'a very womanless bar',and the speaker is cornered by a bar-fly eager to talk about The Stranger,'telling me what a son of a bitch The Stranger/was'. This is interpreted as a reference to Camus himself,when he gave speeches to 'the Academies':

you couldn't tell whether Camus was talking and laugh-
ing out of the
side of his mouth or
whether he was
insane. he talked the same as the guy next to me at the
bar and we
were only looking for
pussy.

The speaker reflects that 'it was very sad'; not Camus' death in a car crash at the age of 47, but his sell-out to the academies.

all along The Stranger had been my hero
because I thought he'd seen beyond trying
or caring
because it was such a bore
so senseless -
that big hole in the ground looking up -
and I was wrong again:
hell, I was THE STRANGER, and the book hadn't been
written the way
it had been meant to
be.
[41]

Whilst this is a slight piece, a mildly satirical view of Camus, it does indicate the authorial unease that a doctrine of individual values - in theory, at least, a subversive creed in Camus' novel - should be rendered acceptable to society's learned and conservative institutions. But the speaker of the poem clings to his own outsiderdom, while distancing himself from Camus. He transfers his affections, though the poem does not state as much, from the tamed and theorized Existentialism of Camus to the more oppositional, non-theorized version by Louis-Ferdinand Céline.

Céline's attitudes of misanthropic extremism, his conviction of the ultimately negative potential for human happiness, seems to strike a chord in Bukowski. Also of interest is what one might call the Existentialist myths perpetrated by Céline's major novels of the I930s, <u>Journey</u>

To the End of the Night and Death On the Instalment Plan. These bottom-dog perspectives hold that those on the moral and economic margins of society (criminals,madmen,bums, whores,drug-addicts,etc) live more authentically than solid citizens,the petits-bourgeois. That is,their lives and mores throw them more dramatically up against the facts of life and death,giving them greater insight into the way things 'really' are.

Before an ideological cloud settled on Céline's Post War reputation,due to his wartime collaboration with the Vichy regime and deranged,virulent anti-Semitism,his books had enjoyed favour from leftist critics intrigued by his withering contempt for bourgeois values. Leon Trotsky,by no means insensitive to literary texts,proclaimed that with Journey,Céline had 'walked into great literature as other men walk into their own homes'.[42] Céline's literary achievement had to do with the language of his novels,a crudely elegant mix of spoken idioms,even street argot,which was widely seen as rejuvenating the form and style of the French novel; his was a free-ranging vocabulary of description. In Irving Howe's phrase,'with noisy verbs and cascades of adjectives,he assaults nose,ear,eye,creating a carnival of sensations'.[43] No doubt the surface vitality of Céline's book excited Bukowski's recorded excitement, though he can have read it only in translation. But even more appealing,one suspects,was Céline's determination to identify,as the critic Patrick McCarthy observed,'the worst with the truest'.[44]

The narrative of Journey To the End of the Night opens with Bardamu's instant,perverse,decision to join the army. He then makes increasingly desperate journeys from Paris to Africa,onto the slums of New York,Detroit's car

factories,and then back to Paris. The extremity of what he encounters,his suffering and disgust,brings out in Bardamu a defiant resentment against Capitalist economics,which compel people to waste their time in menial occupations and exploit the sweating masses. But his main preoccupation is with an 'universal sadness' of which the factories are only a part,and a symptom: 'nothing does any good,drinking does no good,not even red wine,as thick as ink'. The novel has a desperate hilarity,a comic seriousness that,again,a writer such as Bukowski would have relished. Humans are ridiculous 'Soldiers for nothing...monkeys with a gift of speech,a gift which brings us suffering,we are its minions ....Ah,my friend,this world is nothing but a vast attempt to catch you with your trousers down'.[45]

J.H.Mathews' study The Inner Dream: Céline As Novelist (1978) makes the point that Céline not only denied that The Absurd could be confronted by positive action,but that his 'dreadful concept' of it was as 'an inner drive,gathering strength perversely from human aspirations'.[46] The conclusion that Journey comes to is a despairing one,that life is 'a light going out in the darkness....Whatever people may care to make out,life leaves you high and dry long before you're really through....You don't climb upwards in life; you go down'.[47] Céline and Bukowski's view of what goes on in society's Lower Depths in unsparing, and they transfer these views to their portrait of humanity in general. But while Bukowski often alludes to misanthropy his authorial voice is never as bitter as Céline's,nor as frankly unbalanced. Bukowski's is not the voice of anguished madness,but of disreputable sanity. As Sartre maintained,Existentialism is a Humanism,and Bukowski has never lost sight of that - as Céline did.

The narrators of Bukowski's early poems are often isolatos,conscious of being estranged from the dominant motivations of those around them,and also of an indefinable ontological oppression,as they sit and brood in cheap roominghouses 'behind pulled windowshades',feeling like 'a man who has been gassed or stoned/or insulted by the days'.[48] When he does move in the world,Bukowski Man at this stage is loth to get involved with others,and aggressively keen to protect his own inner space. The speaker of 'The Day it Rained at the Los Angeles County Museum' carries his anxiety around with him,inspecting an old monoplane,hearing the rain begin,and remembering his own past. In Hemingway's work - as in A Farewell to Arms - the rain/death leitmotif is prevalent. One can surmise that this Bukowskian character is also ruminating on mortality.

> the jew bent over and
> died. 99 machineguns
> were shipped to France. Somebody won the 3rd race
> while I inspected
> the propeller of an old monoplane
> a man came by with a patch over his eye. it began to
> rain. it rained and it rained and the ambulances ran
> together...
> and the clouds moved sickly through
> a sky that had died
> about the time Caesar was knifed...
> a man came by and coughed.
> think it'll stop raining? he said.
> I didn't answer. I touched the
> old propeller and listened to the
> ants on the roof rushing over
> the edge of the world. Go away,I said,
> go away or I'll call
> the guard.[49]

The speaker's sensitivity is acute; to the fact that people unknown to him are dying elsewhere in the world all the time,and that one day he will die while others live on. The passage is filled with instances of death and self-

destruction, and also references to their agents (machine-guns, ambulances). The speaker is conscious of the nausea of existence, and of the nothingness (Sartre's <u>le néant</u>, Hemingway's <u>najda</u>) that surrounds it. To the Existentialist this deeply despairing boredom with ordinary concerns, and preoccupation with essential matters, is a state of mind both revelatory and necessary. There is sometimes the temptation of suicide to deal with, a subject broached in poems such as 'Old Man, Dead in a Room', and more movingly in 'The Singular Self'. In the latter work, a man goes to a beach late at night, contemplating ending it all, but is prevented by the unexpected presence of courting couples among the sand dunes, with their 'sandy thumpings'

> the two-headed beasts
> turning to stare
> at the madness of a singular self[50]

Jerked back into human awareness by this encounter, he leaves the beach convinced that it is 'a bad place to die', forgets his two shoes, and reclaims his car - still 'looking for/another place'.

For Bukowski, the overcoming of Existential <u>angst</u> is achieved through some kind of action - fights, horse race betting - which heightens existence and keeps the void at bay. These are 'bets' on existence whose outcomes are unpredictable; not for Bukowski the Hemingwayan bullfight, still less the Big Game hunt. His more impecunious characters fight for their lives in dark alleys, as in the poem 'My Friend', whose narrator fights not because of bravery but because of 'something else'. This unnamed entity is an <u>angst</u> 'that walked and slept and sat with/ me...and I saw it everywhere'. He associates it with rain,

and especially notices it when 'riding in buses/and trolly cars filled with human/heads'. He can find relief from this oppressive condition during drunken brawls in alleys with the denizens of bars, when the 'patrons lay their bets' and he is the underdog:

> Eddie charges I see it in his
> feet and along the buttons of
> his shirt and I hear a horn
> honk somewhere far off and
> it's as decent a time as a man
> can expect.
> 51

Such an embattled concept of existence is less in evidence during poems of the 1970s, though the sometimes riotous atmosphere can be seen as flowing on an undercurrent of despair. His speakers are now still alive to death, and the Existential pressures of existence, but they are more relaxed in their approach to the 'universal sadness'. The tone is even jaunty, as in 'Melancholia' where a speaker announces that he has gotten so used to it that he greets it 'like an old/friend'. The event that has caused this latest visitation is a split-up from his lady friend:

> I will nowdo 15 minutes of grieving
> for the lost redhead,
> I tell the gods.
>
> I do it and feel quite bad
> quite sad,
> then I rise
> CLEANSED
> even though nothing is
> solved.
>
> that's what I get for kicking
> religion in the ass.
>
> I should have kicked the redhead
> in the ass
> where her brains and her bread and
> butter are
> at.
> 52

This man of the world says he has felt sad 'about everything', and that the loss of the woman was 'just another/ smash in a lifelong/loss'. Slight as the poem is, it does touch upon one of Bukowski's most abiding themes, that - as Chris Challis noted - 'Life is a continuing process of Loss'. Losses may be of friends, bereavement, innocence, illusions, but they all constitute a preparation for the ultimate loss of life and consciousness. Each 'smash' is a harbinger of death. Camus' Meursault and the priest who visits him agree that each person lives under a sentence of death, though they disagree violently about the lesson to be drawn from such a mighty fact: 'I'd very little time left, and I wasn't going to waste it on God'. Existential writers urge that Mankind should not waste their precious and diminishing days on God, but should live the fullest life possible. With the exception of Céline, Existentialists tend to view death as an energizer of human activity, a contemplative spur for a significant life between the unchosen parameters of birth and burial.[53]

Bukowski's poem 'Waxjob' is a marvellous exploration of such an affirmative angle on death. The narrative concerns itself with 'Mike', a broken-down veteran of World War Two who has become an alcoholic. The man offers to clean the narrator's car, is given five dollars for the task, drinks that away then uses the persistent rain as an excuse for not having done the job. Mike is plainly drinking himself to death; when his wife is questioned, she reports that he is in hospital 'all swelled up'. Mike decides to buck the advice of the doctors, and to enjoy himself once more, by ringing up and asking to be taken home:

Mike was all puffed-up,triple size
but I got him into the car somehow
and gave him a cigarette.

I stopped at the liquor store for 2 six packs
then went on in. I drank with Mike and his wife until
11 p.m.
then went upstairs...

where's Mike? I asked his wife 3 days later,
you know he said he was going to wax my car.
Mike died,she said,he's gone.

you mean he died? I asked.

yes,he died,she said.

I'm very sorry,I said,I'm very sorry.[54]

In one sense,Mike's demise is not a surprise,and the speaker has himself colluded in the self-destructive tide of alcohol that has washed Mike away. The simple dialogue aptly conveys,however,the shock that accompanies news of any sudden death. The speaker can't quite believe that this person seen abroad so lately is now lifeless,separated from human contacts. There is a tone of dignified irony throughout the narrative,but clearly an humane interpretation of Mike's life and death. A matter-of-fact tone,which sticks to the 'facts' of the episode,nonetheless manages to achieve a considerable emotional force,albeit obliquely. The very simplicity and directness of the story gives it humanity and universal applicability; existence is what matters. Mike was alive and is now dead,having lived and died in his own fashion,without regrets.

A lesser writer would have ended the poem there,on a suitably elegiac,even mournful note. Instead,Bukowski suddenly transforms the tone of the whole piece entirely. The speaker admits to all-too-human lusts after Mike's wife,only to be pre-empted by her removal,and he then makes an observation whose comic zaniness allows the reader the relief of laughter:

it rained for a week after that and I figured the only
way I'd get the 5 back was to go to bed with his wife
but you know
she moved out 2 weeks later

an old guy with white hair moved in there
and he had one blind eye and played the French Horn.
there was no way I could make it with
him.

Such welcome traits - sex,human foibles,comedy - help to leaven Bukowski's deeply pervasive Existentialist ethos. He does not follow Sartre or Camus and their ethical, intellectual creed of involvement with humankind's struggle but nor does he go so far as Céline in denying validity to all human aspirations. In spite of frequent intimations in Bukowski's work that love is just another delusion that insulates the human race from the harsh terms of their brief existence,one detects that his position is actually one of affirmative sympathy,perhaps even deep attachment to them in their battle against time and circumstance. The Welsh poet Douglas Houston recently enthused about 'Waxjob' in a letter to the present author,finding evidence within the work that Bukowski has 'such an attractively unadulterated persuasion of the shabbiness of human behaviour which yet permits something that might or must be called LOVE to suffuse his lines'.[55] In Bukowski's fictional world, Existentialism is stripped of its theoretical underpinning and intellectual ramifications,but it forms a permanent substratum to the ways in which his characters deal with the world and focus on their own existence - including those stand-ins for the author appearing in the later work, called 'Henry Chinaski' and 'Bukowski'.

Charles Bukowski is sometimes referred to, usually in journalistic pieces, as a 'Beat Poet'; indeed, he shares with the Beats a number of mutual acquaintances (Harold Norse, Jack Micheline), and began his career just down the West Coast from their San Francisco haunts, thus certainly being aware of their work and burgeoning fame in the late 1950s. More to the point, his work partakes of a large proportion of the Beat myth-kitty, aesthetic and Romantic ideology, and they share many of the same sources in Modernism, Surrealism and Existentialism. Both Bukowski and the Beats espouse disaffiliation from the dominant culture, and extreme individualism as the basis of art and life. They all tend to claim the importance of spontaneity within their work, and the strengths and weaknesses resulting from such an attitude can be seen as broadly comparable: some truly dynamic masterworks, and record-smashing amounts of dross when they do not write at the top of their talents. In essence, Bukowski and the Beat writers are on close but not identical tracks. There are some differences as well as affinities; while many of his poems may be read as Beat documents, at least as many diverge from the essentials of 'Beatness'.

The Beats, a native American literary grouping, began to knit together in New York during the 1940s, wrote many of their most characteristic works (Howl, Naked Lunch, On the Road) during the 1950s, and came to prominence by the end of that decade and throughout the 1960s. Establishing who were Beat personnel seems subject to shifting definition, but it is now generally agreed that the three indispensible figures were the poet Allen Ginsberg, and the novelists Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs. Others who made an important contribution to the movement, though not all of

their work partakes of Beat ideology, were Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso, Gary Snyder, and John Clellon Holmes. Neal Cassady, Peter Orlovsky, Herbert Huncke and Carl Solomon are significant within the anecdotal mythology of the Beats and minor contributors to the literature. Though not part of the original in-group surrounding Ginsberg, numerous other authors have a close association with the Beats, including Ken Kesey, Harold Norse, Philip Lamantia, Ted Joans, Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), Bob Kaufman, Philip Whalen, Michael McClure, Tuli Kupferberg, Lew Welch, Jack Micheline and Diane di Prima. At the beginning of a 1974 interview, Gary Snyder made an attempted roll-call of the movement from his point of view:

> Well, I never did know exactly what was meant by the term 'The Beats', but let's say that the original meeting, association, comradeship of Allen [Ginsberg], myself, Michael [McClure], Lawrence [Ferlinghetti], Philip Whalen...Lew Welch...Gregory [Corso] did embody a criticism and a vision which we shared in various ways, and then we went our own ways for many years. 56

Curiously, Snyder omits Kerouac from this statement, though they were close friends in the 1950s, shortly after Snyder had made Ginsberg's acquaintance. But Snyder does mention the words 'criticism' and 'vision', key ideas in the Beat programme, which was formed in the Post War period on the East Coast, then augmented on the West Coast following residence and contacts with San Francisco writers.

Almost all commentators on the Beats mention that the oppositional ideology was evolved out of a number of social factors: the Depression, followed by a war, followed in turn by the Cold War, political oppression and stagnation for progressive policies, and social conformity ushered in by the 1950s consumer boom. John Clellon Holmes, novelist and

chronicler of the Beats, confirms that the endemic individualism of the movement stemmed from these societal experiences: 'Brought up during the collective bad circumstances of a dreary depression, weaned during the collective uprooting of a global war, they distrust collectivity'. The creative individual was to be the means of rejuvenating human truths, and American literature; a celebration of what Thoreau called A Majority of One, a dissent from mass values and authority. The Beats venerated ecstasies of many kinds, through drugs, jazz, Eastern religions, all means of generating energies within a conformist time.[57]

The dual nature of the term 'Beat' has been defined as both beatitude (i.e. spiritual enlightenment) and dead-beat, that is, being physically and emotionally drained. As inculcated by Jack Kerouac via the junky Herbert Huncke, Beatness can be taken as meaning, in Clellon Holmes' words,

> not so much weariness, as rawness of the nerves; not so much being 'filled up to here', as being emptied out. It describes a state of mind from which all unessentials (sic) have been stripped, leaving it receptive to everything around it, but impatient with trivial obstructions. To be beat is to be at the bottom of your personality, looking up; to be existential in the Kierkegaard, rather than the Jean-Paul Sartre sense.[58]

Clellon Holmes here identifies Beatness specifically with the spiritual rather than the political dimensions of Existentialism. He further proposes that the whole Beat project as a native American, non-theorized counterpart to the European movement. Holmes also claimed that the Beats, in effect, were saying 'don't talk to me about essence but show me what's happening'.[59]

One can finally deduce from these attempted definitions of the Beats' aims and attitudes that the Beat project was in effect, if not by design, apolitical. Disaffiliation from

societal norms, and the exploration of the most extreme areas of the self, in itself represented revolution; such a position can be construed as politically quietistic, even reactionary. Its main thrust was the emphasis of literary and spiritual values, the reinscription of native American individualism. The Beats, and in particular Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti, certainly identified themselves with liberal, progressive causes during the 1950s and 1960s - free speech and anti-Vietnam War campaigns - but they have seldom addressed themselves to mainstream political parties, issues and ideologies, except as entities that they are resolutely opposed to.

Critics Peter Easy and John Osborne have recently argued that if the term 'Beat' was defined in terms of an enabling aesthetic and ideology, rather than - as most previous commentators have preferred - lifestyle and perceived attitudes, then the movement would be much more readily understandable. They point out the Beats' Romanticism, which leads to the privileging of individual, subjective experience, and a deference to social outcasts and moral marginality in junkies and petty criminals. They comment upon the Beats' search for the transcendent in drugs, religion and Nature mysticism, and for the means of escape from everyday consciousness; as regards writing, the avowal of the centrality of spontaneity and improvisation.[60]

The Beat concern to capture the dynamics of the moment, the live workings of the consciousness, was most urged by Jack Kerouac, whose slogans for composition were summarised by Ginsberg as 'First thought, best thought', and 'You're a Genius all the time'. Kerouac maintained that his works were written in bouts of spectacular, unconsidered creation on long rolls of teletype paper, and that careful

revision would dilute the truthfulness of their vision (which did not however prevent his publishers from carrying out some editorial surgery in order to render his books more profitably accessible).[61]

Allen Ginsberg's poem 'Howl' has been similarly depicted as spontaneously capturing the autobiographical experiences of its author and his companions. In his introduction to the volume which contains the poem, Carlos Williams wrote that 'It is the poet, Allen Ginsberg, who has gone, in his own body, through the horrifying experiences described from life in these pages....He avoids nothing but experiences it to the hilt'.[62] In fact, 'Howl' is just as culturally mediated as its major precursor, Whitman's 'Song of Myself'. But the emphasis in 'Howl' is on its imaginative witness to 'the best minds of my generation' (an instance, if ever there was one, of poetic licence), and an anguished message of spiritual, sexual and emotional liberation. Whilst the poem's mode of address is public, speaking about 'my generation' to the world, it also presumes to capture the individual address of one soul to another. Allen Ginsberg addresses Carl Solomon ('an intuitive Bronx dadaist and prose-poet') in a spontaneous overflow of powerful emotion and fellow-feeling:

> Carl Solomon! I'm with you in Rockland
> where you're madder than I am...
> I'm with you in Rockland
> where you imitate the shade of my mother...
> I'm with you in Rockland
> where fifty more shocks will never return your soul to its
> body again to its pilgrimage to a cross in the void...
> I'm with you in Rockland
> in my dreams you walk dripping from a sea-journey on the
> highway across America in tears to the door of my cottage
> in the Western night[63]

Gregory Corso's poem 'America Politica Historia,In Spontaneity' is another Beat work with a public address that concerns itself with the apparently spontaneous expression of individual experience,though it is not a rhetorically energized piece in the manner of 'Howl'. Instead,the poem offers,seemingly without artifice,the quirky ruminations of its author on America and its politicians:

> FDR was my youth,and how strange to still see
> his wife around.
> Truman is still in Presidential time.
> I saw Eisenhower helicopter over Athens
> and he looked at the Acropolis like only Zeus could.
> OF THE PEOPLE is fortunate and select.
> FOR THE PEOPLE has never happened in America or
> elsewhere.
> BY THE PEOPLE is the sadness of America...
> O whenever I pass an American Embassy I don't know what
> to feel.
> Sometimes I want to rush in and scream 'I'm American!'
> but instead go a few paces down to the American Bar
> get drunk and cry: 'I'm no American!' [64]

Ginsberg's 'Howl' is an acknowledged masterwork,and the Corso poem is an engaging piece,both succeeding in conveying an impression of spontaneity - whatever their actual circumstances of creation. But many lesser Beat works, including some by these two authors,suffer because of a 'naive faith in autobiographical authenticity',and a delusion that the nearer they approximate to diary jottings the more,rather than the less,powerful they will be. Some of the Beats' minor works are almost unbelievably sloppy, sentimental and embarrassingly bad, as literature,but are nevertheless collected and recycled as evidence that writers of genius operate importantly 'all the time',a manifestly absurd suggestion. [65]

Similar strictures apply to many of Bukowski's works.

In his preface to a collection of his early poems, Bukowski seems to make the claims for unconsidered art that the Beats had promoted, observing that these poems 'were sent out as written on first impulse, [with] no line or word changes. I never revised or retyped. To eliminate an error, I would simply go over it...and go on with the line'.[66] But the Bukowskian hallmark of 'spontaneity' in fact has little in common with, say, Kerouac's rendering of the contours of jazz solos, or the description of the sensation of speeding across an eternal landscape of America with 'Dean Moriarty'/Neal Cassady at the wheel. As will be detailed in the following chapter, Bukowski's interest in spontaneity has much more to do with the authorial identity he seeks to create in his texts, than with any desire to transcribe movement directly onto the page.

There are many overlaps of subject matter and attitude between Bukowski and the Beats. The poem 'Fuzz' paints a frankly sentimental portrait of the amity between a drunk and the three small boys who ambush him during their role-playing game as cops; the drunk goes into a liquor store and buys 'a fifth of cheap whiskey/and/3/candy bars'. A 1958 poem, 'all-Yellow Flowers', seeks to invoke Nature with a capital 'N'. A girl singing 'some High Mass/of Life' is blended with autumn trees, 'yellow flowers like her golden hair', and the sun. This passage from a Bukowski poem could very easily have been written by Gregory Corso:

> the mailman is insane and
> hands me a bagful of snails
> eaten inside
> out
> by some rat of decay
> in the madhouse a man kisses the walls
> and dreams of sailboating down some
> cool Nile[67]

The Beat gesture towards those on the social margins is deeply embedded in Bukowski's works, especially those affected by madness, poverty, freakishness, addictions, and/or disability. One poem of the mid-1970s, entitled 'The Insane Have Always Loved Me', contains the weary admission that

> the unwanted would attach
> themselves to
> me.
> guys with one arm
> guys with twitches
> guys with speech defects
> guys with white film
> over one eye,
> cowards
> misanthropes
> killers
> peep-freaks
> and thieves.[68]

The speaker of 'The Wild' has been arrested, and placed in the 'L.A. County drunktank'. The violent 'thing' whom he encounters there is won over by the gift of a cigarette, and a sign of solidarity against their common enemy, the police:

> 'I dislike them too', I said.
> the thing grinned and bobbed its head
> yes.
>
> the cop came and took me away
> and put me in a cell with
> 5 less living.[69]

One of Bukowski's more impressive Beat-like works is a poem of his early phase, 'I Write This On the Last Drink's Hammer' - surely an indicative title. It certainly shows what Easy and Osborne have identified as 'that authentic note of psychological extremity, of Existential alienation ...[which] is a hallmark of Beat literature'.[70] The 135 lines of the poem are a long lament for the death of a loved one, whose narrator has determined to keep on drinking

in order to blot out his grief. One might compare it to Allen Ginsberg's much larger-scale poem 'Kaddish', though it concerns a lover not a mother - nor is it as emotionally raw, or moving, as Ginsberg's truly wrenching work. The grieving subject of Bukowski's poem is walking alone, past houses 'waving like flags/filled with drunken hymns'. He is on a drinking binge, 'my voice speaks like slivers through a broken/face,/all this time I've seen through the bottoms of bottles'. His world has gone to pieces, and suicide beckons:

> that all the love that hands could hold
> would go would go
> and that the needs for knicknacks and gestures
> was done
> o fire hold me in these rooms
> o copper kettle boil...
> come o kind wind of black car's bumper
> as I cross Normandy Avenue
> in a sun gone blue
> like ruptured filaments of a battered suitcase
> 71

The suicidal path which the speaker actually chooses leads to the liquor store, 'to see where you are to see where you have gone', the implication being that his lover has drunk herself to death. He enters 'the store of a knowing Jew, my friend', and, in an abrupt universalizing of the poem's meaning, he argues 'for another bottle'

> for him
> and
> for me
> for
>   all
>   of
>   us.

Bukowski's characters are sometimes <u>in extremis</u>, and sometimes whimsically anecdotal; they habitually state

their dislocation, alienation, rejection, antagonism, and individualism in Existential terms. In this, they would seem to have the Beat attitude at their disposal. But, as the literary journalist James Campbell has remarked, though Kerouac's and Bukowski's fictional creations have 'in common a feeling and experience of rejection', the latter 'do not seek to compensate that rejection by recourse to a spiritual philosophy'.[72] Bukowski Man expects and gets no beatitude; his insights, pains, pleasures, his undeluded sense of humour, are all strictly human-based, and the transcendent realm is located only in bottle-shape. Any notion of the body as 'holy', of the spiritual having a vital role, of Nature and mystical experience being abundantly available; all such ideas are generally alien to the Bukowskian view of art and life.

The mainly bisexual or homosexual Beats espoused anarchic individualism, but actually have operated as a grouping with Ginsberg as the kingpin, holding together a vision of a Whitmanic brotherhood. Bukowski responds with great interest and affection to Whitman, but he does not follow him all the way. But Bukowski, Whitman, and the Beats walk a fair distance together on the Open Road. Certainly the Beats have affected him and his work, perhaps importantly confirming the validity of artistic and personal freedoms to him when he was a developing writer. As we have seen over the preceding pages, Bukowski is an extraordinarily acquisitive talent, taking just what he needed from each of the aforementioned movements, and eventually making such derivations over into his own unique style.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

I. 'The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over the Hills', The Days Run Away...pp.II5-I20.

2. 'The Last Generation', War All the Time, (Santa Barbara,I984),pp.I5-I7.

3. Irving Howe, Decline of the New, (New York,I970),p.7.

4. 'His Wife,the Painter',The Days Run Away...pp.I9-20.

5. 'Sunflower', Penguin Modern Poets I3 (Charles Bukowski, Harold Norse,Philip Lamantia), (Harmondsworth,Middlesex, I969),pp.22-23.

6. 'An Argument Over Marshal Foch', Play the Piano Drunk Like a Percussion Instrument Until the Fingers Begin to Bleed a Bit, (Santa Barbara,California,I979),pp.45-46.

7. T.S.Eliot, The Waste Land, A Facsimile & Transcript, edited by Valerie Eliot, (London,I97I),p.I37,p.I40.

8. 'The Hairy,Hairy Fist,and Love Will Die', A Bukowski Sampler,pp.50-54.

9. Imagist Manifesto,in Imagist Poetry,edited by Peter Jones, (Harmondsworth,Middlesex,I976),p.I35.

IO. F.S.Flint,'Imagisme',reprinted in Imagist Poetry,p.I29.

II. William Carlos Williams,quoted in Allen Ginsberg, Composed On the Tongue,p.I25.

I2. Stephen Fredman, 'The New American Poetry',PN Review, 9,no.2,(I982),p.43.

I3. 'I Taste the Ashes of Your Death', The Days Run Away... p.3I.

I4. 'I Cannot Stand Tears',The Roominghouse Madrigals,p.69.

I5. 'Parts of an Opera,Parts of a Guitar,Part of Nowhere', The Roominghouse Madrigals,pp.II8-II9.
'Suicide',The Roominghouse Madrigals,pp.I43-I44.

I6. Hugh Kenner, A Homemade World, (London,I977),p.I44.
Charles Bukowski,'A Rambling Essay...',A Bukowski Sampler, p.9.

I7. Ernest Hemingway, The First Forty-Nine Stories, (I944; London,I968),p.7.
Charles Bukowski, 'He Beats his Women',Second Coming, 2,no.3,(I974),n.p.

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I9. 'The Priest and the Matador',
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CHAPTER FOUR: AUTHORIAL IDENTITY, TEXTUAL TACTICS

Poems written by Bukowski repeatedly seek to create the illusion that they are simply fragments of the personality of their author, an uninhibited autobiographer who likes to regale his audience with madcap slices-of-life:

> my dentist is a drunk.
> he rushes into the room while I'm
> having my teeth cleaned:
> 'hey, you old fuck! you still
> writing dirty stories?'
> he looks at the nurse:
> 'me and this old fuck, we both used
> to work for the post office down at
> the terminal annex!'
> I

A reader unaware that Charles Bukowski did indeed work for the Los Angeles Post Office for many years would still receive an overwhelming impression from these lines that they stood in a one-to-one relationship with the author's life. One is invited to attribute the information gained concerning the 'old fuck' to Bukowski himself, who is known, after all, to have written this poem entitled '8 Rooms'. The intimacy of address to the reader strongly implies that the poem is the transcript of the author's voice speaking to us, his readers, and that he wishes to take us into his confidence, perhaps to reveal still more irreverent details or heterosexual intimacies. Such an excerpt from a minor poem of the 1970s period does therefore reveal two main elements of Bukowski's narrative practice; that many of his works wish to deny their textuality and pass themselves off as 'speech', and that they want to treat the reader as an acquaintance, a bar-room buddy perhaps.

These are unsurprising conclusions. What is more

important to establish is that such effects are the result of a deliberated,worked-for style that seeks to simulate conversational spontaneity,and give the impression of authorial candour. This chapter explores some of the ways in which Bukowski constructs his authorial persona,and beguiles readers with his artifice disguised as naive autobiography. Its latter half will look at the textual tactics evolved to produce the seeming 'naturalness' of his style and to lower the literary tone. Relatively conventional effects often aimed at in early poems are gradually edited out of the work of his maturity,to be replaced by other stylistic concerns more suited to his self-imposed task of 'humanizing' poetry. These tactics are discussed alongside Bukowski's strong narrative element,and his often virtuosic use of comic devices culled from the tradition of American humour in literature,films,radio and tradition.

An investigation of Bukowski's authorial identity,the self created in his texts,might begin with the observation of a predominant use of a first person narrator. To take an instance of this,the openings to a whole succession of poems in the last section of <u>Burning in Water,Drowning in Flame</u> (1974) immediately seek to exploit the picaresque potential of the first-person pronoun,and the inherent tendency of readers to think of a narrator as 'talking' to them.

> it was Philly and the bartender said
> what and I said,gimme a draft,Jim,
> got to get the nerves straight,I'm
> going to look for a job. you,he said,
> a job?
> yeah,Jim,I saw something in the paper,
> no experience necessary.
> and he said,hell,you don't want a job,
> and I said,hell no,but I need money
> ('Looking For a Job')

you know
I sat on the same barstool in Philadelphia for
5 years

I drank canned heat and the cheapest wine
I was beaten in alleys by well-fed truck drivers
for the amusement of the
ladies and gentlemen of the night
('Eddie and Eve')

she was hot, she was so hot
I didn't want anybody else to have her,
and if I didn't get home on time
she'd be gone, and I couldn't bear that -
('Hot')

some people never go crazy.
me, sometimes I'll lie down behind the couch
for 3 or 4 days.
('Some People')[2]

All these poems make a gesture of their autobiographical, revelatory intentions, though their actual status is that of fiction, language whose relation to reality is wholly problematic and unknowable to the reader. The critic Michael Hamburger pointed out in The Truth of Poetry, that 'Whether primarily confessional or primarily dramatic, the first person in lyrical poetry serves to convey a gesture, not to document identity or establish biographical facts'.[3] First person narrators attempt to reassure readers, by giving them a vicarious personality to live through.[4] Such is the apparent 'naturalness' of Bukowski's first person speakers, so intimate their tone - by turns aggrandizing or confidential - that the reader is inclined to trust them, and identify with their experiences. This ideal reader is presumed to be male, since Bukowski's poems habitually adopt the masculine point of view, and describe realms and attitudes instantly recognizable and even congenial to male readers.

An insistence on tying Bukowski's texts to presumed knowledge about his lifestyle, or events in his life, is naive, a mimetic fallacy of art's relation to life. These

approaches deny the artfulness of his work,which is what one must be primarily interested in. The fascination of reading biographies of creative artists arises because they possessed and developed a talent for language,or another artistic medium,which came to fruition within a certain social,political,and psychological context. If artists' talents were not extraordinary,then few people would want to read about their variously dull or sensational lives. The words of Bukowski's poems would remain the same,and have the same impact as texts,even if 'Charles Bukowski' were one of the heteronyms of some present-day Fernando Pessoa,that is,an entirely ficticious poet concocted for the purpose of writing particular kinds of poems. To take another imaginative possibility,'Charles Bukowski' might even be the nom-de-plume of a little old lady with a rich fantasy life,who then employed the services of a plausible-looking man to read her poems in public. The point is,that freed from the burden of vulgarly autobiographical readings,Bukowski's poems can be seen for what they are - artefacts,fictional constructions,which may make a point of denying their artificial,rhetorical status,but cannot escape it. Bukowski's great language gift is what matters.

The personalities of Bukowski's early narrators approximate to the same type,being detached observers of humanity,cynical about the actions of men and voyeuristic about the actions of women. Sometimes,though not invariably they are revealed as socially-marginal artists. They adopt non-conformist attitudes and living patterns,celebrating their estrangement from the beastly bourgeois. A good example would be 'The State of World Affairs from a 3rd Floor Window',whose girl-watching speaker proceeds to muse on larger events.

I am watching a girl dressed in a
light green sweater,blue shorts,long black stockings;
there is a necklace of some sort
but her breasts are small,poor thing,
and she watches her nails
as her dirty white dog sniffs the grass
in erratic circles;
a pigeon is there too,circling,
half dead with a tick of a brain
and I am upstairs in my underwear,
3 day beard,pouring a beer and waiting
for something literary or symphonic to happen
5

The speaker's familiar,lightly ironic tone touches upon the antics of a constipated dog,the appearance of its owner - her clothes,and also her small breasts; presumably a demerit from his point of view,but indicating his sexual interest. There is a suggestion that his observational scrutiny may have to do with boredom,or a period of fallowness while waiting for 'something' to happen. The implication of the last line is that the speaker is some kind of a writer,with a liking for classical music. A dishevelled appearance and bibulous inclinations ('3 day beard,pouring a beer') may also indicate that this is a writer of relaxed,even bohemian,social attitudes,who is unlikely to be a shiny-shoed advocate of cleanliness, Godliness,conspicuous consumption,hard work - the American Way of life,in terms of ideology at least.

The narrator adopts a tone of informality ('some sort', 'poor thing') to tell us a simple story,which builds a relationship between the subjects observed and those who are 'observing' the girl and the dog through the narrator's eyes and point of view. The reader is told that 'it's no good: ché sèra,sèra',and that the dog is 'simply not worried'. The worry thus highlighted is not just a dog's habits,or the temporary block suffered by a writer,but that

whilst these mundane events are happening, ships are 'now crossing the sea;/there are piles and piles of H- and A-bombs'. The poem was in fact first published in 1963, the year after the Cuban Missile Crisis, when an American sea blockade of Cuba threatened a nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union. The specific historical context of the poem may well add to our appreciation of it, though Bukowski's works rarely respond to particular political or social events. Indeed, the Crisis itself is not mentioned within the poem: the ships laden with bombs may equally well simply stand for the whole realm of international events that ceaselessly spread their ripples into everyday concerns, even though they take place in far distant waters. The poem simply contrasts, and balances, an ordinary human situation - one being watching another, with some passing interest and sympathy - with a public situation. The benign narrator humorously links canine constipation and wider possibilities. The girl and her dog leave the view of the speaker, an 'unsymphonic' pigeon does not, and we are told: 'well, from the looks of things, relax:/the bombs will never go off'. In a larger sense, we are being told not to worry about public events, but to focus upon everyday events and human, personal concerns. This plea to 'relax' is inviting, but also of course another instance of Bukowski's political quietism. The whole area of politics is dismissed in the clichéd phrase 'ché sèra, sèra' (what will be, will be), which was also the title of one of Doris Day's popular records of the 1950s, the era of 'I Like Ike' and other conservative slogans.

Another aspect of the narrator's identity is his economic status; he is forced to live in low-rent apartments and neighbourhoods, but feels quite at home in

them. This is the case in the more-riotous atmosphere of 'What Seems to be the Trouble,Gentlemen?',which takes place in a cheap hotel,whose management has called in the police following a drunken assault upon a bellboy. The rough-house narrator tells us that when 'the fuzz came up',

> I had the sofa in front of the door
> and the chain on,
> the 2nd movement of Brahms First Symphony
> and had my hand halfway up the ass
> of a broad old enough to be my grandmother
> and they broke the god damned door,
> pushed the sofa aside;
> I slapped the screaming chippy
> and turned and asked,
> what seems to be the trouble,gentlemen?[6]

A tough-guy who slaps women around,and uses slangy idioms ('ass','broad','god damned','chippy'),the speaker seems quite well used to such encounters with loose women, classical music,and the police; he seems a bundle of stimulating,contradictory qualities and traits. He shows an alcoholic chutzpah in the face of potential violence,and unbridled sexual urges that encompass a 'chippy' (a promiscuous or delinquent woman),as well as anarchic antagonism to that which most citizens feel are important - such as respect for other people (three are attacked within the poem,including the speaker himself),and the forces of law and order. His lifestyle and attitudes are not presented as wholly admirable,but preferable to social conformity; he is enacting an opposition to bourgeois morality. The next morning,the speaker tells us,he is in a prison ward 'chained' to his bed,and being interrogated. His major concern,he adds with some irony,is that he will be late for work,'which worried me immensely'.

The racetrack is another popular,low-class setting for Bukowski's poems in all phases. For example,in 'A 340

Dollar Horse and a Hundred Dollar Whore',the storyteller makes it clear that he is at home in the milieu,with a casual command of the technical names and nicknames of types of bet. Again,he is a highly-sexed observer,very responsive to the attractions of racetrack whores hoping to relieve successful punters of some of their cash.

> don't ever get the idea that I am a poet;you can see me
> at the racetrack any day half drunk
> betting quarters,sidewheelers and straight thoroughs,
> but let me tell you,there are some women there
> who go where the money goes,and sometimes when you
> look at these whores these onehundreddollar whores
> you wonder sometimes if nature isn't playing a joke
> dealing out so much breast and ass and the way
> it's all hung together,you look and you look and
> you look and you can't believe it
> 7

The admonition not to 'get the idea' of the speaker as a poet is,of course,a device for drawing attention to that very fact. One,after all,is reading that phrase within a magazine or book containing those words,and other texts with the generic title of 'poems'. What is more seriously meant is that the speaker is not the kind of poet who might go to a racetrack simply as a social anthropologist, or in search of colourful material. This is a determinedly bluecollar poet who is involved in the vibrant and shoddy milieu he describes; his language again is casual and conversational ('let me tell you','you wonder sometimes') with the words 'onehundreddollar' being run together to approximate to vernacular usage.

The punter-poet wins a substantial bet,and 'the biggest blonde of all' leaves with him. They return to his apartment for sex. But the prostitute does not simply take her money and leave after a swift and joyless bout. Instead,she is shown sitting in bed,drinking 'Old Grandad' (whiskey) and chatting away:

and she said
what's a guy like you doing
living in a dump like this?
and I said
I'm a poet

and she threw back her beautiful head and laughed.

you? you...a poet?

I guess you're right,I said,I guess you're right.

The woman's reversal of a clichéd male chat-up line brings a reluctant admission of a claim to poethood,which is immediately half-withdrawn under scornful laughter. The speaker presumably does not correspond to her idea of what a poet should 'look like' - refined,elevated,brooding, delicate,perhaps. Again,this Bukowskian speaker is setting out to make plain that he is a poet of the Lower Depths, well-known to racetrack-goers and whores,likely as not to be found 'half drunk' and living in 'a dump'. He proclaims his marginality,but also his status as an artist. He is no stander-aside from humanity's seamier side,but positively relishes it.

These conditions and interests are further elaborated in a 1965 poem,'A Night of Mozart'. Its narrator is very familiar with Jeanette ('one of the better hustlers'),and they sit in a racetrack bar,discussing a winning punter and the system he keeps to himself:

'I'd start him off with a blow-job and then twist
his nuts until he told me how he did it...'
'Would you do that to me,baby?' I asked.
'With your method of play you're lucky to have
admission',she said downing a drink that had cost me
85 cents.[8]

This amusingly flirtatious dialogue establishes that the speaker is on home territory, so to speak, and is genial enough to report his dealings with the titillating hustler and his own current lack of betting fortune. When the successful punter is murdered ('eighteenhundred dollars split four ways'), with the knowledge or connivance of Jeanette, the speaker is able to blackmail her into providing free drinks, cigarettes and sex - a modest but satisfactory cut. Next day at the track he wins 'onehundred and twelve dollars, not counting drinks and admission', as though if he had stated a less exact amount we might not have believed him. Another aspect of his interests is a knowledge of music, selecting Mozart for his home entertainment with the hustler, and then 'the Rake's Progress by Strav' (Stravinsky) for his next night alone. He mixes areas of high culture and low life with complete naturalness and unselfconsciousness.

Another early speaker with an interest in betting, sexually-available woman, and culture makes an appearance in 'I Am Visited By an Editor and a Poet', a poem which goes to some lengths to plead that this 'really is' Charles Bukowski speaking, or at least that the events depicted within 'really happened': witnesses are summoned. The Speaker has 'just won $115' and 'just gotten rid of a very loose/(in several ways, the looseness not the riddance)'. Note the grammatical confusion, another speech-indicator which most other writers, or their editors, would surely have expunged. The narrator hears a knock.

> and since the cops had just raided a month or so ago,
> I screamed out rather on edge -
> who the hell is it? what do you want, man?
> I'm your publisher. somebody screamed back,
> and I hollered, I don't have a publisher

> try the place next door, and he screamed back,
> you're Charles Bukowski, aren't you?
> 9

After this faintly farcical episode, the poet-recluse entertains his unwelcome guests - identified later in the story as J.B.May, editor of Trace, and the little magazine poet 'Wolf the Hedley' (Leslie Wolf Hedley) - and tells them that he isn't really a poet 'in the ordinary sense'. He explains this by telling them about 'slaughterhouses', 'the racetracks' and the conditions in 'some of our jails'. He contrasts his own appearance with that of May and Hedley who are 'very immaculate', thus claiming to be more in touch with the blood, dirt, and crime of real life. Since this is known to be the line taken by Bukowski in many essays and pronouncements, the reader is invited to accept the authenticity of the events and opinions in the poem - and to attribute them to Bukowski himself, named within the narrative as its chief subject. Of course, in the absence of sworn affidavits from Bukowski, May and Hedley, or the authenticated research of a detailed biography, one has no evidence that such a meeting ever took place, or that it took place as depicted; only the poem insists that it did.

An aspect of the air of autobiographical immediacy that Bukowski's poems seek, is that they sometimes name their narrator as 'Bukowski' (as in the previous poem) or 'Henry Chinaski' (the hero of several of the author's novels during the 1970s). Within later work, Bukowski shows an increased willingness to enter the text as 'himself', and the poems often discuss incidents that are meant to be interpreted as stemming from the author's life in a direct, almost diary-like fashion. As examples, one could point to 'Hell Hath No Fury', where two jealous girlfriends fight over 'Bukowski'. In 'Trouble With Spain', there is a

contretemps between the narrator and a handsome young artist at a party. The unflattering opinion of other guests at the party is reported:

> Bukowski,he can't write,he's had it.
> washed-up. look at him drink.
> he never used to come to parties.
> now he comes to parties and drinks everything
> up and insults real talent.
> IO

This passage is not so much self-deprecatory as self-indulgent. By no means all the poems where Bukowski takes centre-stage as a character are as tiresome,but few of them will probably be included in a selection of his best work. Bukowski's imagination is most free-ranging when the speaker is not specifically named,or tied to the author himself,but acts simply as a storyteller. In certain of his best works,the sex of the narrator is not definably male or female; indeed,in perhaps one-third of his poems there is no indication of gender. But Bukowskian speakers always have an emphatic personality.

One must also mention those poems of the I970s,in which 'Henry Chinaski' is identified as the narrator and chief protagonist. Chinaski is known as a writer of some repute,and these poems often indulge in a fair amount of literary chit-chat,whilst also putting-down such conventional habits. One clear instance of this occurs in 'Culture', where Chinaski has taken refuge at the house of a bibulous,literary lady. They drink,and talk about Henrik Ibsen,Knut Hamsun,as well as the relative merits of two rather different American authors:

> 'now James Thurber',she said,'JAMES THURBER
> and Ross,I think his name was,he was the editor

> of the New Yorker, they used to sit around for hours arguing about the use of the comma'.
>
> 'yes', I said, 'while other people were starving to death'.
>
> 'now CHIN-ASS-KI', she said, 'since when do you give a damn about other people starving to death?'[11]

Both 'Henry Chinaski' and 'Bukowski' have become that odd textual construct, a 'paper-author', as Roland Barthes coined the term, whose 'life is no longer the origin of his fictions, but a fiction contributing to his work'. These names which stand-in for the author during his texts are simply convenient fictions whose actual relation to reality and autobiography is entirely problematic.[12]

But the easy critical assumption that Bukowski is, or pretends to be, the narrator of all his poems is demonstrably false. Particularly in his early phase, Bukowski made use of a range of identifiable personae, voices which are distinctly not that of an urban author. He has numerous works whose narrator is a hobo or daylabourer, as in 'Shot of Red Eye', 'Poem for Personnel Managers' and 'Scene in a Tent Outside the Cotton Fields of Bakersfield'. Bukowski also investigates a range of lower-class perspectives on art, life and society by means of still more voices. A by-no means comprehensive list of personae would even include the female masks of bar-stool floozy ('Did I Ever Tell You?') and landlady ('Crazy Man, Another One'). Masculine voices adopted are the following: cartoon cowboy ('What a Man I Was'), losing boxer ('The Loser'), suicide ('Old Man, Dead in a Room'), lavatory attendant ('Mens Crapper'), painter ('Peace', 'I Cannot Stand Tears', 'The Sunday Artist) flop-house manager ('The Moment of Truth'), football coach ('Yellow'), jailbird ('Riot') and explorer-adventurer

('22,000 Dollars in 3 Months').

The use of a persona, the assumption of another voice or personality, has a long history in poetry. Among the most prominent figures to realize its potential for indirect revelation have been Robert Browning, W.B.Yeats, Ezra Pound, T.S.Eliot and Basil Bunting. They realized that modern man could not comfortably inhabit the Romantic concept of a single, undivided self. Michael Hamburger argued that modern poets were afflicted by the 'problem of multiple personality', of which an extreme example would be the Portuguese Modernist poet Fernando Pessoa, who split his poetic identity into four distinct voices, all of whom had differing styles and names: Ricardo Reis, Alvaro de Campos, Alberto Caiero, and Fernando Pessoa 'as himself'. Pessoa wrote both free verse and classical odes with equal facility. Such dilemmas of poetic identity and style afflicted those Modern writers, as Hamburger articulated, to whom tradition 'was not something given and self-evident...but something to be selected from the _musée imaginaire_ of literary history, to be renovated and restored'.[13] This can extend to the revivification of voices from past periods of history or in other, distant cultures, or the adoption of the voice of the opposite sex - inviting the imagination to take on the challenge of inventing a distinctively different mind. One might instance W.B.Yeats' 'Crazy Jane' poems, or those other works of his spoken by woman, such as 'Before the World Was Made' and 'A Last Confession'. Ezra Pound's early poems 'Sestina: Altaforte' and 'Piere Vidal Old' are both spoken by Provencal characters of the late Middle Ages, while Basil Bunting's 'Chomei at Toyama' is voiced by a thirteenth century Japanese. The use of a persona allows the discussion of personal interests and perspectives to be

achieved with indirect lenses, and perhaps with less inhibition, by lowering self-consciousness; the author's consciousness of a contemporary self.

Whatever Bukowski's motivations, one of his earliest poems uses an identifiably female speaker, the 1957 work 'Did I Ever Tell You?'. A monologue, it recounts the habits of the many men in the past life of a woman of easy virtue. Her colourful experiences range haphazardly over seven and a half pages, which is too long to sustain real interest, given the relative paucity of comic detail. It does have some quite good wisecracks and comical asides, as when she remarks of one former love called 'Ralph':

> Ralph was the only one, I think,
> who ever loved me,
> but he didn't appreciate the finer
> things:
> he thought that Van Gogh used to pitch for
> Brooklyn and that George Sand played
> opposite Zsa Zsa Gabor
> 14

Bukowski makes great play of placing references to culture-heroes (Van Gogh, George Sand) in the mouths of social outcasts, low-life types, sportsmen, bar-flies and other incongruously allusive characters.

The gap between high art and the 'man in the street' is explored in another persona poem, the 1960 work 'Peace'. This is told by a painter, whose alfresco activities are disturbed by the presence of a couple of hunters out shooting. The painter becomes exasperated by their ignorant gawping, and 'finally' tells them go and look at Picasso and Rembrandt, Klee and Gauguin, 'listen to a symphony by Mahler' and only if they can get 'anything' out of 'that' should they return and 'stare at my canvas'.

The painter seems angered by their activities, as well

their ignorance of Modern painting; one might have expected the sympathies of a writer to lie with the aesthetic concerns and tastes thus alluded to. Instead, Bukowski's poem leaves a somewhat different, contradictory impression.

> what the hell's wrong with
> him? the one guy
> said.
>
> he's nuts. they're all nuts,
> the other guy said. anyhow,
> I got my ten doves.
>
> me too, his buddy said, let's
> go home; we can have them
> in the pan
> by 2.30.
> 15

This is not a simple case of the values of high art being ranged against destructive sport, nor is it just a satiric portrait of characters convinced by their inspection of the painter's canvas and outburst that all artists are 'nuts'. The poem also shines a slightly ironic view on the pretensions of art and artists, by reporting that the hunters see art as irrelevant to their concerns in the daily struggle to survive. They may well be poachers, providing for their living through a time-honoured human activity, whereas the artist is obsessed with the private struggle to produce works, 'useless' artefacts, that are in several senses luxury items. Eating is even more fundamental to life than creativity. Here, Bukowski's use of the persona has enabled him to problematize these issues, without reaching any dogmatic conclusions about the relative values of art and life, the artist and the hunters. Within the poem there is an implicit criticism, not of the artists named (all of whom are favourably regarded in other Bukowski poems) but of art's status within society, cut off from the everyday experience and educational reach of large

sectors of the population. The painter urges the hunters to go away and let him get on with his work,but also to go away and let their lives be enriched by art,as unlikely as that is to happen.

The sporting personae in Bukowskian works are almost always losers,as in 'K.O.'; in 'The Loser',the speaker decides to leave boxing for the less brutal but perhaps equally bruising pursuit of poetry:

> and the next time I remembered I'm on a table,
> everybody's gone: the head of bravery
> under light,scowling,flailing me down...
> and then some toad stood there,smoking a cigar:
> 'Kid,you're no fighter',he told me,
> and I got up and knocked him over a chair...
> the tape still on my hands and
> wrote my first poem,
> and I've been fighting
> ever since.
> 16

There is an unusual variation in this well-established identification with losers in 'Yellow',whose narrator is a tough American football coach. He appears to be an overbearing advocate of the macho,success-orientated ethos of the sport and,by implication,American society at large. The coach introduces himself,and then tells us about 'Seivers', a star running back who lost his nerve following a bad injury,and who is now 'gun shy as a/squirrel in deer season'. The narrator can't stand to see a man 'jaking it', that is,lacking the guts to do battle again,and so he deliberately humiliates Seivers:

> I got him in the locker room the other day when the whole
> squad was in there. I told him,'Seivers,you used to be a player
> but now you're chickenshit!'

When Seivers tries to answer back,the coach punches him on the chin,and Seivers starts to cry 'against the locker, one shoe off,one on'.[17] The punishment is a very American one,since the coward nearly always gets knocked over in similar fashion during Westerns. The coach then remarks Seivers' failure to measure up to the competition will lead inevitably to his failure in the economic game,stating that 'guys like Seivers' will end up washing dishing dishes for a dollar per hour,'and that's just what they deserve'. The aggression and high financial rewards inherent in American football,or more particularly its ethos,function as a microcosm of American society with its relatively unfettered Capitalism. Both systems,the game and the society, reward winners and ignore or punish losers,the rewards being there for those who are prepared to compete with others and beat them,or prove more effective. The coach's criticism of Seivers is,in his eyes,a vital one. Crying, here viewed as a sign of masculine weakness,is somehow connected with the weakness that results in having to reside at the bottom of the economic order,washing dishes for a living. Bukowski's use of the coach's voice may appear to endorse such sentiments,including those that favour machismo. But this is not the pattern of his work. American footballers are a male gang,a collective,who respond unquestioningly to the orders of the coach. They are precisely the kind of conformist group that Bukowski's efforts direct themselves against,and whose values he is for ever trying to undermine and debunk. The sympathies of the author are at least as much with the Seivers of this world as they are with the domineering coach,who are both individuals standing apart or on top of group identities. Bukowski's use of the persona has allowed him to take a

sidelook, perhaps even a side-swipe at the competition spirit, the effects of Capitalism on individuals, without offering a clear-cut plea or providing an ideological critique. He is not urging a new system, simply drawing attention to the impact of the current one. The team spirit is also questioned. As discussed in the following chapter, Bukowski's conception of masculinity has as much to do with notions of integrity and individual sensitivity, as it has with tough-gut, tough-guy actions and attitudes. The male speakers in Bukowski's works may have a few drinking buddies, but they never identify with any team or collective organisation of men. His personae enable him to achieve a greater diversity of viewpoints, and subtlety of content, than is at first sight apparent.

There are very many proletarian personae at large in his early poems, who take bottom views of society - this is literally the case in 'Mens Crapper', where its lavatory attendant narrator is a close observer of male ritual and fastidiousness. The world of the cheap hotel or flophouse is another archetypal location for sightings of the human beast and their essential natures. One of the most pointed is 'The Moment of Truth', first published in 1966. Its speaker is the manager of a seedy roominghouse, one of whose residents has taken rat poison, and is already stiff when he is found. The manager's reflections on what follows are unsentimental, clear-eyed about human motivations, rather dismissive of the 'winos' who are affected by the man's death, but nonetheless are in need of 'shaves and something to drink':

> and I told them: 'all right, all you monkeys
> clear the god damned halls! you hurt my eyesight!'
> 'a man died, sir, he was our friend', one of them said.

> it was Benny the Dip. 'all right,Benny',I told him,
> 'you've got one night left in here to get up the rent'.
> you should have seen the rest of them disappear:
> death doesn't matter a damn when you need a place to
> sleep.
> 18

This is an unsparing view of skid row and its denizens; the manager sees the interjection of 'Benny the Dip' as just another sob-story to con an advantage. Though the speaker has seen some dignity and pathos in the victim's death,he shows scant sympathy for his surviving colleagues,who are getting on with their pathetic existence as best they can. Yet the poem does balance apparent cynicism against the live human issues of friendship and death itself. The poem itself is not wholly unsympathetic to the bums. As a whole, the work tends to endorse Bukowski's Existentialist mythologizing of skid row,seeing it as a place where all illusions about existence are finally stripped away,the realm where bourgeois concerns and spiritual values are shown to be empty of meaning. In fact,of course,the very last thing that one would find on skid row is the truth. On the contrary,winos and bums can only bear to look at the truth through the bottom of a beer or wine bottle. The man stretched out sleeping on the pavement of the shopping arcade may be a kind of victim of society's economic set-up,but he is no philosopher. There is an equivocal aspect to the narrative of the poem,with the speaker caught between his instinctive cynicism and twinges of regard for a man's passing. Bukowski's use of the persona,with the rather skewed authorial presence it entails,makes these works harder to ultimately decipher,their meanings less straightforward.

Another aspect of Bukowski's authorial identity is the more than occasional habit of authorial interruptions and comic asides within the narrative. Sometimes this amounts

to an address of a 'dear reader' sort, as in 'Farewell, Foolish Objects', where the narrator remarks to the reader, 'so now if you will excuse me'. Such a tactic is partly designed to break up the barrier between poem and its readers, attacking the detached authority of poetry's discourse. The poem 'Practice' signs off with the narrator sending a farewell, much as a radio disc-jockey might do to his or her listeners:

> it is not an unusual morning except that
> it is one more,
> and I want to thank you
> for listening.
> 19

Asides, and irreverent commentary within a narrative, are also in evidence, as in the rambling 1962 poem 'WW 2'. This account of the experiences of its narrator during that conflict include an encounter with the Draft Board, and a 'sike' (psychiatrist), followed by a strangely entertaining spell in prison. Much of the language is slangy, swear words are used, as well as words spelled phonetically (a rare occurrence in Bukowski's poems), such as in the exclamation 'BUTTT as i wuz saying'. The opening statement has the intention of double-bluffing the reader, implying that the following events really happened and, as ever, inviting everyone concerned to 'relax' and suspend the categories of fact and fiction:

> since fact is an artifice of fiction
> let's call this fiction so like all good boys and
> girls
> we can relax

This appears to mean that since life ('fact') is an anarchic narrative ('fiction') which we make up as we go

along ('an artifice'),the poem will therefore reflect this. The characteristic Bukowskian authorial playfulness is much in evidence,as when the speaker becomes infuriated with the disturbed old man who shares his cell,and then takes time out to elicit the reader's empathy:

> he was always on the crapper
> puffing on an empty pipe and all these makeshift make-
> shit
> clotheslines hanging about dripping polack stockings
> and rags
> (forget my name i am a Prussian nobleman)
> (this is fiction)
> (isn't it) (i am getting a little bored with this and
> could use a
> hot piece of ass as what man cd not?)
> 20

With comical familiarity,the reader is told that the author-speaker is on your side,able to empathise with the creeping <u>ennui</u> of a poem of nearly nine pages in length, and the ever-present sexual urge of the (male) reader for a 'hot piece of ass'.

The resort to real names and first names within his work ('Linda','Marylou','Jane','Barbara','Jack') can be regarded as another layer of attempted verisimilitude,an illusion of fidelity to actuality. Such is the paradoxical nature of literary works that insist on their reality while relishing their fictionality. Bukowski's narrators are constructed by the text,of course,and not the other way around. In his later volumes,perhaps most markedly in <u>Love is a Dog From Hell</u> (1977) and <u>Dangling in the Tournefortia</u> (1981),there is a continuity of narratorial identity from poem to poem in such a way that the books seem to be designed as poetic 'diaries' of the life of the narrator. That is,the impression of autobiography that his works often give is more pronounced in later books,whereas in the earlier phase there are more varied narrative

tactics and procedures, as well as identifiably differing personae.

One can conclude this survey of Bukowski's construction of an intimate authorial identity by briefly indicating certain of the ramifications of texts that are designed to give the impression that they have been spoken, or are being spoken, not written. This is a characteristic tactic of some of the greatest American literary texts, as with Moby Dick and Huckleberry Finn. In an essay on Ken Kesey's novel One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, the critic John Osborne argued that the work, though it is narrated by one of its fictional characters (Chief Bromden) clearly separate from the author, it nonetheless wishes to give the dynamic impression of a living voice. Twain's Huckleberry Finn, narrated by the engaging Huck Finn, and Melville's Moby Dick which is 'given' to us by Ishmael, are similarly founded upon such necessary authorial duplicities. The colloquialisms, slang, vernacular idioms, occasional obscenities, malapropisms, ungrammatical constructions, aposiopesis within all these works are all attributes of common speech which are usually excised from written text. Bukowski's texts can be placed in this tradition of American writing when they are maintaining the illusion that the narrator is actually speaking to us. A poem of the mid-1960s, entitled with slangy relish 'Big Bastard With a Sword', opens thus: 'listen, I went to get a haircut, it was a perfectly good day/until they brought it to me, I mean I sat waiting my turn'. Such storytelling tactics are designed to obscure or suspend the most obvious fact about literature - that is has been written, that it consists of black marks on white paper to be engaged with only if one opens a book or magazine.[21]

Though Bukowski's poems often brilliantly succeed in giving the impression of spoken language, the texture and contours of American speech, they are - thankfully - nowhere near a transcription of actual speech, which by its very nature is highly repetitive, digressive and unstructured. His use of the speech model is a reinscription of his Romantic roots as a writer, and his own American literary stance; he certainly gets closer to the vernacular than Whitman, and arguably closer than William Carlos Williams. None of these writers have wanted to simply convey the impression of speech, but to use its dynamic energies in the construction of their art. Bukowski's authorial strategies and narrative elements are perforce linked to his textual tactics, all of which contribute to an air of spoken ease rather than learned discourse and obtrusive literariness.

Any poet's forms owe a great deal to past discoveries, as well as the giftedness of his or her own ear. Fairly early on, Bukowski must have realized that the traditional poetic tools of what Eliot termed the Auditory Imagination - regular rhyming and rhythmic effects, assonance, alliteration, etc - were alien to his talent and purpose as a writer. A few examples of such usages can be found within his very earliest work, when he was still impressionable and had not yet embarked on his long march towards stylistic freedoms and narrative aggrandizement. 'I Taste the Ashes of Your Death' and 'Hooray Say the Roses' employ assonantal effects with some skill, and exhibit internal rhyming, but one would be hard-pressed to find such devices being used in his work after the mid-1960s. As with Frank O'Hara, one does not read Bukowski's work for its musical qualities; the trait of _logopoeia_ often found so blissfully within the lines of

Eliot, Pound, Bunting and Zukofsky is almost entirely absent from this poet's work.

The narrative conventions and textual tactics that Bukowski's poems do employ, and which will be detailed, include the parallelism, the paragraphic stanza, and such considerations that bear upon his line-breaks. The comic devices found in his narratives, in particular comedies of unlike discourse, punchlines and the deliberate anti-climax, also bear examination. His revival of the narrative element in verse has been significant, particularly to his performance orientated work of the 1970s and beyond, when he had evolved forms flexible enough to encompass dialogue. Of course, all these stylistic features operate in tandem within poems, but can profitably be examined in isolation; machines made of words need occasional stripping-down.

Charles Bukowski usually writes in Open Forms, free verse but with heavily cadenced lines of irregular lengths; the parallelism culled from Whitman's practice is an important resource, but there is also likely to have been an input from similar practitioners whom one knows that Bukowski has admired, Robinson Jeffers and D.H.Lawrence. As a structuring device in verse, the parallelism has a long lineage, stretching back to the Hebrew poetry of the Psalms, and forward to Shakespeare's sonnets. A correspondence or comparison of successive passages, the parallelism imparts a rhythmic impulse and a sometimes impressive rhetorical weight to lines. Whitman's Song of Myself contains many examples of this usage, and one knows that he used the device to grand effect, giving some of the poem an epic sweep. Bukowski is wise enough not to try to compete in such respects; Whitman's listing of humanity is more Bukowski's style:

For me all that have been boys and that love women,
For me the man that has been proud and feels how it
stings to be slighted,
For me the sweetheart and the old maid....for me
mothers and
the mothers of mothers,
For me lips that have smiled, eyes that have shed tears,
For me children and the begetters of children.
22

Whitman's poem contains a good deal of all-embracing Nature at least some of which found its way into the variable but often marvellous free verse of D.H.Lawrence - an acerbic but empathetic commentator on Walt's attributes. The poem 'Tortoise Shout' achieves intensity through the build up of subjects yoked together by rhythmical parallelisms in a distinctly Whitmanesque manner:

I remember my first terror hearing the howl of weird, amorous cats;
I remember the scream of a terrified, injured horse, the sheet lightning,
And running away from the sound of a woman in labour, something like an owl whooing,
And listening inwardly to the first bleat of a lamb,
The first wail of an infant,
And my mother singing to herself,
And the first tenor singing of the passionate throat of a
young collier, who has long since drunk himself to death,
The first elements of foreign speech
On wild dark lips.
23

Another source for the Bukowskian penchant for the parallelism is the Californian poet Robinson Jeffers, whose leaden lines and somewhat moralizing tone have proved to be a rather baleful influence on certain Bukowski texts. One may justifiably depict Jeffers as a rather humourless, heavy-handed poet, who used the parallelism as a device for, so to speak, departing for the slopes of Mount Olympus and berating the world from halfway up. A typical instance of

the device in operation can be found in Jeffers' poem 'Time of Disturbance', whose speaker finds it opportune to warn humanity thus:

> Moderate kindness
> Is oil on a crying wheel: use it. Mutual help
> Is necessary: use it when it is necessary.
> And as to love: make love when need drives.
> And as to love: love God. He is rock, earth and water,
> and the beasts and stars, and the night that
> contains them,
> And as to love: whoever loves or hates men is fooled
> in a mirror.
> 24

Bukowski's poem 'He Wrote in Lonely Blood' is a tribute to Jeffers, but is not stylistically indebted to him; a small number of other poems certainly are, and indeed are so close that they almost read like parodies of the Jeffers manner. They also echo a deep pessimism about America and the human race in general, while yet feeling the need to give out banal advice as to human conduct. Bukowski's poem 'Counsel' is a particularly notorious example, the distinctly stilted phrases being another indication of how aberrant the work is from the true direction of his work.

> love, yes, but not as a task of marriage,
> and beware bad food and excessive labor;
> live in a country, you must,
> but love is not an order
> either of woman or the land
> 25

Another Jeffers-influenced effort in similar didactic vein is the 1966 poem 'The Genius of the Crowd'. Its discrete paragraphic stanzas successively employ the words 'AND', 'Those', 'Beware', 'Their/There', 'Not', 'They', 'And' and 'Like to begin their monolithic statements. The work reads rather like an exercise in lofty attitudinizing:

Beware Those Who Seek Constant
Crowds; They Are Nothing
Alone
Beware
The Average Man
The Average Woman
BEWARE Their Love
26

In this instance, the parallelism sits ill with Bukowski's usually sane and sceptical tone.

In the fifteenth section of Song of Myself, Whitman arranged sixty-nine long lines, of which no less than fifty-five start with the word 'The'. Such a reiterative pattern is echoed, sometimes inventively and at other times monotonously, within Bukowski poems - many of whose lines launch themselves with simple words, 'and', 'but', or 'the'. In 'The Day I Kicked a Bankroll Out of the Window', for instance, the opening stanza has twenty lines, and seventeen of those begin with the same construction, indicating a tirade that the reader has chanced to overhear:

and, I said, you can take your rich aunts and uncles
and grandfathers and fathers
and all their lousy oil
and their seven lakes
and their wild turkey
and buffalo
and the whole state of Texas

The extremity of the device occurs in 'They, All of Them, Know', which contains 135 lines; all but two start with 'ask'. A tortuous build-up links up randomly assembled phenomena:

ask the sidewalk painters of Paris
ask the sunlight on a sleeping dog
ask the 3 pigs
ask the paperboy
ask the music of Donizetti
27

A number of reiterative strategies obtain throughout the Bukowskian hoard of poems; another one being the Stein/ Hemingwayan model of repetition with artful variation previously described. The parallelism acts as scaffolding for reiteration, and is at best a flexible and inclusive tactic, and can build up emotional intensity; Bukowski, however, generally employs its list-making and observational modes. But the device's main attraction is that it enables long and irregular lines to retain poetic shapeliness, with two, three, or four stresses per line.

The paragraphic stanza is a typical feature of free verse, enabling congruent or related ideas to be coherently linked together; the phrases of such a paragraphic stanza usually exhibit several qualifying clauses. This stanzaic pattern is widespread in Bukowski's verse, though a simple comparison of a 1956 poem with one from 1970 shows a much more confident poetic intelligence at work. 'These Things', one of the first poems he had accepted following the resumption of his writing career, is a one paragraph statement about human aspiration, dislocation, isolation, and mortality:

> these things that we support most well
> have nothing to do with us,
> and we do with them
> out of boredom or fear or money
> or cracked intelligence;
> our circle and our candle of light
> being small,
> so small we cannot bear it,
> we heave out with Idea
> and lose the Center;
> and wax without the wick,
> and we see names that once meant
> wisdom,
> like signs into ghost towns
> and only the graves are real. 28

These expressions are curiously crabbed ('do with them',

'heave out with Idea'). Three stresses in each line impart a regularity of cadence that is stately but not of great rhythmic interest. The poem's lowercase lettering has the effect of throwing attention onto the only capitalized words, the quasi-philosophical 'Idea' and 'Center', but these do not convey their connotations at all plainly. The very lack of real language inventiveness or thematic drive underscores the monolithic feeling engendered by reading the work; it leaves only a vague impression on the memory.

The 1970 poem 'If We Take' discusses essentially the same points as the earlier work, employs a similar structure based on the verse paragraph, but its impression is more dynamic. Instead of dealing with abstractions or vaguely-realized yearnings, this poem concerns itself with 'what we can see'. 'If We Take' consists of two paragraphs of fifteen lines each, separated by a one-line sentence. The first paragraph mixes motifs of decay and death ('flowers rotting, flies web-caught', and 'dying fires', 'men old enough to love the grave') with jaundiced observations of 'clowns in love with dollar bills,/nations moving people like pawns'. If the work had ended there, it would merely have been a more interesting re-run of 'These Things'. But the second paragraph finds its narrator able to take delight in life's small details: 'a jigger of scotch, a blue necktie, /a small volume of poems by Rimbaud, a horse running'. There is no longer the alienated sensation that these things have 'nothing to do with us'. There is now even the possibility of 'love again/like a streetcar turning the corner/on time'. The poem ends by invoking the seasons, and their eternal cycles of death and renewal - a pattern which the poem's two paragraphs have echoed. Bukowski's inclusive urge has been disciplined by the verse paragraph-

ing, allowing the coherent development of themes.[29]

When considering the technical aspects of Bukowski's craft, or art, one must also ask whether he establishes clear and consistent conventions for line breaks. To what extent do the units of space within a Bukowski poem indicate directions, a score for its oral delivery? In interviews, the author has often been dismissive or disingenuous about such matters, recently replying to just such a question 'Line breaks? The lines break themselves and I don't know how'.[30] One can, however, identify certain practices in respect of line breaks, even if they are not consistently applicable to all phases of his work. Bukowski uses both the terminal juncture, a minute pause at the end of a line where a small breath gap would naturally be taken, as well as the <u>enjambement</u>, a continuation of a sentence onto the next line in order to complete the sense.

The terminal juncture with a minute breath pause at the end of most lines, can be seen at the start of the 1960 poem 'The Tragedy of the Leaves'. The sense seems to demand that each line be given its separate weight:

> I awakened to dryness and the ferns were dead,
> the potted plants yellow as corn;
> my woman was gone
> and the empty bottles like bled corpses
> surrounded me with their uselessness
> [31]

This pattern is kept up almost throughout, giving the work a slower delivery than many Bukowski poems, which in later times often rush down the page in hungover lines at some pace. Here, even though the lines shorten dramatically towards the end, a short pause is necessary after each line:

and I walked into a dark hall
where the landlady stood
execrating and final,
sending me to hell,
waving her fat, sweaty arms
and screaming
screaming for rent
because the world had failed us
both.

The lineation of Bukowski's poem 'The Drunk Tank Judge' gives definite clues as to how it should be read out loud. Moreover, the lineation is integral to the poem's satirical portrait of legal justice for those at the bottom of the social scale. The opening lines comically underscore a comparison between the judge and those whose offences he will deal with:

the drunk tank judge is
late like any other
judge and he is
young
well-fed
educated
spoiled and
from a good
family.

we drunks put out our cigarettes and await his
mercy.
32

The first sentence has twice as many words as the second, but probably takes four times as long to say. This is because in reciting the poem Bukowski would have effected a slight pause, emphasizing the ironies implicit in each damning adjective. Later on in narrative, Bukowski again opposes short and long syntaxes in order to reinforce the comic observations, and its social critique:

'judge, these guys beat hell out of a man
in there'.

'next'.

'judge,they really beat hell out of me'.
'next case,please'.

Just as the opening phase of the poem led to the ambiguity of the word 'mercy',so the ending moves to a one-word denouement,'justice'. On several occasions within the poem new sentences are begun in the middle of a line in order to avoid end-stopping.

The spaces that Bukowski's texts take up on the page are far from random,and the author has been highly aware of line-breaks,lengths of line,punctuation and the grouping of sentences as visual effects on the page,but his practices are not consistent or especially rigorous. If there is a predominant pattern to the lineation of his later works,it may be the favouring of the <u>enjambement</u>,a hungover line that propels the reading down the page. One of many such examples of this tactic can be identified in a jokey poem of the mid-1970s,'Tough Company',where a writer finds himself acting like a beleagured sheriff when his anarchic creations come to life:

poems like gunslingers
ask me
what the hell my game is,
and
would I like to
shoot it out?...

we're running this
game
say all the
gunslingers
drawing iron;
get
with it!
[33]

Here the hungover lines dovetail neatly into paragraphic stanzas,which is often the case in his performance-based verse of the 1970s. However,one's acquaintance with his

tapes,and records of Bukowski readings,tends to indicate that in performance he often does not observe line-endings, but reads to enhance the sense and theatricality of the work in question. One recalls that William Carlos Williams, whom one would have expected to pay great attention to the dynamics of line-lengths and line-endings in his verse, usually blithely ignored them when reading in public. Though Bukowski became a formidable deliverer of his work to live audiences in the 1970s,he always preferred to distribute his poems in book form,where one can gain clues as to their oral dimension - but their shapes can not be regarded as totally accurate scores for performance. He simply is not that kind of rigorous technician; Bukowski's forms have evolved to match the contours of his own voice.

The remaining matters to be looked at are narrative tactics,but they have been appropriated from the techniques of comedy. Having said that,comedies of unlike discourse have an established history in American literature,while punchlines are essentially rhetorical devices within a story or joke,and as such are appropriate to Bukowski's aim of creating as familiar and casual an impression on the reader or hearer as possible.

A comedy of unlike discourses arises from the sense of a gap between two juxtaposed narratives,or between two monologues within a single narrative. Its essence is the incongruity of two contradictory elements or narrative modes. It is a traditional resource in the American scheme of literary humour,which often depends upon a clash between 'cultured' and vernacular discourse. The critic Louis D. Rubin Jr has argued that in the American tradition,low life and the vernacular is preferred to 'whatever is Literary'.

He summarises this tendency by stating that the 'vernacular perspective, set forth in opposition to the cultural, the literary - is the approved American mode of humor'.[34] This tradition can be traced back to the jocular writings of Benjamin Franklin, 'Poor Richard's Almanac' - it was probably no coincidence that Bukowski's column for Open City originally bore the title 'Poor Paranoid's Almanac'. A large part of the oeuvre of Mark Twain depends upon such a comical collision between the literary and the low-life discourse, most famously in the Duke and Dauphin's travesty of the 'to be or not to be' soliloquy, when the would-be thespians make their appearance in Huckleberry Finn (1884). Other American humourists who explored the clash of cultural modes include Josh Billings, Don Marquis, Ring Lardner and James Thurber. Hemingway's earliest attempts at writing were imitations of Ring Lardner pieces, with their faux-naif malapropisms, fractured logic and mangled expressions. Bukowski is an admitted fan of Thurber's stories and drawings, with 'Walter Mitty' as the comic colossus bestriding fantasy and reality, and the battleground of the domestic realm.

A number of Bukowski works thrive on precisely the same assumptions of a comic gap between reality and the literary, as in the significantly-titled poem 'A Literary Discussion'. A boozy, randy bard finds himself drinking at the home of a verbose critic called 'Markov' and his wife. The contrast between word and deed, between the wordy self-justifications of the critic and the silent philandering of the poet soon takes shape. The critic complains of his guest's manners:

> I would rather, says Markov,
> entertain a ditch-digger
> or newsvendor

because they are kind enough
to observe the decencies
even though
they don't know
Rimbaud from rat poison.

my empty beercan
rolls to the floor...

you've hurt his feelings, she said,
he thinks you are a great poet.

he's too slick for me, I said,
he's too wise.

I had one of her breasts out.
it was a monstrous
beautiful
thing.
35

This episode contains a familar put-down of civilized and educated discourse and behaviour as too 'slick', too 'wise', and therefore perhaps less authentically American. The poet-narrator presents himself as being more earthy, more in touch with life than the effete, educated, verbose critic. The rough-house poet is shown as (literally) having a more direct access to life than the self-deceiving Markov. Since the work is entitled 'A Literary Discussion', it can be taken not just as a comic commentary on what is literary, but also on literature, with vernacular perspectives being favoured. The comparison is between a man of few words and a man of many words; the use of few words, it is implied, is preferable to garrulity. The poet 'says' only eight words within the narrative, and these are ironically addressed to the critic's wife, whom he is in the act of seducing after the critic has left the room in high dudgeon.

The debunking of high-flown, educated, or poetic language is a trait that one has earlier observed in the poem 'Vegas', where the pseudo-Surrealist diction of the speaker leaves him to come off worst when a laconic truckdriver decides he has had enough of such nonsense. A similar

linguistic contrast is set up in '5 Dollars', though here the clash is between two types of poet, who conduct monologues past each other's attention.

> meat is cut as roses are cut
> men die as dogs die
> love dies like dogs die,
> he said.
>
> listen, Ronny, I said,
> lend me 5 dollars.
>
> love needs too much help, he said.
> hate takes care of itself.
> 36

The clash here is typical of the Bukowskian view that condemns rhetorical, overly-'poetic' flourishes, and endorses straight-talking. Though most of his poems that simply exploit the comedy of unlike discourse are fairly slight affairs, they are usually entertaining, and they all reinforce the fundamental linguistic and cultural assumptions (or prejudices) on which Bukowski's art operates. As we shall see, it also ties in with his invocation of American icons of masculinity.

It is a commonplace observation of the comedian's art that its success depends more upon good timing than good material. In structural terms, the comedian seeks to manage tension within a narrative, a joke, so that when this is released, the audience's pleasure is maximised, and the blissful sound of laughter is heard. In an essay on Mark Twain's humour, James M. Cox observed that the humourist or comedian must operate a fine-tuning of a joke:

> There must...be a sense of something escaping, some generative force which either pre-exists the joke or is created by it. Thus, if the humorist becomes too safe, the wildness of incongruity, absurdity, madness, repression are diminished and the energy of humor is reduced. If, on the other hand, the wildness threatens the safety, then anxiety begins to displace security

and the pleasure of humor is lost.
37

The most popular devices for dispersing narrative tension are punchlines and deliberate anti-climaxes. The efficacy of a punchline is largely the result of just the right amount of build-up, and the unexpectedness of the denouement. Bukowski's poem 'They, All of Them, Know' obviously fails in this respect. The sheer labour of getting through 133 lines with the same initial construction ('ask...ask...ask') means that the pay-off is of little interest, when it eventually arrives. The slow crescendo of enquiry, when some monumental answer is surely soon to be delivered, is excruciating and exasperating. The denouement is not so much a punchline as a deliberate anti-climax:

> ask the men who read all the newspaper
> editorials
> ask the men who breed roses
> ask the men who feel almost no pain
> ask the dying
> ask the mowers of lawns and the attenders
> of football games
> ask any of these or all of these
> ask ask ask and
> they'll all tell you:
>
> a snarling wife on the balustrade is more
> than a man can bear.
> 38

The last two lines are italicized in the collection in which they appear, possibly indicating that this curiously antique phrase is a quotation. But it may even be the refrain from a long-forgotten Music Hall or Vaudeville song.

A much more contemporary, and vulgar, effect is aimed at in a 1970s work called 'The End of a Short Affair', which corresponds much more nearly to the structure of a good dirty joke. There is an initial sexual bout, after which the speaker's lady friend leaves. She then rings him up:

the phone kept ringing.
I picked it up.
'hello?'

'I LOVE YOU!' she said.

'thanks',I said.

'is that all you've got
to say?'

'yes'

'eat shit!' she said and
hung up.

love dries up,I thought
as I walked back to the
bathroom,even faster
than sperm.
39

One could almost imagine this as a Lenny Bruce monologue, the words 'shit' and 'sperm' still carrying a comic frisson when spoken in public,and a tinge of scurrility. The abrupt worldly wisdom of the speaker is well-judged. The narrative build-up is long enough to carry all the information needed to decipher the superficial relationship so rudely forced asunder,but short enough not to risk digressive boredom. It is also worth noting that the comedy again partly inheres in the brevity of the responses. He says one word,and she replies with three. He then replies with one, and she answers with seven words; he comes back with yet another one-word statement ('hello...thanks...yes'),and she can find only two words to finish with.

Another quite effective punchline can be found in 'No Grounding in the Classics',another work that conjurs up a juxtaposition between cultural reference and a skid row setting. The speaker tells us of his companion,a 'wine-soaked whore',who falls asleep while 'politely' listening to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Perhaps because her Sugar

Daddy has read 'the classics',when she wakes up,the woman remarks with glorious inanity that with with his 'brains', he might become the first man 'to copulate/on the moon'. The humour again resides on a small joke about language, with the maladroit gentility of the woman's use of the verb 'to copulate',when she would more naturally have used more streetwise synonyms for the verb.[40] It would be tedious to list all the variations that Bukowski works on the punchline and anti-climax,and he certainly over-uses the devices in his later work. A typical example of the over-reliance can be found almost at random,but here is a piece called 'Rain or Shine'. A couple visit a zoo,full of bored,lethargic,over-fed animals and birds. They see some vultures,then move onto the next cage,where the occupant seems strangely familiar:

> a man is in there
> sitting on the ground
> eating his own shit.
> I recognize him as
> our former mailman.
> his favourite expression
> had been:
> 'have a beautiful day'.
>
> that day,I did.[41]

As a device for comedy,the punchline or anti-climax has severe limitations. It is but one of the elements employed by real masters of the comic arts,some of whom, - for instance W.C.Fields or Phil Silvers - hardly ever resorted to such a usage,or if they did,generally threw the punchline to a gag away. Rather than try to hit the audience with a knock-out blow,they preferred a relentless assault of verbal weapons and comic gambits. These were running-gags,tall-tales,non-sequiturs,wisecracks,quick-fire

quips,one-liners and other fracturings of logic and language. Bukowski's finest comic narrative poems,such as 'Fire Station' and 'Shot of Red Eye',contain the whole gamut of such laughter-provoking devices,and will be more fully described in the next chapter. Here it is sufficient to observe that such poems succeed because of the variety of comic ways and means,whereas punchline poems have only one device with which to make an impact on the reader or hearer. Many of Bukowski's punchline efforts pall on second or subsequent readings,wheras the two aforementioned narratives repay re-readings,as literary artefacts are designed to do.

Finally,it is important to look at Bukowski's stress on the narrative element,the story-telling capacity,of verse. Almost all of his poems tell simple stories; few of them could be described as lyrical poems-of-a-moment's-observation. Narrative poems,of course,are a distinguished genre,with a history stretching all the way back to _The Odyssey_,_The Iliad_,_The Canterbury Tales_,and from _Paradise Lost_ to the nineteenth century narratives of Wordsworth's _The Prelude_,and beyond. By the Modernist era,with its concentration on the reform of the lyric poem,the narrative impulse had begun to be dissipated. This was definitely the case by the time of American poetry of the 1950s,dominated by lyric,confessional modes executed in differing manners by Lowell,Berryman,Plath and the Beat writers,_et alios_. Even a long poem,such as Ginsberg's 'Howl' or 'Kaddish', cannot be really termed a narrative,when the structure is of a whole series of moments of perception unified in the consciousness of the narrator.

Many of the most successful of Bukowski's early works are those with a strong narrative drive. 'The Life of

Borodin' amusingly recapitulates the composer's life ('remember he was just a chemist/who wrote music to relax') and his domestic circumstances, and his death:

remember his wife used his compositions
to line the cat boxes with...
he often slept on the stairway
wrapped in an old shawl...
in 1887 he attended a dance
at the Medical Academy
dressed in a merrymaking national costume;
at last he seemed exceptionally gay
and when he fell to the floor,
they thought he was clowning.
42

The narrative portrays Borodin as an easy-going, cuckolded character with a termagant wife, mentions three of his major compositions, and gives a quick sketch of the social milieu in which he operated - all via a storyteller who is not named, and does not significantly intrude upon the tale, or add an iconoclastic commentary, as later narrators might have done. It is worth noting that this is a narrative that ends in death, as all stories must, according to Hemingway, and it is certainly the case that Bukowski views the death motif as a suitable denouement to most of his works. Bukowski's poems have a 'process' quality, and attribute a process quality to life. Underlying much of his work, as we have seen in abundance, is a sense of death as the one inevitable termination of all ongoing processes. Therefore, the best way to end a poem is with a discussion, or example, of death.

This is the case in another, much more emotive, early narrative poem called 'The Twins'. A man returns to his dead father's house in order to sort out household effects, but also to muse upon what this loss has meant. At the outset of the poem, we are told about the bitter clash of values between father and son ('I told him to listen/to

Brahms,...and not be/dominated by women and dollars'),but as the story progresses the son recognizes a strong kinship with his father,and some kind of mental reconciliation with him is now possible. The narrative manages to give the reader quite a vivid short portrait of the father,and the son's sceptical,questioning attitude to the values that he lived out:

> I move through my father's house (on which he owed
> $8,000 after 20
> years on the same job) and look at his dead shoes
> the way his feet curled the leather,as if he were
> angrily planting roses....[43]

The work ends with the son,having tried on his father's suit,standing before the mirror,'waiting also/to die'.

Narrative predominates in the poems that Bukowski has written over the past two decades. Along with this has come a marked increase in dialogue,and the sort of readerly instructions (I said,she said) more commonly assigned to prose narratives than to poetry. Many of these works seem to be close cousins of his contemporaneous short stories. In Crucifix in a Deathhand,written between 1963 and 1965, the lyric impulse is still much in evidence,and most of the poems therein are monologues; by 1984,and War All the Time,the majority of poems are narratives,often with a great deal of dialogue to propel the action and make idiosyncratic observations.

An excellent narrative poem within the latter work is 'Eating My Senior Citizens' Dinner At the Sizzler',though it does not,in fact,contain any dialogue. The work is set in a restaurant that offers a special tariff for pensioners '20% off for/us old dogs approaching the sunset'. The narrator realizes that the folk who surround him in various

states of decrepitude are his contemporaries, and he is driven to confront the unmistakeable signs of his own ageing. Looking into a mirror, he sees silver hair, and has to 'concede' that he would 'look misplaced at a/rock concert'. A young waitress fills all their cups with 'lovely/poisonous caffeine', and they thank her and chew on, 'some with their own teeth'. When the narrator gets up to leave, he finds that his way is blocked by 'an old girl/in a walker', then by another whose back is bent 'like a bow'. The women's faces appear like parchment, as if they had been 'embalmed'. His departure is delayed for a third time by a large wheelchair. To him, this is a tableau of approaching death, and he reacts to its portentous significance by revving up his car and charging through the city traffic, tuning in his radio to listen to a young female singer, and thereby hoping to banish thoughts of mortality. Both the singer and the young waitress underscore the contrast between the California of the sun-belt pensioners surviving on low incomes, and with the burdens of disability, with the youth culture of the Sunshine State. But the narrator does not really indulge in social commentary, sticking as usual to observation of the external facts and occurrences, and leaving any emotional subtext to be inferred. The poem is a good example of the observant successes of his concern for narrative, and shows no diminution of his eye for the telling detail.[44]

Bukowski's revival of narrative has not gone unnoticed by his fellow poets. Douglas Houston has praised his 'marvellous way with narrative', while Gerald Locklin has commented that 'While others worried about how to restore narrative structures to verse, Bukowski just did it'.[45] Bukowski's authorial identity, textual tactics, and narrative

concerns are all of a piece, bespeaking an intention to lower the rhetorical barrier between poet, poem, and reader. The sheer ease of narration, and the marked 'naturalness' of his texts is no accident but the triumph of a worked-for style.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

I. '8 Rooms', Play the Piano..., pp.I04-I05.

2. 'Looking for a Job', 'Eddie and Eve', 'Hot', 'Some People', Burning in Water..., pp.I72-I73, pp.I79-I80, pp.I6I-I62, p.I90.

3. Michael Hamburger, The Truth of Poetry, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, I972), p.88.

4. John Osborne, 'The Sage of Ventnor Street', Bête-Noire, 6, (Winter I988), 7-4I, (p,I7).

5. 'The State of World Affairs from a 3rd Floor Window', Burning in Water..., p.I7.

6. 'What Seems To Be the Trouble, Gentlemen?', A Bukowski Sampler, p.46.

7. 'A 340 Dollar Horse and a Hundred Dollar Whore', Burning in Water..., pp.47-48.

8. 'A Night of Mozart', The Days Run Away..., pp.70-7I.

9. 'I Am Visited By an Editor and a Poet', A Bukowski Sampler, pp.38-39.

I0. 'Hell Hath No Fury', 'Trouble With Spain', Burning in Water..., p.220, pp.204-205.

II. 'Culture', Dangling in the Tournefortia, pp.I3I-I34.

I2. Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', Image Music Text, translated by Stephen Heath, (London, I984), p.I6I.

I3. Michael Hamburger, The Truth of Poetry, p.I27.

I4. 'Did I Ever Tell You?', The Days Run Away..., pp.76-83.

I5. 'Peace', The Days Run Away..., pp.30-3I.

I6. 'K.O.', Burning in Water..., p.I0I.
'The Loser', A Bukowski Sampler, p.45.

I7. 'Yellow', The Days Run Away..., p.II4.

I8. 'The Moment of Truth', The Days Run Away..., p.53.

I9. 'Farewell, Foolish Objects', A Bukowski Sampler, pp.75-77.
'Practice', The Roominghouse Madrigals, pp.I50-I53.

20. 'WW 2', Mockingbird Wish Me Luck, pp.9I-99.

2I. This paragraph is greatly indebted to the argument of John Osborne, 'American Male Mythology and Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest', Bête-Noire, I, (Autumn, I984) 50-65.
'Big Bastard With a Sword', The Roominghouse..., pp.56-58.

22. Walt Whitman,Leaves of Grass,The First (I855) Edition, p.3I.

23. D.H.Lawrence,'Tortoise Shout', Selected Poems,edited by Keith Sagar, (Harmondsworth,Middlesex,I972),pp.I5I-I55.

24. Robinson Jeffers,'Time of Disturbance',in Kenneth White, The Coast Opposite Humanity, (Llanfynydd, Carmarthen,I975),p.28.

25. 'Counsel', Penguin Modern Poets I3,pp.28-29.

26. 'The Genius of the Crowd',A Bukowski Sampler,pp.57-59.

27. 'The Day I Kicked a Bankroll Out of the Window', A Bukowski Sampler,pp.43-44.
'They,All of Them,Know', Burning in Water...,pp.89-92.

28. 'These Things',The Days Run Away...,p.22.

29. 'If We Take',Mockingbird Wish Me Luck,p.I59.

30. Jay Dougherty/Bukowski interview,Gargoyle,35,p.I02.

3I. 'The Tragedy of the Leaves',Burning in Water...,p.I5.

32. 'The Drunk Tank Judge',Play the Piano...,pp.87-89.

33. 'Tough Company',Play the Piano...,pp.I3-I5.

34. Louis D.Rubin Jr, 'The Barber Kept On Shaving',in The Comic Imagination in American Literature,edited by Louis D.Rubin Jr, (New Brunswick,New Jersey,I973),p.386.

35. 'A Literary Discussion',The Days Run Away...,pp.38-39.

36. '5 Dollars', Play the Piano...,pp.63-64.

37. James M.Cox, 'Mark Twain: The Height of Humor',in The Comic Imagination in American Literature,p.I40.

38. 'They,All of Them,Know', Burning in Water...,pp.89-92.

39. 'The End of a Short Affair',Love Is a Dog From Hell, pp.43-45.

40. 'No Grounding in the Classics',The Days Run Away..., p.93.

4I. 'Rain or Shine', Love Is a Dog From Hell,p.262.

42. 'The Life of Borodin',Burning in Water...,p.I9.

43. 'The Twins',Burning in Water...,pp.23-24.

44. 'Eating My Senior Citizens' Dinner at the Sizzler', War All the Time,pp.277-280.

45. Douglas Houston,letter to the present author,dated 7 April I988. Gerald Locklin comment quoted in Glenn Esterly,'The Pock-Marked Poetry of Charles Bukowski', Rolling Stone,2I5, (I7 June I976) I0-I7 (p.I2)..

CHAPTER FIVE: STEREOTYPE, SUBVERSION AND CULTURAL MYTH

Probably the most commonly-expressed negative reaction to Bukowski's work concerns its apparently bull-headed sexism. The black American poet Alta, sometime editor of Shameless Hussy Review, succinctly stated the matter thus: 'just because bukowski (sic) writes well,& indeed helped "humanize" poetry, which was one of his self-stated goals, does not mean that i can quietly read his poetry as if he is not insulting me,& waging war on women, because sometimes he is'.[1] The parade of female characters within his fictional world - the whores, floozies, 'shackjobs', rapacious landladies, etc - undeniably offers an extremely reductive portrayal of one half of the human race. More precisely, Bukowski's view of women is made up of sexual stereotypes designed to appeal to male fantasy, and of mythic archetypes recycled from American popular culture - its films, radio, television and influential literature.

The same sources can also be credited for his portrait of masculine characters, and dramatization of male attitudes. Bukowski Man has chosen at least three role models; 'Rip Van Winkle', and the screen personae of Humphrey Bogart and W.C.Fields. The Fieldsian component of Bukowski's authorial voice, i.e. its humour, is an important consideration. I shall be arguing within this chapter that the function of this humour sometimes reinforces stereotypes, and at other times gloriously explodes them. Though the perceived sexism of his work is indeed pervasive, it is nowhere near as monolithic as his detractors have assumed. Bukowski's treatment of American cultural mythology will also be looked at with a view to teasing out its subversive and reactionary aspects.

Perhaps the most obvious way in which Bukowskian narrators express their hostility to women, and appeal to the latent misogyny of the male reader, is in the range of abusive epithets with which they typify female characters. These are referred to as 'whores' (whether or not they accept money for sex), 'bitches' (without evidence of spiteful behaviour) and 'shackjobs' (meaning sleazy women, good enough to cohabit with, but not to marry). In the world according to Bukowski, such types - seldom individualized - are stupid but scheming, more than willing to trade on their sexual appeal to men. Men, however disreputable, are usually seen as laconic, worldly wise, with few illusions as to the nature of the female beast. For instance, in 'I Love You', the speaker surprises his lady friend by finding her in bed with another man. She reacts hysterically at first, screaming 'take me away from this son of a bitch!/I hate him I love you!'. This is a man of the world who has seen such things many times before - female infidelity and subsequent protestations - and regards them with some equanimity:

> of course, I was wise enough not to believe any of
> this and I sat down and said,
> 'I need a drink, my head hurts and I need a
> drink'.
>
> this is the way love works, you see, and then we all sat
> there
> drinking the whiskey and I was
> perfectly satisfied.
> 2

The intrinsic faithlessness of women is a theme that many of Bukowski's male narrators seek to prove. The sexier the woman, so the supposition runs, the more likely she is to want to turn to other men. In the 1972 poem 'Hot' a mailman rushes to collect and deliver his quota of mail-

bags, in order to get back to his apartment and 'Miriam'. After several delay, he arrives back home to find a note waiting for him, propped up on a purple teddy bear:

sun of a bitch:
I wated until 5 after ate
you don't love me
you sun of a bitch
somebody will love me
I been wateing all day
3

Five spelling mistakes, a repeated insult, and a sulky threat that 'somebody will love me', are all meant to convey the woman's ignorance and shallow demands for male attention. The note, and the purple teddy bear, are hers - both indicating a lack of taste, or 'class'. But the male protagonist sets off to comb the bars in search of her, though whether in the cause of a reunion, or violence, is not stated. A feeble level of punning innuendo operates within the wretched piece, with the van engine, bathwater, the woman, and the title, all being 'hot'. When Bukowski's poetic inventiveness deserts him, so the stereotypes are untranscended.

A violent solution to female infidelity is suggested in 'Freedom', though the course of action followed is as unexpected as it is extreme. First published in Olé in 1964, the poem concerns a man whose female companion frequents cheap bars and the company of men. He drinks at home, thinking of her telling him 'things that seemed true/ but were not'. When she returns, it is with that 'special stink again', at 3 a.m. in the morning, 'filthy like a dung-eating swine'. The man takes out a butcher's knife. Instead of attacking her, however, he castrates himself in front of her, carrying the testicles 'like apricots' and flushing them down the toilet bowl. Though luridly improbable, the story is treated seriously, if melodramatically:

GOD O GOD!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

and he sat there holding 3 towels
between his legs
not caring now whether she left or
stayed
wore yellow or green or
anything at all.

and one hand holding and one hand
lifting he poured
another wine.[4]

The 'freedom' referred to by the title is male freedom from desire for the female,and,by implication,male freedom from the promiscuous exercise of female desire and the pangs of jealousy caused. Additionally,though the man directs violence against himself,it is clearly a sign of contempt for the woman,the implication being that it is really the woman who is a ballbreaker and castrator. Another Bukowski poem,'True Story',describes a character found wandering along the freeway 'all red in/front',having cut off his 'sexual machinery',who is seen as a 'one man/ Freedom March'.[5]

These misogynistic fantasies bring to mind comparisons with certain stories by Ernest Hemingway. In 'God Rest You Merry Gentlemen',two doctors converse about a young boy who wanted to be castrated. When the request is refused,the boy - torn between a rigid religiosity and the demands of his adolescent flesh - cuts off his own penis. In Hemingway's rather better-known story 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber',a wife shoots her husband dead at the climactic moment of a hunting expedition. The clear implication of the dialogue at the narrative's close is that this was no accident,but a convenient way to cover up,and perpetuate, her affair with the accompanying White Hunter. One might also recall the situation of the war-wounded Jake Barnes

in The Sun Also Rises. Throughout the novel he is plagued by desire for Brett Ashley,yet his emasculated state has left him unable to do anything about it. The constant evidence of her sexual liaisons with men,and reminders of their past relationship,are sources of agony to him,to which contempt,jealousy and self-laceration contribute equal measures.[6]

Hemingway and Bukowski are hardly unique among American writers in exploring ambivalent male sexual disgust and desire. T.S.Eliot's The Waste Land can be read on one level as a dramatization of such concerns. They are implicit in the version of the poem eventually published,and implicit in its prototype,'He Do the Police in Different Voices'. The subsequently cancelled opening section of 'The Burial of the Dead' section depicts the nocturnal adventures of a group of inebriated men attempting to enter the premises of a brothel run by one 'Myrtle'.

> What d'y' mean,she says,at two o'clock in the morning,
> I'm not in business here for guys like you;
> We've only had a raid last week,I've been warned twice.

The proposed opening to 'The Fire Sermon' (written in the style of Alexander Pope) is an elaborate description of the morning toilette of Fresca. She is depicted as being 'Aroused from dreams of love and pleasant rapes',then taking a bath,where 'Odours,confected by the cunning French,/Disguise the good old...hearty female stench'.[7] The speaker of Eliot's poem 'Whispers of Immortality' is both attracted and repelled by the sexual presence of 'Grishkin' and her 'female smell',which he notes as being more 'rank' than a 'sleek Brazilian jaguar/...in its arboreal gloom'.[8]

A more appropriate writer to compare and contrast with Bukowski in this respect is Henry Miller. The disgust felt by Eliot's characters at female sexuality leads them away from further encounters, while Miller's rampantly libidinous creations throw themselves ever more frenzedly into a maelstrom of sex, and frankly contemptuous regard for women. Miller liked to claim that his books were not 'about' sex but about self-liberation. The pioneering feminist critic Kate Millett was of the opinion that such liberationist claims were patently false. She pointed out that in his books female identity was effectively restricted to 'cunt', an 'exclusively sexual being, crudely biological'. Male identity was allowed a much greater freedom and potential. 'Though he shares this lower nature, the male is also capable of culture and intellect....His appetite for "cunt", recurrent and shameful as it is, is nevertheless, his way of staying in touch with his animal origins. It keeps him "real"'. In Miller's scale of values, the ideal woman is the prostitute, who enables men to have sex without the presumed hypocrisy of emotional ties, and without placing domestic restrictions on male sexual freedom.[9]

As we have seen, Bukowski's speakers are often on first-name terms with racetrack prostitutes. In 'A Last Shot On Two Good Horses', the for-once successful punter goes home to his woman, assigning her an intended back-handed compliment by calling her 'a beautiful whore'. In 'Fire Station', the card-sharping narrator also pursues a little casual but profitable pimping on the side, ironically without the knowledge of his female companion, who goes upstairs with 'her' fireman.

when the other guy came down
he gave me a

five.

'how was it,Marty?'
'not bad. she's got...some fine
movements'.
IO

The essential point of a later poem,'The Price',is to make a direct link between two forms of economic contract entered into by men and women,namely,that between whore and customer,and that of man and wife. Its genial narrator sits drinking 'I5 dollar champagne' and enjoying the company of two hookers called 'Pam' and 'Georgia'.

'you want me',says Pam,'it
will cost you a hundred'....
'I was only kidding about the
hundred',she says.

'oh',I say,'what will it cost
me?'

she lights her cigarette with
my lighter and looks at me
through the flame:

her eyes tell me.

'look',I say,'I don't think I
can ever pay that price again'.
II

The 'price' demanded by the woman - romantic involvement, and probably marriage - is too high for the narrator,who would rather pay the one hundred dollars for her sexual favours. The cost of domesticity is too great to be borne 'again'; besides,from his point of view,sex with a whore may be more exciting than with a wife. One may also draw the inference that the ethics of whoredom are preferred to those of marriage. 'Pam' only requires one hundred dollars, but the same woman as his wife would be continually demanding money,and enforcing a strict ban on other women. This is clearly the crassest species of male chauvinism,but it

indicates that, like Céline and Henry Miller, Bukowski sees relations between the sexes as inextricably bound up with economics, with sex bearing a commodity status. As Bardamu bitterly observes in Journey to the End of the Night, 'It's a sin...to be lecherous and poor'.[I2] Céline's attitude to the sex war is loveless, bleak, rather unforgiving. There is more joie-de-vivre in Miller's works. His male characters have little difficulty in finding concupiscent women, either prostitutes or the most casual of acquaintances, with whom to satisfy their fantastic priapic urges. These women remain shadowy in character, rarely given much development in the narrative since their sexual identity is the only thing of interest. By and large, they remain lifeless inflatables of male fantasy, mere commodities at a time when the bottom has fallen out of their market. They are thus available for a few francs, well within the grasp of Millerian heroes, who are almost always economic failures.

The Bukowskian world of whores and hustlers contains many elements common to Céline and Miller. For Bukowski's men it is a self-evident truth that women, whether as whore or wife, sell out to the highest bidder in society, and that protestations of love are to be treated with some scepticism. Yet in spite of this surface cynicism, the potential for love between two struggling beings, even in the midst of the most degraded circumstances, still exists in Bukowski's work - it certainly does not exist according to Céline or Miller. After the card-sharp and the sluttish female leave their suckers behind during the poem 'Fire Station', they return to the bar from whence they emerged, this time with money in the narrator's pocket, The woman believes that her sexual bouts with the firemen went unnoticed, and that

these constitute a promiscuous abandon and free exchange. Of course, the exchanges have been anything but free, having cost each fireman five dollars. The reader is invited to chuckle at her gullibility, and receives the nod and wink from the narrator. But Bukowski is able to synthesize all such chauvinistic ironies into a rather affecting, and amusing, scene at the bar. The woman begins to attract the attentions of a sailor, and is suddenly drawn to confront the reality of her lifestyle. Her mate, protector and pimp rather tenderly keeps up her pretensions to 'class', and they declare a genuine attachment to each other.

> 'look at that sailor looking at me,
> he must think I'm a...a...'
>
> 'naw, he don't think that. relax, you've got
> class, real class. sometimes you remind me of an
> opera singer. you know, one of those prima d's.
> your class shows all over
> you. drink
> up.
>
> I ordered 2
> more.
>
> 'you know, daddy, you're the only man I
> LOVE! I mean, really...LOVE! ya
> know?'
>
> 'sure I know. sometimes I think I am a king
> in spite of myself'.
> I3

Though the ironic tone ('you class shows all over/you') tends to undermine the disclosures being made, the scene is convincing, perhaps even epiphanic. The sentiments touch home precisely because of the hard-edged chutzpah of the narrator, and the sexual/financial double-dealings that have preceded this moment of truth. She recognizes the depth of her feelings, in spite of her numerous infidelities; he too wakes up to the humanity of the wine-soaked woman beside him. Nonetheless, the narrative's denouement is entirely

plausible, even inevitable. Returning from the bar's toilet, the man finds his place usurped by the eager sailor, and his woman engaged in the initial stages of sexual commerce once more. Completely unsurprised, he joins his fellow bar-flies 'Harry the Horse' and 'the corner/newsboy' in another masculine pursuit, this time a game of darts. The work does assume certain stereotypes of masculinity (laconic, jokey, masterful) and femininity (hysterical, gullible, nymphomania). The narrative does impart a fair degree of dimensionality and emotional honesty to the sexual stereotypes. Indeed, it sets up a comical dynamic between them. Bukowski's masculinist prejudices do not crush the humanity and humour out of his fictional creations. Having said that, Bukowski's world is, in a sense, a Poor Man's paradise, with plenty of sex, drink and anarchy to keep the masculine pulse racing.

Such an appeal to the male sensibilities is obvious in the observed attributes of the females conjured up on his typewriter, though they are hardly conventional sexual fantasy material. The women are generally a mixture of sleazy eroticism and well past their physical peak. In 'One of the Hottest', for example, the platinum blonde has 'a huge painted mouth', a wrinkled neck and 'the ass of a young girl'. The poem '18 Cars Full of Men Thinking of What Could Have Been' finds its narrator stuck in a column of vehicles temporarily brought to a halt by the sight of a woman 'in green' falling over in high heels, or more exactly her attributes:

> all rump and breast and dizziness
> across the street.
> she was as sexy as a
> green and drunken antelope and
> when she got to the curbing she
> tripped and fell...

and the green antelope
crossed the street
toward the bar
wobbling and shaking
shaking and wobbling
everything
I4

The men are assumed to be all equally regretful at not having stopped their cars to help the extravagantly sexy creature up,and thereby making her acquaintance. By implication,what men want is a showpiece woman,or a whore,with all the excitement and sexual possibilities that such an idea entertains. This is openly stated in works such as 'I Saw An Old Fashioned Whore Today': 'I'm sure she drove off to someplace/magic'. Such a statement proves that Bukowski romanticizes the reality of whoredom just as much as he does skid row. But then,again,he is no social realist. In 'A Man's Woman',the speaker claims that 'the dream' of a man is 'a whore with a gold tooth'

and a garter belt,
perfumed
with false eyebrows...
salami breath
high heels
long stockings with a very slight
run on back of left stocking,
a little bit fat,
a little bit drunk,
a little bit silly and a little bit crazy
I5

These are caricatures,with exaggerated physical characteristics. They are far from the unreal perfection of,say, Playboy centrefolds or Soap Opera starlets. The aforementioned whore has 'a gold tooth',a run in her stockings,and, most grotesquely,'salami breath'. She in fact has the unreal imperfection of another kind of male fantasy figure, the slag,possible participant in sluttishly unbridled behaviour or victim of gang-bang rapes. Clones of this

vulgar female make their appearance in many Bukowski poems, and they often show themselves to be no mere cyphers. They are tough cookies, quick on the uptake, and ready with a wisecracking rejoinder. Descriptions of these women seem to be written in a kind of shorthand, the male reader knowing what they look like because the females correspond to a pre-existing stereotype of sexuality, big-bosomed and bibulous. In 'Shot of Red Eye', two daylabourers find their lives dramatically acquire new interest as they sit in a bar:

> two big women came in and
> I mean BIG
> and they sat next to
> us.
>
> shot of red-eye, one of them
> said to the bartender.
> likewise, said the other.
>
> they pulled their dresses up
> around their hips and
> swung their legs.

The narrator gets into conversation with one of these saloon-bar tarts, and she asks him

> what happened to your
> face?
>
> automobile accident on the San Berdoo
> freeway. some drunk jumped the divider. I was
> the drunk.
>
> how old are you, daddy?
>
> old enough to slice the melon, I said,
> tapping my cigar ashes into my beer to give me
> strength.
>
> can you buy a melon? she asked.
> I6

This passage seems to be concerned with the man's macho behaviour and idiomatic replies ('San Berdoo', 'old enough

to slice the melon'),but the woman undercuts the certainties of the masculine discourse by her witty comeback ('can you buy a melon?'). Not content to be the passive recipient of the man's wisecracks,she counters with one of her own. The elements of exaggerated sexuality,and wise,tough-talk that the woman possesses,her awareness of the power to manipulate men that she has,her confident appraisal of the low-life setting she inhabits,enable the identification of the mould from which she has been cast: Mae West.

In her celebrated comedies She Done Him Wrong (1933), Belle of the Nineties (1934) and Every Day's a Holiday (1938),Mae West played essentially the same character, variously known as 'Miss Lou','Diamond Lil' and 'Peaches O'Day'. This filmic persona is nominally a saloon-bar singer but actually a prostitute - she announces herself at the opening of She Done Him Wrong as 'one of the finest women that ever walked the streets'. Her scripts,some of which she helped write,were (at least before the censor cracked down upon the more overt sexual overtones) full of innuendo-loaded jokes,and wisecracks that deflated male sexual pretensions. In the 1933 film she sings two risqué songs with the titles 'I Wonder Where My Easy Rider's Gone' and 'I'm a Fast-Movin' Gal That Likes It Slow'. The inimitably manipulative character that she created shows a thinly concealed contempt for her hordes of male admirers,and a profitable determination to get as much out of them as she can,remarking 'Diamonds are my career'. But she is also a Tart With a Heart. In She Done Him Wrong,the Salvationist Cary Grant's Mission Hall is reprieved by her to the tune of twelve thousand dollars,albeit that her largesse has to do with shady money's just redistribution.

The main attraction of Mae West's characterization,

apart from her wondrous wit,was her very exaggeration of female sexuality,pushing the caricature so far as to be nearing that of a female impersonator. Her sexual attractiveness was almost a running gag,so frenziedly did the male workers swarm around her honeypot. Over forty when the best films were made,she was hardly a conventional Hollywood image of feminine pulchritude. Allied to a swaggering walk,which emphasized her curvaceous bulk,her innuendos implied that she was available - at a price - and a woman of strong sexual appetites. In fact,she never delivers anything more than the most rudimentary on-screen kisses,while promising all kinds of possibilities,and hinting at the satisfaction of male fantasies,in order to string the suckers along.

Of course,the Bukowskian female is located several rungs down the social scale from the Mae West archetype - no diamonds for them,just more drinks - and they are far from having her on-screen independence of thought,action, and finance. Bukowski's women are far more dependent on the whims of the man in their lives ('Miriam' in 'Hot' had been 'wateing' all day),but they derive wit and the ability to trade on the susceptibility of men to sexually-attractive, or at least sexually-available,females. Many witty,tough-mouthed women hold their own in the verbal and sexual battle played out in his works,for instance 'Jeanette' in 'A Night of Mozart'. There are also the powerful presences of landladies ('The Day Hugo Wolf Went Mad','The Tragedy of the Leaves') and brothel madams,none of whom are exactly downtrodden by men. In an early poem,there is a pointed conversation on 'Morality,Eternity and Copulation' between a Madam and an unnamed male speaker,who are interested in the prospects for business,now that the war is over and

maimed soldiers are returning home. She observes that 'if they haven't shot off/the other parts', these men will still want to 'fuck':

> and the dead? I
> asked.
>
> the dead are without money or
> sense.
>
> many of the living are the same
> way? I suggested.
>
> yeah, but those we don't
> serve....
>   men are men and
> soldiers are soldiers and
> they love to
> fuck, don't
> you?
>
> amen, I
> said.
>   17

Both characters are in agreement that the state of affairs where men will pay to have sex, and women will make themselves available at a price, is an eternal, unchanging facet of human nature ('men are men'). The Madam sees both the women and the men within her ambit as sources of profit. Indeed, the pointedness of her last question seems directed towards stimulating the sexual interest of the narrator, probably her latest customer. Bukowski Woman is invariably characterized as either a sexpot, siren or exploiter of men, however much Bukowski ameliorates these stereotypes by the presentation of humorous caricature and the occasionally powerful female. But there is more dimensionality to his sexual stereotyping than is the case with Miller, or even Hemingway.

A related aspect of Bukowski's conception of women is the elevation, or transmogrification, of them into cultural archetypes, symbolic figures of womanhood. Bukowski, understandably, is not the kind of writer to praise Goddesses or

invoke the Muses,practices which would be completely alien to his streetwise narrators. Nor are they likely to personify Truth,or Liberty,as a woman. But one can detect the presence of another kind of female archetype in a poem of the mid-I970s,'Eddie and Eve'. The narrator visits his old friend 'Eddie' after an interval of thirty years,only to find him crippled by Arthritis,and his wife also changed out of all recognition:

> he was still in the same house
> with the same wife
>
> you guessed it:
> he looked worse than I did...
>
> then his wife came out. the once slim
> Eve I used to flirt with.
>
> 2I0 pounds
> squinting at me.
> I8

The comic shock of the observation of the obese 'Eve',now grotesquely 'squinting',is reinforced by her name,with its obvious connotations of Eve,the first temptress of man in the Garden of Eden - a deeply ingrained cultural myth. Such a connotation is also suggested by the narrator's admission that he used to flirt with 'the once slim/Eve',and then the offer of her sexual favours by 'Eddie' during a drinking session for old times' sake. In her youth,she was tempting but unnobtainable; now she is obtainable but untempting. The poem plays off the archetype against the sorry human fact of decay,raising the image of Eve as a sexual stimulant to men,only to immediately sabotage it with this mountainous domestic specimen of the female. Archetypes are by definition eternalized,unchanging beings; by invoking the archetype yet admitting the factor of change, Bukowski is challenging the archetypal importance of 'Eve'.

The Bukowski character turns down, as it were, the price of conformity when he declines the invitation to take 'Eve' to bed. The poem seems to be hinting at the dangers to men of domestic 'bliss' and social conformity ; Eddie is 'still in the house/with the same wife'. One is reminded of the James Thurber drawing that shows a small, worried man being menaced by the predatory demeanour of a woman in the shape of a house.

This portrayal of woman as the tyrant of the domestic realm, and hence the enemy of male freedoms, runs throughout the American literary and cultural tradition. Leslie Fiedler long ago pointed out the long line of American heroes on the run from marriage, domestic responsibilities and conformism, who gravitate towards the unrestricted atmosphere of the Frontier, however envisioned. Fiedler extended this observation to the American male writer, who fears 'maturity' above all things, 'and marriage seems to him its essential sign....a compromise with society, an acceptance of responsibility and drudgery and dullness'.[19] In this so-called Literature of Masculine Protest, perhaps the original model is Washington Irving's 'Rip Van Winkle', who resorts to an alcohol-induced sleep of two decades in order to escape the influence of his shrewish wife, who is a representative of 'a species of despotism under which he had long groaned, and that was - petticoat government'. She was intolerant of his easy-going ways, fishing and drinking with pals, and especially of his 'insuperable aversion to all forms of profitable labor'.[20]

Rip is joined by Hemingway's Nick Adams, Kerouac's Dean Moriarty, Thurber's Walter Mitty, and Kesey's Randle McMurphy to name but a few fictional projections of this tendency, though some of these creations see their quest in comic

terms. One can also add the filmic persona of W.C.Fields, whose manifestations - 'Cuthbert J.Twillie','Eustace McGargle',or 'Elmer Prettywilly' - kept up a constant stream of invective against domesticity,and the wives, mothers-in-law,and children that it entailed. Fields' film characters were usually shown hiding from work and family committments in saloon bars,drowning their sorrows in drink and concocting outrageous schemes with which to snare greenhorns and other gullible types. These schemes often were initially successful,only to go tragically wrong,from their originators' perspective,through circumstances beyond their control. Phil Silvers' great television character 'Sergeant Bilko' had a very similar conception, though Bilko is far more voluble than the Fields model. The army camp of 'Fort Baxter' is a masculine playground of betting,tussles with officialdom and regulations,and flings with the passing female characters. One of the running jokes of the series was the effort of Bilko to avoid entrapment into marriage with his long-time,long-suffering girlfriend 'Joan'. As with Fields' creations,the card-sharping and ingenious schemes worked out by Bilko to hoodwink the duller-witted (to 'bilk' is American slang for cheating) rarely,if ever,rebounded to his ultimate advantage. He feels mugged by fate,but has a rather enjoyable time nevertheless. Certainly Bilko prefers his existence as the chief animator of his buddies to the conforming and comfortably hen-pecked life of his superior,'Colonel Hall'.

Most of Bukowski's male speakers exhibit a high percentage of such attractively disreputable attitudes. In 'Fire Station' and the rather earlier work 'Moyamensing Prison', the narrators are part-time card-sharps who live by their

wits in exploiting those around them. 'The Life of Borodin' and 'The Day Hugo Wolf Went Mad' depict the great artists as the victims of female tyranny, either by being cuckolded, and hen-pecked by a woman who doesn't appreciate his music (Borodin) or driven mad by the rent-fixated demands of his battle-axe landlady (Wolf). Several other poems make the same connection between 'the female' and the workaday economic pressures that the male, and in particular the male artist, wishes to avoid. 'The Sound of Human Lives' makes an appeal to the latent misogyny of the male reader by contrasting the speaker's laisser-faire attitudes to work, and art, with those of his 'strangely' ambitious female companion, who complains that

> all we do is eat! make love! sleep! eat! make love!
>
> my dear, I say, there are men out there now
> picking tomatoes, lettuce, even cotton,
> there are men and women dying under the sun,...
> you don't know how lucky we
> are
> 21

When the woman gets out of bed and starts typing, the speaker, in effect, pooh-poohs her ambition to be a writer, saying that he does not know why people think 'effort and energy' have anything to do with 'creation'. He compounds the fatuousness of the comment by remarking that 'in matters like' politics, medicine, history and religion 'they are mistaken also'. Here overt sexism has caused Bukowski to compromise his own best instincts as a writer. Art, as Oscar Wilde knew, is ninety-nine per cent perspiration and only one per cent inspiration. It is strongly implied that female artists, for all their effort and energy, cannot create authentic art because they lack the spark needed to form it. That is, because of their sex; only men have the

seed necessary to spark 'creation'. Women's art is - literally and metaphorically - too much like hard work. But Bukowski's own prodigious track record of publication is a monument to the efficacy of long sessions on the typewriter. The essential point,though,is to associate female artists with the futile,back-breaking,unremunerative toil of day-labouring in the fruit and cotton fields.

The work can also be interpreted not just as a macho put-down of women writers,but also a plea that art itself be regarded as a male preserve,a zone of freedom away from everyday monetary concerns and the ambitions of females. Bukowski's rambling narrative poem 'The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over the Hills' again makes pejorative links between a woman's art and her sexuality. The narrator calls upon a male friend,and notices a woman also there,in 'the last peach fuzz of her youth',but 'quiet,which was good'. He is more interested in her body than in her poetic accomplishments,remarking that 'the bitch had some poems she wrote and I read them/and they were not bad considering she was built for/other things'. In 'A Literary Romance' the speaker finds that the female author of 'very sexy poems about rape and lust' turns out to be 'a virgin,35 years old'. The moral is drawn that,following his failed attempt to seduce her,she remains 'a very bad poetess',and

> I think that when a woman has kept her legs closed
> for 35 years
> it's too late
> either for love
> or for
> poetry.
> 22

On one level,this fits in well with Bukowski's authentic thesis that art must be informed by experience,and that the would-be artist who avoids real involvement in human

emotions, and activities, is likely to produce word-games, bad art according to his values. Needless to say, the supposition that a sexy woman cannot be a good writer (as in 'The Days Run...') and neither can an unsexy one (as in 'A Literary Romance') results in art itself being seen as an all-male club of great artists, clearly an erroneous notion. The narrator of 'A Literary Romance' seems to think that he could have acted as a male Muse to the 'very bad poetess' in question, seducing her in the cause of art, giving her the masculine secret of creativity. Of course, he fails to register the fact that a number of female artists have chosen to remain virgins, and still produced work of considerable stature, because such an admission would inconvenience his prejudice. Outstanding examples of such women artists within the Anglo-American literary canon are, for instance, Jane Austen, Emily Dickinson, Edith Sitwell, Marianne Moore and Stevie Smith.[23]

The opening to Bukowski's poem 'John Dillinger and Le Chasseur Maudit' again seeks to smear 'poetesses' with unfavourable associations and comparisons. The speaker can find some 'sanctuary' in hearing about other 'desperate men':

> Dillinger, Rimbaud, Villon, Babyface Nelson, Seneca, Van Gogh,
> or desperate women: lady wrestlers, nurses, waitresses, whores,
> poetesses

The opposing lists are hardly weighted fairly. The 'desperate men' consist of two well-known gangsters, two dissident bards and two artistic suicides; they are all highly evocative within the reader's mind, and can be seen as admirable if one favours a vigorous opposition to the

status quo in art,or society. On the other hand,the 'desperate women'(a rather different connotation) are merely types not individuals. Alongside nurses and waitresses are placed oddballs such as lady wrestlers - who usually perform for ogling male audiences. Men are,according to this list,capable of being Saints of Opposition. Women, however,can only serve,or ape the masculine pursuits of wrestling...and poetry.[24]

Bukowski's writing can be seen as aligning itself with a heavily masculinist American cultural tradition,from which it reanimates male and female stereotypes and archetypes,transferring these fictional beings onto the streets, bars,and low-rent enclaves of a world that passes itself off as late twentieth century America. Having looked at some of Bukowski's cultural models for his female characters,we can now turn the attention towards fleshing out certain of the sources and characteristics of his role models for masculinity. The relevance of 'Rip Van Winkle' has already been noted,and the intimation made that W.C. Fields and Humphrey Bogart's screen personae also provide vital inputs for this. Indeed,references can be found in Bukowski's work to other filmic titans including James Cagney,Edward G,Robinson and George Raft. Fields appears to supply the humorous balance to these specialists in domineering maleness. But Bukowski is not simply a film fan,identifying strongly with popular actors of his youth, many of whose movies he will undoubtedly have seen. Rather, his work is a subversive celebration of the American cultural tradition of which these film figures are a part. By outlining in broad detail the masculine patterns given by Bogart and Fields,and how much and where Bukowski takes

from them,one may gain further clues as to the cultural context of Bukowski's literary art,which has strong affinities with avant-garde high art,but also a strong component of popular culture.

In the case of W.C.Fields,Bukowski notes not simply a pattern of masculine recalcitrance in the face of work and the presumed oppression of feminine domesticity,but also a comic repertoire. However,Fields was a stage and screen actor,and his Vaudevillian specialities - high-flown verbosity,tongue-twisting names,bumbling golf,pool and hat routines - contribute little or nothing to Bukowski's purposes. But parallels between Bukowski and Fields' rasping delivery of one-liners in nasal monotones were often drawn during Bukowski's public readings of the I970s. While Bukowski's male characters are not deliberately spiteful to children and animals,they often manage,like Fields' memorable creations,to be both highly objectionable and very funny. They share the cultivation of disreputable action and attitudes designed to outrage respectable citizenry - drunkenness,elaborate schemes,avoidance of work. Fields was something of a stoic comedian. Indeed,as William K.Everson observed in The Art Of W.C.Fields (I968), Fields 'never seemed to work for his laughs...he appeared to ward them off,as though his situation were too pitiful to generate laughter. His best gag lines were usually delivered as throw-away mumbles'.[25]

As well as Fields,Bukowski's appropriation of comic techniques and attitudes is highly likely to have been influenced by the popular American radio shows of the I940s and I950s. The most successful performers of that era were double acts: Bob Hope and Bing Crosby,Jack Benny and Phil Harris,George Burns and Gracie Allen. They were the masters

of the running gag,the wisecrack,quick quip,incongruous aside,the non-sequitur and the verbal sucker-punch. Though their humour was usually socially conformist,even conservative in content,there were risqué elements,idiomatic expressions and some other features that have survived in Bukowski's much broader and more vulgar comedy.

Wisecracks deployed within Bukowski's narratives often seem designed to reinforce a pre-existent notion about,say, the inherent faithlessness of loose women. In 'Hello,Willie Shoemaker',a man is summoned to his boss' office in work:

> and he said,Kid,I hear you been takin' Marylou out,
> and I said, Just to dinner,boss,
> and he said, Just to dinner,eh? you couldn't hold
> that broad's pants on with all the rivets on 5th street
> 26

This slangy dialogue sounds as though it has been rescued from the cutting-room floor,an unbuttoned scene that did not make it past the studio censor,or onto the air waves. It falls into the wide category of male banter in the approved American style of humour. Another sample is apparent in 'L.Beethoven,Half-Back',with the minor hilarity of the revered Ludwig being changed into a tough-tackling, tough-talking American football player.

> Beethoven blocked out 3 men,
> and as I went past
> he said,I got a couple of
> babes lined up for tonight;
> don't injure
> anything
> you might need
> later
> 27

As previously noted,this is again an example of American humour seeking to exploit the comic clash of cultural modes, the incongruity of European high art reference within a

sporting framework, the great composer spouting in American idioms. The observation also has a basis of male sexual camaraderie, perhaps, but the emphasis is as much on the 'couple of babes lined up' as on any relationship between men. In a later poem, however, we find two men again more than a little concerned about their sexual apparatus. A man feels the need to visit a racetrack urinal urgently:

> I unzipped and stood there
> grabbing and groping
> and tugging;
> I tugged and I groped and
> I grabbed
> and the guy next to me
> said:
> 'my god, you must really
> have a lot of it...'
> 'nothing like that, sir,
> I've got my shorts on
> backwards'.
> 28

In a British context, such an episode could be seen as akin to a Max Miller joke, an innuendo-loaded story that creates its comic frisson by anti-climactically dispersing the audience's expectations of vulgarity. It is still a joke about a well-worn subject of male concern, penis size, expressed in a format that is unthreatening to male egos or anxieties. Some of Bukowski's cracks on this subject are more tired, as in 'Fire Station', when the female character is flirting with her first fireman. She asks him, '"you got one of those big THINGS?"... "oh, hahhaha., I mean one of/ those big HELMETS!"'. Rather predictably, he replies, '"I've got a big helmet too"'.[29]

None of these gags subvert male attitudes; they tend to confirm existing codes of masculine behaviour. Bar-buddies could have told each other the three preceding 'stories' quite comfortably and enjoyably. Such characters might well agree amongst themselves that drink takes precedence over

womanising,a conclusion that the narrators of 'I Love You' (a whiskey sipper) and 'Freedom' (a wine-bibber) have also reached. W.C.Fields,as it were,joins them at the bar. So does the shade of a cynical roué,the Earl of Rochester:

Farewell,woman! I intend
Henceforth every night to sit
With my lewd,well-natured friend,
Drinking to engender wit.
30

Bukowski Man turns to drink as a way of heightening and dramatizing existence,but also as an escape,a temporary shield against the demands of the world,of women,of work, and to dull his Existential consciousness of the void that lies beneath all such earthly considerations. There is a pathetic,escapist aspect to the Bukowskian comedy,analagous to that of W.C.Fields. There is banter and male bravado,but also anxiety,jokes being told to disperse depression about the parlous state of their world and their lives.

Different as they are,the on-screen personae of Fields and Bogart can both be recognized as typically American specimens of rugged individualism. Fields is the stoic survivor,comically at odds with society's standards of decent behaviour. Humphrey Bogart is the tough guy,undeluded by the wiles of women and the corruption of men,who nevertheless has a strong streak of sensitivity,even sentimentality. Bogart played many supporting roles as hoodlums in 1930s Gangster movies,before becoming the famous private eyes - Sam Spade,Philip Marlowe - of the 1940s. When playing the romantic lead as 'Rick' in Casablanca,his characterization has many of the undertones of the earlier roles. These include an essential independence,as suspicious of the motives of the police as he is of the women that he is attracted to. Money cannot buy his

loyalty, and neither can extravagant protestations of love. The film image of Bogart seems to stand for relatively simple, 'straight' values, based on inner integrity and self-sufficiency. Disrespectful of corrupt authority, he is a seeker after justice, whether or not that coincides with the law. Bogart characters have a strongly domineering element, a masculine ruthlessness that allies itself to a taste for strong liquor and bewhiskered dialogue. Often the Bogartian Man is revealed as a once-bitten romantic, let down in the past by a love affair and subsequently cynical about the implications of romance, though he is still highly interested in women. 'Rick' and 'Ilsa Lund' (Ingrid Bergman) played out a wonderful partnership on this basis in Casablanca, of course, and the tough, gutsy nightclub owner several times reveals himself as a sentimentalist during the action of the film. This does not make him any less of a male chauvinist. Many such men are sentimental about women in their absence; it is living with them and their infuriating habits that they cannot stand.

Bukowski's appropriation of the Bogart manner draws upon the latter's manifestations as an escaped convict, a gold prospector, a hobo, a minor hoodlum, perhaps even a boozy tug-boat captain. In the 1970s poem 'Maybe Tomorrow' there is an explicit identification with Bogart's more desperate types. The speaker recalls his earlier self, when he 'looked like' Bogart and 'rode boxcars through the bad-lands/never missed a chance to duke it'. He then makes another, presumably joking, claim:

> cigar in mouth
> lips wet with beer
> Bogart's
> got a beard now
>
> he's much older

but don't believe the gossip:
Bogie's not dead
yet.
31

While this is a piece of attitudinizing,not to say myth-making,it does show Bukowski's conscious use of an existing model of fictional masculinity that will be instantly recognizable - and appealing - to readers. Practically every sentient being in the Western world will have seen some Bogart movies; certainly those who buy books of poems and attend readings will have done so. Thus the infiltration of Bogart's associations into Bukowski's authorial self is quite easily accomplished,since they have an ostensible tough guy stance and speech in common. Hugh Fox, for instance,writing in a 1973 piece about Bukowski seemed to have swallowed the connection between Hemingway,Bogart and Bukowski whole. He praised 'Buk' as 'the Man Against the Crowd. The Crowd is compromisers,sell-outs....I think that one of the big reasons for Buk's popularity is his straightforeward morality. It's a Hemingway-Borgartish (sic) morality,the morality of the purity of the inner man, the losing tough guy'.[32] Fox states,in fact,the Bukowski Myth,which contains these masculine figments as ingredients.

With the Bogartian archetype outlined,one can now see at least some of the statements of Bukowskian speakers in an ironic,even self-deprecating,light. There is a degree of deliberate role-playing,of deliberate congruence with an established cultural type,that still allows the intrusion of humorous,occasionally subversive details.

The narrator of 'Ants' is dealing with an invasion of the insects in his bathroom when his phone rings.

it was my friend Danny. he said,
listen,you are the only real man I know. I'm

going to kill myself...
go,I said,ahead...
she left me,he said,she left me like that,
hardly any notice...I really loved
her. (he began to cry.)
listen,I said,meeting a bitch is an accident,
having one leave you is a basic reality,
be glad you're coming up against
basic reality...
33

When 'Danny' rings up again,making the same suicidal noises, the 'real man' hangs up on him. As we know,the Bukowskian narrator believes that he is wise to the likely outcome of romantic involvements. But one should not take the episode too seriously,or at face value; it can be plausibly argued that the poem is being played for laughs. He advises the sensitive 'Danny' to kill himself even before finding out what the call is all about. Though tears and susceptibility to feminine wiles are dismissed as signs of masculine weakness,there is a measure of levity in the advice offered. One may infer that the caller does not actually intend to commit suicide,but has rung up to get a healthy dose of cynicism,which he duly receives. The two men are ritually confirming each other's suspicions that the female is not to be trusted. He is told by the man of the world that the desertion of a 'bitch' is a 'basic reality',a reality which is preferable to the delusions of romance. While such statements fit in with Bukowski's Existential view and masculine archetypes,this is surely another instance of their amelioration by humour.

That there is an ironic,debunking dimension to 'Ants' may be inferred by the use of the ambiguous term 'real man'. Other poems offer even clearer subversions of this concept. Bukowski is by no means a simple apologist for machismo and its attendant certainties. Such modes of behaviour are often subjected to a degree of role-playing irony. For

an example of this, one might turn briefly to a short poem called 'No Charge', first published in Coastlines magazine in 1960. A racetrack pick-up between two seemingly well-recognized archetypes from 1940s films, or Detective Fiction, is enacted. A Bogartian character gets the nod from a sexy Vamp, but the typology starts to become comically skewed:

> this babe in the grandstand
> with dyed red hair
> kept leaning her breasts against me
> and talking about Gardena
> poker parlors
> but I blew smoke into
> her face
> and told her about a Van Gogh
> exhibition
> I'd seen up on the hill[34]

The speaker makes a great play out of his smoke-blowing indifference to the woman's seductiveness, but then starts to tell her about an art exhibition - hardly what she might have expected to hear. She joins her cousins in 'No Grounding in the Classics' and 'A 340 Dollar Horse and a Hundred Dollar Whore' who are similarly confronted by their man's artistic interests. There is a touch of masculine wish-fulfillment in the denouement of the poem, when we are told that though the Van Gogh 'thing' cost fifty cents, the racetrack whore made no charge. Presumably because the sex was unusually good: 'she said/'Big Red' was the best horse/ she'd ever seen -/until I stripped down.'. In spite of this bravado, the poem's action and discourse is lightly subversive of its apparent cultural sources.

A much later work makes another reference to a famous image of domineering masculine behaviour on screen, only to comment in satirical fashion upon it. At the opening of 'Iron Mike', the model this time is the belligerent use of a grapefruit by James Cagney in The Public Enemy:

> we talk about this film:
> Cagney fed this broad
> grapefruit
> faster than she could
> eat it and
> then she
> loved him.
>
> 'that won't always
> work', I told Iron
> Mike.
> 35

There ensues a dialogue between the narrator and 'Iron Mike' in which the former does much more of the talking than the latter; one can summarise these two chauvinists as, respectively, the sentimentalist and the cocksman. 'Iron Mike' has the answer to women who will not leave him alone after sex (which is all he is interested in) - he slaps them around, and then they leave. He makes a connection with his boasted sexual score of thirty-two female scalps, implying that, as with the Cagney character, women's devotion is kept and inspired by male domination and violence. The narrator, however, immediately puts into question such a notion, that women 'want' to be treated roughly. His attitude, while equally committed to keeping women in their subordinate sexual and domestic roles, nevertheless undermines 'Iron Mike', and such cave-man proclivities, by the intrusion of homespun details:

> 'I don't have your nerve,
> Mike. they hang around
> washing dishes, rubbing
> the shit-stains out of the
> crapper, throwing out the
> old Racing Forms...'

The narrator goes on to wax quite sentimental about women, claiming that no man is 'invincible' to love, and that 'some day' even Mike will be 'sent mad by/eyes like a child's

crayon/drawing'. Again, this is no defence against a charge of misogyny, since many such men grow moist-eyed about women when they are absent; male company interspersed with heterosexual bouts seem to be their ideal. One can claim, however, that the crasser traits of 'Iron Mike' are being laid open to a certain amount of ridicule, though the evidence is not wholly conclusive, and the Cagney archetype is not fully explored. At best, the observations that the work has to make about male violence against women are ambiguous. In this, it is in line with other minor Bukowski poems which illustrate this concern. In 'And the Moon and the Stars and the World' domestic beatings are apparently viewed as part of the natural order of things, while 'The Colored Birds' comments upon the banal basis of husband-wife violence, but neither endorses nor condemns such goings-on.[36]

To use a Thurberesque phrase, The War Between Men and Women is generally conducted on a more jokey level in Bukowski's work than 'Iron Mike' suggests. In this, masculine nostalgia for an era when men were men and women were glad of it, is sometimes seen in a debunking light. The archetypal significance of 'Eve' has already been established. Her partner 'Eddie' also takes on something of a symbolic dimension, since he stands for the masculine certainties of his youth, a by-now distant era. The ageing, arthritic Eddie tries to revive his lapsed friendship of thirty years previously, indulging in a drinking session with the narrator and talking over old times. But these days Eddie cannot take his drink; he begins to vomit

telling me between spasms
that we were men
real men
we knew what it was all about

by god
these young punks
didn't have it.
37

Eddie is clearly shown to be deluding himself, pathetically clinging to a fiction of his past self, the Good Old Days and the fighting and boozing that they supposedly contained. The spirit of male camaraderie that Eddie is trying so urgently to summon up is being covered in beer-vomit. The narrator recognizes the psychological importance of these figments, turning down the offer of Eve's sexual favours with the words 'I can't Eddie...you're my/buddy'. But such scruples might not have applied if Eve had not become a squinting mountain of flesh. Eddie passes out, and is carried 'snoring' to bed. The narrator leaves, stares at their house for a few moments, then drives off: 'it was all I had left to do'. The Bukowskian hero-narrator is a loner, usually presenting himself as wise to the wiles of women but also to the illusions of male bonding.

Masculinity in Bukowski's work has as much to do with ideas of individual integrity and sensitivity as it has with exploring spheres of male interest and behaviour. Though his work seems to invite a fairly damning feminist critique, it is certainly not monolithically sexist. The often ironic perspectives of his male narrators mean that the poems sometimes question the attitudes, traits and concerns that, on another level, they exploit and even celebrate.

Having looked at Bukowski's use of stereotypes and archetypes culled in the main from American popular culture one can extend the discussion to his treatment of American national mythology. The symbolic figures of America, the

cowboy-outlaw, together with their urban cousins, gangsters, crop up from time to time in his works. They take part in Bukowski's ongoing engagement with national ideology and mythology, allowing him to discuss patriotism, success and the Pioneer Myth ambiguously. Again, this discussion seems sometimes subversive, and sometimes reactionary. It is also another layer to Bukowski's attempt to render the contemporary scene in mythic terms, and give the realistic lineaments of his urban cowboys and other characters the hallmarks of unchanging types drawn from the eternal stock of Human Nature.

When a Bukowskian speaker comes across a cowboy, mutual incomprehension ensues, and certainly the urban types that populate his narratives would look very odd, even ridiculous, if they tried to ride a horse. But many of them play with cowboy characteristics: unwashed independence, distrust of the law, concentration on the Existential reality of the individual amidst a hostile environment, etc. These connotations are occasionally subjected to a rather funny inversion, as in 'The Difference Between a Bad Poet and a Good One is Luck' - a question-begging title, since all concerned, including Bukowski, know that the essential difference has to do with grasp of language and techniques. However, this Bukowskian speaker makes his point about the chance nature of experience. After some adventures, he finds himself a rich young woman, and is installed at her large residence near a small town in Texas. The locals then pay a courtesy call to size up the stranger in their midst:

> and they all came to her house -
> all the cowboys, all the cowboys:
> fat, dull and covered with dust.
> and we all shook hands.
> I had on a pair of old bluejeans, and they said
> oh, you're a writer, eh?

and I said: well, some think so....
two weeks later they
ran me out
of town.
38

The cameo of the cowboys as 'fat, dull and covered with dust' is symptomatic of Bukowski's debunking tone. Such an assessment is far removed from their heroic image in Hollywood Westerns, and the roles of Tom Mix, Roy Rogers, John Wayne, Gary Cooper and Clint Eastwood. Removed from their faithful horses and the grandeur of the American landscape, the cowboys in Bukowski's poem are revealed as small town, small minded bigots who regard a writer with suspicion. Rightly so, because he is sceptical of their values. There is another unflattering portrayal of a Western type in the 1959 poem 'What a Man I Was', which is spoken in a parodic drawl by a psychopathic outlaw, who tells us that he shot 'the Sheerf', even his own horse, '(poor critter)', and then 'every light/in town'. He then makes his last outbursts at the end of a rope, surrounded by an unsavoury lynch mob.[39]

Bukowski is on much firmer ground when he invokes the cowboy and such associations as befits their cultural significance, within a contemporary setting. In 'Another Academy', Bukowski contrasts the situation of a group of bums, waiting outside a Hollywood Mission Hall, 'quiet as oxen', with the award of an Oscar to John Wayne for his performance in the film True Grit (1969). Wayne was well-known as a Republican, a champion of conservative values of God, the Family, the Bible, and Free Enterprise. He became a celebrated portrayer of all-American types, usually cowboys or soldiers, in the well-established mould of self-reliant, hard-living, sentimental, outdoorsmen. His image was, literally and metaphorically, an illusion; like Ronald

Reagan,he was too busy making movies to have any actual connection with fighting wars or meeting cowhands. The true grit of the bums is viewed with sympathetic detachment by Bukowski's narrator: 'dirty stained caps and thick clothes and/no place to go'. They are probably closer to the reality of the Old West than Wayne's inevitably sanitized impersonations of grizzled soaks. Wayne's fictional archetype of masculinity is largely unmentioned,as is the sentiment surrounding the conferment of the Oscar to the actor at the end of his career. The emphasis of the poem is on the illusory nature of Hollywood and its values; the Oscar ceremony has no meaning in the bums' experience, except a bitter one: the ultimate Rich versus the ultimate Poor.[40]

In 'Yeah,Man?',a poem within the 1981 collection <u>Dangling in the Tournefortia</u>,the hero 'Larry' acts out an ironically updated version of the Pioneer experience. He lives in a low-rent neighbourhood which is being inundated by 'little brown guys',probably Mexicans working illegally in California,though precise details are not given. When Larry's car,that cherished symbol of American freedoms,is blocked in by their 'smashed giant battleships of/cars',a dispute arises. He starts drinking,then forces a change in their exasperating attitude of <u>mañana</u> by forcing one of the immigrants to move their car at knifepoint. This violent solution appears to have been successful,and Larry gives thanks by acting as an all-American consumer should. He goes out to buy 'some six-packs' and 'fried chicken'. On his return,he finds that most of his apartment's furniture and belongings have been stolen,wrecked or covered in graffiti. His cat's tail has been 'scalped' and lies bleeding in the toilet. Larry sits down on what is

left of the couch,takes a swig of beer and comes to an American decision:

> he decided then
> that it was about time
> he moved
> further west.
> 41

The pattern of westward migration by Pioneers and their families during the nineteenth century is the basis for essential parts of American national mythology,continually embellished in popular novels,Westerns,and television shows. The historical Pioneer experience involved succumbing to or overcoming harsh Frontier conditions and attacks by marauding Indians,as well as the depredations of disease and starvation. Pioneers were sustained by religious belief and the desire for freedom,land,a better life - the archetypal Americans,in other words. Until California was settled,these American Pioneers could always retreat ever westward,a direction that has taken on cultural symbolism for American culture ever since the Frontier itself ceased to be an actual place that one could travel to. For the purposes of American culture,the Frontier became a fictive zone,a place where Huck Finn could aspire to light out towards,a realm of dangerous freedom away from the safe stalenesses of civilization and its restrictions on individual liberty.

In Bukowski's poem,'Larry' has paid the price for his American desire to protect freedom of movement (his car) and individual space. His minor act of violence has reaped a whirlwind of destruction - the wagon train,as it were, has been set on fire by the Indians. In any event,modern demographic trends have caused the Myth to be punctured. One can surmise that the poem takes place in a poor area of

Los Angeles,though there is no exact location specified. If he is an Angeleno,there is now nowhere for 'Larry' to move to. The Frontier survives only as an element within the American Imagination,ripe to be reworked by writers such as Charles Bukowski,long-time resident of Los Angeles, who can see ironic parallels with the Pioneer experience on the dangerous streets of the city.

Bukowski adopts a slightly less questioning attitude to gangsters,seeing them as figures to be roped into his symbolic theology of opposition to the status quo. Again, as with cowboys,what we know about gangsters has mainly been provided for us by Hollywood. The gangsters and their filmic dramatizers which appear in Bukowski's works are often located in a past America of harsher but simpler operations,'a glorious/non-bullshit time' according to the speaker of 'The Lady in Red',who summons up the gangster era as part of his own lost youth.

> roosters were weak and the hens were thin and the people ate
> them if they didn't lay eggs fast enough,and the best time of all
> was when John Dillinger escaped from jail,and one of the
> saddest times of all was when the Lady in Red fingered him and
> he was gunned down coming out of that movie.
> Pretty Boy Floyd,Baby Face Nelson,Machine Gun Kelly,Ma
> Barker,Alvin Karpis,we loved them all.
> 42

The exploits of gangsters were embellished in newspapers of the 1920s and 1930s,in some cases making folk heroes out of characters who robbed the Banks which foreclosed on tenant farmers,and evicted mortgage holders unable to keep up payments during the Depression. The speaker of the poem associates himself with the struggling masses' 'love' for gangsters,whose nicknames - 'Pretty Boy','Baby Face' - show a degree of popular affection. In reality,this was somewhat

misplaced on such ruthless murderers,who were interested only in lining their own pockets. By the late 1920s,and throughout the 1930s,Hollywood had transformed the sordid reality of cold-blooded killings,protection rackets,extortion,bootlegging,prostitution,loansharking,civic and judicial corruption,etc into a Golden Age of charismatic Mob bosses. These were famously played by actors such as James Cagney,George Raft,Humphrey Bogart,Edward G.Robinson,whose characterizations suggested an enviable lifestyle in which jazz,sex and drink were prominent.

As we have noted,a number of Bukowski poems make admiring gestures towards these filmic figures: an early work is even entitled 'The Night I Nodded to George Raft in Vegas'. Bukowskian speakers tend to identify with certain gangsters,in particular those who met a spectacular end at the hands of law and order (or J.Edgar Hoover's F.B.I. men) rather than those who were eventually snared on mundane technicalities such as income tax evasion. John Dillinger makes an appearance in 'The Lady in Red' - it is pleasing to think that he may have been 'gunned down' coming out of a gangster movie - and also in 'John Dillinger and Le Chasseur Maudit',as does Baby Face Nelson. Presumably,they are seen as admirable for having lived out an absolute contempt for 'the rules' of society to an ultimately fatal conclusion. It is even possible that Bukowski is simply indulging in a little hero-worship,regarding these mobsters (transformed by time and Hollywood into heroic,mythic beings) as men out of the ordinary,canonised as Saints of permanent opposition.

But gangsters' contemporary descendants,the Mafia, receive virtually nothing of this cultural kudos in Bukowski's scheme of values. They are too reminiscent of

the heads of business Corporations,moneymakers with 'God Bless America' engraved on their hearts,to be utile in his fictional world. Indeed,one poem,'Man in the Sun' is amusingly dismissive of the lifeworks of 'one of the heads of the Mafia',who ate too much and 'got fat sucking at good/cigars and young breasts'. When the Mafiosi has his final heart attack,his last words are 'how beautiful life can be'. The speaker draws the lesson that

> sometimes you've got to kill 4 or 5
> thousand men before you somehow
> get to believe that the sparrow
> is immortal,money is piss and
> that you have been wasting
> your time.[43]

One might expect the Bukowskian view that the Mafia's concerns with power,influence and money are divertissements and a waste of time when overlooked by the grave. The Mafia are part of the business world of the United States,and employ bankers,lawyers,tax consultants,accountants and other professional groups whose activities are beyond the pale as far as Bukowski's anti-bourgeois rhetoric is concerned.

The national holidays and sacred cows of patriotism are usually regarded with some scorn by Bukowski's characters, whose lives are conducted away from such official concern; poems such as '4th of July' and 'Happy New Year' see these occasions as simply inauthentic living. 'Independence Day' opens in a deliberately suggestive manner,when its speaker tells us that

> it was the 4th of July and I was
> living with an Alvarado street whore,
> I was on my last unemployment check[44]

The suggestion has to do with whether such a hard-up pair have anything to celebrate on America's birthday,which is unmentioned again during the narrative. They have obviously rejected the American shibboleths of hard work and enterprise,components of American national ideology. The speaker has made a facetious link between a national holiday and the poverty of certain citizens of the Republic,though the work does not go on to make any specific political points. In 'Bad Action',a racetrack punter is disturbed several times when trying to study the form of horses; when he does locate a sufficiently secluded seat in the grandstand,

> the public address system
> came on:
> 'Ladies and Gentlemen,the Flag of
> the United States of America!'
>
> we all stood up.
> the flag went up.
> we all sat down.
>
> sometimes being at the racetrack
> is worse than being in the
> county jail.
> 45

The satire does not go very deep here,but Bukowski nearly always offers facetiousness in place of any political critique; the outlaw stance is evoked ('the/county jail') but not to any purpose beyond a mild quip.

In conclusion,one can confidently summarise Bukowski's authorial self,and nearly all of his narrators,as being mythic in an identifiably American way. They are sceptical of certain elements of national ideology,but identify strongly with American national mythology. His stereotypes and archetypes are culled from the same sources,with their preexisting models in American popular culture being favoured. His recourse to Myth can be seen as reactionary,but it is also highly stimulating.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

I. Alta, short untitled essay, in Second Coming, 2, no. 4, n.p.

2. 'I Love You', Play the Piano..., p.5I.

3. 'Hot', Burning in Water..., pp.I6I-I62.

4. 'Freedom', The Days Run Away..., p.I7.

5. 'True Story', Burning in Water..., pp.II3-II4.

6. Ernest Hemingway, 'God Rest You Merry Gentlemen', 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber', in The First Forty-Nine Stories (I944; London, I968), pp.322-326, pp.II-46.

7. 'He Do the Police in Different Voices', and draft of 'The Fire Sermon', in T.S. Eliot, The Waste Land, A Facsimile & Transcript, edited by Valerie Eliot, (London, I97I), p.5, p.39.

8. T.S. Eliot, 'Whispers of Immortality', Collected Poems, (London, I974), pp.55-56, (p.56).

9. Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, (London, I977), p.3I2.

I0. 'A Last Shot on Two Good Horses', The Days Run Away..., p.89. 'Fire Station', Play the Piano..., pp.38-44.

II. 'The Price', Love is a Dog From Hell, pp.95-96.

I2. Céline, Journey to the End of the Night, p.3I2.

I3. 'Fire Station', Play the Piano..., pp.38-44.

I4. 'One of the Hottest', Love is a Dog From Hell, p.26. 'I8 Cars Full of Men Thinking of What Could Have Been', The Days Run Away..., pp.66-67.

I5. 'I Saw An Old Fashioned Whore Today', 'A Man's Woman', Mockingbird Wish Me Luck, p.I22, p.I38.

I6. 'Shot of Red Eye', Burning in Water..., pp.I23-I26.

I7. 'A Conversation on Morality, Eternity and Copulation', The Roominghouse Madrigals, pp.I32-I33.

I8. 'Eddie and Eve', Burning in Water..., pp.I79-I80.

I9. Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, (New York, I960), p.33I.

20. Washington Irving, 'Rip Van Winkle', Selected Prose, edited by Stanley T. Williams, (New York, I96I), p.92, p.I06.

2I. 'The Sound of Human Lives', Burning in Water..., pp.2I4-2I5.

22. 'The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over the Hills', The Days Run Away..,pp.II5-I20.
'A Literary Romance', Burning in Water...,pp.2I-22.

23. The idea of a male Muse,releasing a female artist into genuine creativity through sex is also the subject of an amusing,if dubious,poem called 'Experience', The Rooming-Madrigals,pp.2I5-2I6.

24. 'John Dillinger and Le Chasseur Maudit', Burning in Water...,pp.I32-I33.

25. William K.Everson,The Art of W.C.Fields, (London,I968), p.232.

26. 'Hello,Willie Shoemaker',A Bukowski Sampler,pp.39-40.

27. 'L.Beethoven,Half-Back', The Days Run Away...,p.I03.

28. 'I Can't Stop',Dangling in the Tournefortia,pp.I27-I28.

29. 'Fire Station', Play the Piano...,pp.38-44.

30. 'Song',The Complete Poems of John Wilmot,Earl of Rochester,edited by David M.Vieth,(New Haven and London,I968), p.5I.

31. 'Maybe Tomorrow', Play the Piano...,p.I0I.

32. Hugh Fox,'What Bukowski Has Really Done/Is Doing to U.S.Poetry', Second Coming,2,no.3,(I974),n.p.

33. 'Ants', Mockingbird Wish Me Luck,pp.I0I-I02.

34. 'No Charge', Burning in Water...,p.20.

35. 'Iron Mike', Love is a Dog From Hell,pp.83-84.

36. 'And the Moon and the Stars and the World',The Days Run Away...,p.84. 'The Colored Birds',Mockingbird...,pp.26-27.

37. 'Eddie and Eve',Burning in Water...,pp.I79-I80.

38. 'The Difference Between a Bad Poet and a Good One is Luck', Burning in Water...,pp.I47-I48.

39. 'What a Man I Was',The Days Run Away...,pp.I3-I5.

40. 'Another Academy', Mockingbird Wish Me Luck,pp.2I-22.

41. 'Yeah,Man?',Dangling in the Tournefortia,pp.59-65.

42. 'The Lady in Red',Dangling...,p.I3.

43. 'Man in the Sun', Burning in Water...,p.85.

44. 'Independence Day',Dangling...,pp.26-30.

45. 'Bad Action', War All the Time,pp.220-22I.

CHAPTER SIX: BUKOWSKI AND THE WEST COAST POETRY SCENE

Charles Bukowski's verse, and his public career as a writer, have evolved within a West Coast tradition that lays emphasis on the pursuit of poetry through little magazines, small presses, and live performances. The vitality of this tradition in the Post War period has been remarkable, encompassing the achievements of the Berkeley Renaissance poets and the Beats, developments during the 1960s, and the currently buoyant poetry scene in Southern California. Formed by indigenous talents and those who have migrated to the area from other States or countries, it has made a positive virtue out of being far away from and largely unrecognized by the New York literary marketplace, and has nurtured distinctive writers who fully reflect the area's environment of racial and cultural mix. This chapter will outline the Californian context of Bukowski's work, and suggest the importance of his example to the present generation of West Coast poets. His 1970s readings will be described, and their impact upon his verse practice and celebrity as a literary figure considered.

The financial rewards, and lifestyle, offered by the world's most influential film industry have always attracted writers to California, and certain of most celebrated literary talents of this century have spent time as screenwriters. F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Aldous Huxley, Nathanael West, James Agee and Raymond Chandler, for instance found success and disenchantment in varying degrees. Of more specific relevance to the development of indigenous writing were the residencies in California of Robinson Jeffers, Henry Miller, Anais Nin and Kenneth Patchen, all of whom inspired interest among the avant-garde literary

groups that flourished in California after the Second World War. Kenneth Rexroth's account of American Poetry in the Twentieth Century (1973) observed the importance of social factors in the formation of these groups, and in their libertarian, pacifist leanings. Key members of the San Francisco Anarchist Circle had been Conscientious Objectors, held in logging and labour camps within north-western States during the war years. Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, William Everson, Philip Lamantia and Rexroth himself were all ex-detainees who subsequently settled in the San Francisco Bay area, maintained their contacts and became instrumental in the poetry movement termed The Berkeley Renaissance, which was most vital in the late 1940s and 1950s. The Anarchist Circle itself produced little magazines, such as The Ark, George Leite's Circle, and City Lights, edited by Peter Dean Martin - who went on to found a bookstore of the same name with Lawrence Ferlinghetti in June 1953.[1]

The fulcrum of artistic activities was San Francisco. In Allen Ginsberg's recollection, the city had many advantages for artists in various mediums and circumstances:

> It had a tradition of philosophical anarchism with the anarchist club that Rexroth belonged to, a tradition receptive to person rather than officialdom....There had already been a sort of Berkeley Renaissance in 1948 with Jack Spicer poet, Robert Duncan poet, Robin Blaser poet, Timothy Leary psychologist, Harry Smith, great underground filmmaker....They were there all around the same time, they didn't know each other well but they were passing in the street....And specifically there were little magazines like Circle...there was a tradition that didn't exist in the more money-success-Time-magazine-oriented New York scene. [2]

Public readings, and such artistic cross-fertilization, were essential features of this San Francisco scene. Sometimes up to two hundred people gathered in bars, art galleries,

or coffee shops, and sometimes numbers were limited to a few dozen at Rexroth's weekly soirées. Young writers, Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac among them, were first introduced to the West Coast literary sphere via such gatherings, where they found pleasing responsiveness to their work and relaxed social attitudes. Thus, the Beats tapped into pre-existing West Coast tendencies that favoured anarchistic politics, an informal poetic, and live performance. Ferlinghetti observed that 'The Poets' Follies big public events, had happened several years in a row before the Beats came on the scene....You could say the Beats were only one phase of a continuing San Francisco poetry movement with a big emphasis on the oral tradition'.[3]

At Allen Ginsberg's first public reading of 'Howl' at the Six Gallery in San Francisco on 7 October 1955, the readers (which also included Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen and Philip Lamantia) were introduced to the audience by Kenneth Rexroth. The event was the precursor to many readings involving Beat-associated writers on the West Coast, some of which became - as the poet and critic Richard Eberhart noted - 'as scandalous, thronged and disruptive as protest-rallies'. In a sympathetic piece written for The New York Times Book Review, printed on 2 September 1956, Eberhart praised the enthusiasm and spontaneity of these 'informal occasions':

> The West Coast is the liveliest spot in the country in poetry today. It is only here that there is a radical group movement of young poets....In the Bay region there are several poetry readings each week. They may be called at the drop of a hat....Hundreds from about 16 to 30 may show up and engage in an authentic, free-wheeling celebration of poetry, an analogue of which was jazz thirty years ago. The audience participates, shouting and stamping, interrupting and applauding.[4]

Such events engendered a rather different atmosphere for the reception of verse to that which obtained at University-based readings. The fashion now swung in favour of a greater emotional immediacy between poet and audience, together with a lowering of literariness and academic reserve. Ginsberg himself rapidly gathered a reputation as perhaps the most dynamic declaimer of verse since Dylan Thomas.

During the 1960s this vogue for readings often saw them being used as vehicles for the anti-Vietnam War campaign, and the various Free Speech and censorship battles of the Underground press. One such benefit reading in 1968 helps illustrate the nature of the writing scene just down the coast in Los Angeles, which was and is different from that in San Francisco. A reading was held in the Ash Grove Theater to raise money and focus support for Open City's defence against obscenity charges; it was summarised by Tony Quagliano as 'the truest embodiment of a sense of community that the "underground" literary scene in Los Angeles was ever able to muster....But what actually brought those writers and the audience together that night was not any literary purpose, but a political one'.[5] The evening was billed as a gathering of Los Angeles poets, but the majority of those who read were born elsewhere: Jack Micheline and Harold Norse were originally New Yorkers, and long-time resident in Los Angeles John Thomas made a point of announcing himself as 'a Baltimore boy'. Bukowski himself came to the city as a small child, from Andernach, Germany. This in fact makes him typically Angeleno, since the majority of the population of Los Angeles and its surrounding areas were and continue to be immigrants, attracted latterly by the climate, youth culture, campus freedoms and employment potential of Southern California.

The poet and editor Bill Mohr has pointed to the social forces at work in directing the influx of people to the area in the Post War years, notably the massive expansion of the Defence Industry, certain populist movements, and the Entertainment sectors of the economy:

> The suburban cities in Los Angeles County which first expanded when World War II brought huge numbers of people to work in the defense industries saw another population surge during the longest war in the United States' history [Vietnam]....Many young people were moving here simply to be 'where it was happening', which included peace marches and rallies as well as movies and the Sunset Boulevard music scene.[6]

These demographic factors may account for the heterogeneous nature of the writing environment around Los Angeles, as of Southern California as a whole. San Francisco has been hospitable to groups of writers and, as has been observed, allowed the free flow of mutual stimuli between artists of differing types and generations; the City Lights enterprise has provided a focus, as bookstore, meeting place for writers and as a major independent publishing imprint. Los Angeles has tended not to encourage resident writers to coalesce into like-minded groupings. This may be partly due to the vehicular nature of a city of suburbs, stretching over a large area; Greater Los Angeles, if superimposed on London, would encompass the distance between Cambridge and Brighton. Many writers have depicted Los Angeles as a haven for loners, Charles Bukowski included. In the Red Hill Press <u>Anthology of L.A.Poets</u> (1972), which he co-edited with Paul Vangelisti and Neeli Cherry, Bukowski commented on the city's potential gifts of anonymity and individual space: 'a man or woman, writer or not, can find more isolation in Los Angeles than in Boise, Idaho'.[7]

In the period since the 1960s, much of the most vibrant poetic activities have taken place around Los Angeles and Long Beach. Consideration of the work of some currently active poets will be offered in due course. It is certain that the success of Bukowski's career, his deserved repute as a live performer, and perhaps simply the presence of this singular figure, has proved galvanic to young writers. The ready availability of his poetry and prose in Black Sparrow and City Lights editions was a major factor in boosting his reputation, but Bukowski's own decision in 1970 to start giving readings from his works was an important one. Bukowski's progression from bookstores, galleries, to the College reading circuit followed that of the Beats and the San Francisco poets; his reading style, though peculiarly his own, also echoes the West Coast tradition of dynamic performance, and interaction between poet and audience.

Bukowski's career as a public performer came about as a result of his resolve to leave long-standing employment with the Los Angeles Post Office and, with the encouragement of his publisher John Martin, become a full-time writer. When Bukowski mounted a stage, he did so only for reasons of earning a living. Earlier on, even when his reputation as the author of the Open City columns and several volumes of distinctive poetry had brought offers of readings, the pronouncements that Bukowski made on such possibilities were invariably negative. He told Charles Potts to 'watch that poetry reading thing. most poets can't read at all, most can't write. Not saying you. but the reading can apt (sic) to be a thing where one puts the ego out on a string so the people can touch it easier'. Even more emphatically,

Bukowski wrote to Carl Weissner on 27 February 1968, indicating a deep-seated reluctance to compromise his privacy as a writer and face the reading public:

> rumours on (sic) town hall reading of Bukowski, Corso, Micheline...impossible. didn't you know I have made it known for years that I don't read publicly?.... [I have] just turned down a reading, with fee, at Univ. of Southern Calif. Festival of the Arts. I never read in public, don't intend to unless it means the difference between starving in the gutter and starving in a closet....[I] have turned down fees of from $200 and $700 and told them to go screw....I am not an actor, I am a creator, I hope.[8]

Despite such a vehement protest, Chicago Review briefly recorded in its Fall 1970 issue that Charles Bukowski had just completed a reading tour of the western States. He read in bookstores, and in nightclubs where he quickly learned the art of dealing with hecklers, and exchanging banter with a less than sober audience. But Bukowski was also well capable of striking rather deeper emotional chords and conveying more serious impressions. One of the earliest accounts of a Bukowski reading dwelt at length on Bukowski's theatrical knack of affecting and moving those who paid to see him. The event, for which Bukowski was paid one hundred dollars, took place at Pomona College Art Department in California. Guy Williams, a member of the teaching staff who had helped organise the reading, wrote to Lafayette Young, a San Diego bookseller, testifying to the impact that the evening's proceedings had had on him.

> After three days, I must tell you this: I still can't erase that scene in Rembrandt Hall - Bukowski standing there behind the podium with all the poems in his fist, his blood and belly full of booze, staring us down. The genteel audience, his disdain and him hurting so hard behind that ruined face. A face from another time, place, planet. As I think of it now my stomach still turns over, aches....He made me use my feelings. Gave

> me a ride in his gut bucket; forced me to feel, really feel: it was like some sort of cruel Reality Therapy.[9]

Williams' description suggests the electricity of the occasion, and Bukowski's powerful stage presence, able to communicate with a mixture of hostility and theatricality. It qualifies the many later impressions of Bukowski's public persona as simply a vulgar antagonist of the audience, a jokey barbarian. A sample of the latter, rather dismissive, commentary can be glimpsed in an exchange between an interviewer and the veteran New York poet Karl Shapiro, printed in a Triquarterly interview. The paths of Bukowski and Shapiro had recently crossed. Shapiro expressed the opinion that Bukowski was 'an authentic poet', but illustrated this with the following anecdote. 'He was over at our house and threatened to tear it apart. A wonderful artist had loaned us a couple of his paintings, beautiful abstractions. Bukowski sat down on the sofa, and somebody said to him: "What do you think of that painting?" He said 'Vulgar bourgeois shit"'. One of the two interviewers then remarked that 'The idea of Bukowski using the word "vulgar" is priceless. He gives readings and a lot of people you'd never associate with poetry come to the reading in leather jackets, carrying six-packs of beer and bottles of whiskey, to egg him on, and then he sits there and belches through a reading'.[10]

One can make the assumption that the lure of increasingly large amounts of money, and the opportunity - indeed, the expectation - of consuming large amounts of alcohol in fulfillment of his image as a bibulous bard contributed to his variable, if fascinating, performances. He commented to Robert Wennersten that drinking while reading had certain dangers, but it helped to get the audience to

identify with him: 'I can feel the audience relating when I lift...beer and drink it...I don't know if I'm playing the game or they're playing the game'.[11] On several well-documented occasions, Bukowski certainly lost the game with the bottle and the audience. Gerald Locklin encountered the unpredictability of Bukowski in this inebriated state during the second of two readings given on the same day at the Long Beach campus of the University of California during the early 1970s. The reading at midday passed off without significant incident, but an afternoon's residence in a nearby tavern turned Bukowski into 'his doppelganger: [an] unruly, rude, bullying, self-styled demented genius'. Locklin's comical account of the farce that took place in the evening manages to capture the grotesque one-man-show which the soused poet insisted in trying to put on:

> Bukowski could barely talk by then, let alone discern many of the words on the page. Between attempts at poetry, he flaunted his thermos, alternately encouraged and insulted questioners, performed the world premiere of a one-note 'Melancholy Baby', all the time rocking back and forth upon the podium....I sat in back, laughing in spite of myself, while reeling off rosaries that he might not topple from the stage and break his neck....He had planned to read two hours. My prayers were answered - his thermos dry, he gave it up after one.[12]

Another reading in Long Beach a few years later went off rather more successfully, and was reported upon by the journalist Glenn Esterly in a 1976 article for Rolling Stone magazine. The appearance of this commentary on the Bukowski phenomenon in a nationally-distributed, highly 'overground' publication was symptomatic of the increased reputation that the author was now enjoying. The extensive piece contained several photographs, reprinted some poems, and packaged comments from several friends and associates

of Bukowski. As part of the highly readable narrative, Esterly wrote that Bukowski

> always vomits before readings; crowds give him the jitters. And tonight there's a big crowd. Some 400 noisy students....Bukowski is in good form, just full enough of booze to bring out the showman in him, and the audience responds enthusiastically. On the humorous lines he reads drolly, stretching out certain syllables in his mortician's voice and managing to get the same inflection into the spoken word as he has on paper. [13]

Many of the antics at Bukowski's readings can properly be ascribed to alcohol, but they may also have had a purpose beyond self-aggrandizement. He often swopped <u>badinage</u> (humorous ridicule) with his audiences, sometimes even while a poem was being delivered. Such a practice would have fitted in with his general intention to lower or disperse any air of formal literariness, to highlight the personality of the author, and to 'humanize' poetry. He informed Michael Andrews that 'the bullshit's all right, but it's not as good as the poetry. I like to mix them together. It takes away from the ho liness, the so-called holiness of the poetry'.[14] The poet Stephen Kessler remembered the sight and sound of Bukowski's appearance at the 1974 Santa Cruz Poetry Festival, 'a marathon reading at the Civic Auditorium' alongside Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder and others, where

> Bukowski enraged the feminists and delighted the subliterary slobs by being himself on stage, reading in that unshakably murderous monotone for his allotted time punctuated by slurps off his quart of screwdriver [vodka and orange], then heckling his colleagues from the audience. ('Read ten more!' he yelled at Snyder as the hour approached midnight and the crowd hushed reverently to receive some of Gary's Zen/environmentalist wisdom). [15]

There is of course a point at which such cheerful disresp-

ect, such iconoclastic chutzpah, becomes the boring persistence of the barroom drunk. Bukowski was certainly aware of the strain of acting up to the scabrous image he had created on paper, and the self-destructive potential of this strain was certainly one factor in the increasing infrequency of his public performances during the latter part of the 1970s. Another element to the human cost of singing for one's supper, reading words in which the poet inevitably has a considerable emotional investment amid a highly charged atmosphere, was the realization of what had happened to other writers. In Bukowski's expressed opinion, and it is one with which many would concur, the necessity to read to a live audience had 'killed Dylan Thomas and...sucked many other poets into a grand imbecility'.[16] As royalties from his books increased, so the financial imperative to give readings receded, and Bukowski was once more able to indulge his previously-expressed dislike of being on show.

Certain of his poems discuss the experience of performing, usually regarding it as a clownish, futile exercise, a test of endurance rather than an opportunity to show off. 'Poetry Reading', from a 1972 collection, finds its speaker with 'sweat running down my arms' coming to the sour conclusion that he is 'scrabbling for pennies in dark tiny halls/reading poems I have long since become tired/of'. Few of his efforts on the subject have much intrinsic interest as poems, though 'On the Circuit', 'On and Off the Road' and 'The Hustle' are worth reading on an anecdotal basis.[17] There is, however, a sardonic poem entitled 'This Poet', which is formally unusual among his works. The text is squeezed into a tight column going down the page, an effect that truncates many of the words and divides the

lines purely for visual impact - contrivances difficult to represent on a standard typewriter. This poet in question has been on a drinking binge for two or three days prior to a reading engagement at a University. When he gets on stage he vomits into an adjacent grand piano:

> I can unders
> tand why th
> ey never invi
> ted him bac
> k. but to pas
> s the word o
> n to other un
> iversities tha
> t he was a
> poet who lik
> ed to vomit i
> nto grand pi
> anos was un
> fair.
>
> they never c
> onsidered th
> e quality of
> his reading.
> I know this
> poet he's ju
> st like the re
> st of us: he'l
> l vomit anyw
> here for mon
> ey.
> 18

The piece is deliberately cynical, contemptuous of standards of decent behaviour, emphasizing that 'this poet' - presumably meant to be identified as not a million miles removed from Bukowski himself - has only mock-regret to offer at ruffling bourgeois feathers. There is also an implicit connection made between reading poetry and the painful experience of vomiting, a slice of cynicism that seems weary indeed. One may also detect a dig at those who will do anything (or 'vomit anywhere') for money, but that is of course exactly what the speaker himself is doing.

Writing in 1972, the poet and translator Michael Hamburger lamented 'the widening gap between poetry intended for

the inner ear and poetry mainly intended for public performance - and instant consumption'.[19] While Hamburger was not referring to any particular poet's work,or even to American poetry in general,the point he raises has some relevance to a consideration of the verse that Bukowski wrote during his decade or more as a public performer,in which many of his works do seem intended for instant accessibility and consumption. One can argue that,in general,many of the poems suffer by comparison with his earlier work; other readers may prefer the later works' more direct and less literary tenor. In some specific ways, the poetry of the 1970s shows a marked evolution even from Bukowski's verse practice of the mid-1960s,which still had occasional uses for alliteration,assonantal effects and internal rhyming. By the early 1970s,Bukowski had moved to an even more marked narrative direction,had stripped and simplified his language still further,caused his work to make more explicit autobiographical gestures,and showed a greater reliance on comic techniques - authorial jokes, asides and punchlines. Such elements push the poem further away from silent reading,though not entirely - Bukowski sells many more books of his poems than tapes,cassettes or records. Each phase of Bukowski's writing career has entailed a relatively low rate of truly achieved work;perhaps one poem in three or four 'comes off'. But the impact of his readings has probably been to decrease the percentage still further.

Having said that,there are certainly a number of outstanding Bukowski poems from the 1970s which are perfectly structured for performance,and yet repay re-reading and careful study. 'Waxjob','Eddie and Eve' and 'Palm Leaves' are examples of this. 'The Catch',which was anthologized in

Geoffrey Moore's <u>The Penguin Book of American Verse</u> (1979), is another felicitous instance. Bukowski's ability to maintain narrative playfulness, investing a simple-seeming story with a weight of symbolic meaning, has seldom been better demonstrated. The work may also be a reflection on Bukowski's public persona and role as a performer.

The story opens with a strange catch by one of a group of fishermen operating from a pier. They and the narrator, who is probably a passing spectator - again there by accident - come up with three exotically plausible attempts at naming the creature. None of these is substantiated, but one of them (a 'Billow-Wind-Sand-Groper') conveys an odd innuendo. Having thus far hinted that this is no quotidian tale, the narrative takes a lurch into fabulatory realms.

> we took the hook out and the thing stood up and
> farted. it was grey and covered with hair
> and fat and it stank like old socks.
>
> it began to walk down the pier and we followed it.
> it ate a hot dog and bun right out of the hands of
> a little girl. then it leaped on the merry-go-round
> and rode a pinto. it fell off near the end and
> rolled in the sawdust.
> 20

The audience that has been watching the creature's anarchic antics are fascinated though sceptical ('it's a publicity stunt.../it's a man in a rubber suit'). The creature then starts to show signs of distress, and dies, despite a cup of beer being poured thoughtfully over its head. The fishermen and the narrator roll the creature back into its element, and it disappears as quickly and enigmatically as it had arrived. The question of a name for the strange creature is gone through exactly as before, and is again unresolved and unresolvable.

it was a Hollow-Back June Whale,I said.

no,said the other guy,it was a Billow-Wind-Sand-Groper.

no,said the other expert,it was a Fandango Escadrille without stripes.

then we all went our way on a mid-afternoon in August.

The narrative follows a cyclical pattern,suggesting an eternal cycle of events removed from History,a fictional world that operates without specific landmarks of geography or contemporary detail. The mid-afternoon in August lasts forever in the realm of fiction and myth. More exactly, this Tall Tale can be read as a bleakly comic fable of the feeling of not being 'at home' in the world,and as a commentary on the artist and the public. As described,the creature has a certain resemblance to Bukowski's exuberant, vulgar public self,associations perhaps strengthened by its ride on the merry-go-round (of life? of the poetry circuit?) and the cup of beer. But to push the arguable personal content of the poem too far would be to heavy-handedly state what the poem itself enacts with such a deft comic touch,a narrative moreover with hardly a jarring or surplus word. Its fascination may have something to do with its reiterative structure,which,while noticeable,is never in danger of provoking boredom. This reiteration extends not just to the opening and close of the work,but also to phrases such as 'grop,it said,grop....grop,it went,grop', and repetitions within the paragraphic stanzas. The word 'it' recurs no less than twenty-one times,and five times in the sixth stanza. The words 'it's','its',and 'we' are also frequently used. Such recurrent elements impose a patterning for the listening ear,though not a regular or predictable one,and add a sense of 'poemness' to the simplicity of the narrative.

In an essay written in 1973, and thus at approximately the same date as 'The Catch', Bukowski claimed that 'his contribution' had been to 'loosen and simplify poetry, to make it more humane. I made it easy for them to follow. I taught them...that a poem can even be entertaining, and that there need not be anything necessarily holy about it'. 'The Catch' is a vindication of the Bukowskian performance aesthetic, combining accessibility with some depth of meaning. Even if one were reading or hearing the poem for the first time, its easy to follow procedures and entertainment value would immediately be apparent. It also allows the imagination to construct a memorable reading off the page, whether or not one has actually heard the author read it live, or on a record. Despite the work's simplicity and brevity, or perhaps because of these attributes, it leaves a lasting impression that something significant has been enacted within it.[21]

'The Catch' may possibly bear a distant kinship to William Carlos Williams' poem 'The Sea Elephant', whose circus performing subject has some pathos, 'troubled eyes - torn/from the sea', whilst doing his tricks. Other readers may bring to mind the Robert Graves poem, 'Welsh Incident', in which a mysterious creature is comically discussed. Still more readers who know their way around contemporary verse may think of the famous Robert Frost poem, 'Neither Out Far Nor In Deep', another poem in which humanity stares from a shoreline into the sea, and the essential loneliness of human affairs is suggested. The fishermen of 'The Catch' are alone with their thoughts until the creature's arrival momentarily propels them into communal action; its departure sends them on their separate ways once again. Frost's sea-watchers wait forever for something to happen,

unsure of what it might be. Of course, Frost's poem is formally much more regular, employing a neat pattern of rhymes, and does not aim at the funny-bone in the same way that Bukowski's more anarchistic work does.[22]

This is not to suggest that Bukowski has read, or been consciously influenced by any of the three aforementioned poems - though he is more well-read than he likes to admit - but it does show that Bukowski's seemingly 'unliterary' works set off cultural echoes in their readers. As previously stated, Bukowski almost always addresses his work towards literate audiences, who can appreciate the stimulating difference from most literature they have read, and will 'get' the irreverent cultural references to artists and their creations. The 'Man in the Street', if Bukowski's poems were drawn to the attention of this hypothetical figure, would hardly think they were 'poetry' at all - his poems don't rhyme, seldom employ regular rhythms, don't use capital letters to begin each line of verse, etc. Though Bukowski has stressed his artistic purposes of simplicity and accessibility, so that his work - like Hemingway, or even e.e. cummings and W.C.Williams - could certainly be read and understood by those without higher level education, it is undoubtedly the case that the vast majority of its readers will have some educational connection with the study of literature. Bukowski is a writer who appeals very much to students, and other literate young people who like to be able to identify with a seemingly rebellious figure. During the 1970s student protests in West Germany, an educational establishment was occupied by student activists and re-named 'Bukowski University' for a few days.[23] The sort of cultural allusiveness that Bukowski goes in for is not completely unlike that in the work of an Eliot or a

Pound;though their work is of course massively more erudite than his,and often seems to make intimidating demands upon readers;there is a kind of unselfconscious or liberating mixing of cultures and arts and snatches of anecdotal material,which appears analagous. But Bukowski operates at a much lower intellectual level than the two Modernist titans,and does not set out his work in the same elitist, and culturally programmatic terms that they habitually do. But the ideal reader of Bukowski's texts is much more likely to be a poetry enthusiast than a 'Man in the Street'. Bukowski's main appeal to unsophisticated tastes,as will be discussed in conclusion,is through his Hollywood connections and filmic interpreters.

During the period in which he gave public readings, probably the single most memorable event was held in Hamburg in 1978,during a private visit by the author to West Germany and France which also advanced his reputation in Europe considerably. The Hamburg reading was apparently suggested by Christoph Derschau,a young German writer and Bukowskian enthusiast who was also known to Carl Weissner. The attraction of seeing Charles Bukowski in Der Markthalle brought an audience of over 1,200 people to 'an old scruffy concert hall,the centre of the alternative scene in Hamburg',as Weissner recalled. Günter Grass had read a few months earlier at the same venue to around three hundred paying customers. Again according to Weissner,who hosted his long-time friend and correspondent during the German half of Bukowski's trip,the crowd that turned up to see the poet in the land of his birth were mostly 'young people, the kind...you would see at a Joe Cocker concert....And there were the usual hecklers,some vociferous women's libbers among them,Hank [Bukowski] trading insults with

them in perfectly good humor'.[24]

Such was Bukowski's fame in the Federal Republic that he had encountered some of the nuisances of celebrity when arriving at the hall for a run-through of the sound equipment on the day of the event - reporters and photographers were there to greet him, and a television station in Austria succeeded in extracting an off-the-cuff interview. The reading itself seems to have had much of the excitement and atmosphere of a rock concert, a situation that the author and reluctant performer was now experienced enough to be able to handle with practised confidence. Bukowski's account of the immediate preliminaries to the event is worth quoting at length, following as it does the public performer's necessary psychological build-up from extreme nervousness to a heightened sense of ease.

> The crowd was massive, animal-like, waiting. The drink helped. Even holding the drink helped. I stood there and finished it off. Then we pushed down between bodies trying to reach the stage....Sometimes I was recognised and a hand would reach out toward me and the hand would be holding a bottle. I took a drink from each bottle as I pushed forward. As I got closer to the stage the crowd began to recognize me. 'Bukowski! Bukowski!' I was beginning to believe that I was Bukowski. I had to do it. As I hit the wood I felt something run through me. My fear left. I sat down, reached into the cooler and uncorked a bottle of that good German wine. I lit a bidi. [Indian cigarette] I tasted the wine, pulled my poems and books out of the satchel. I was calm at last. I had done it 80 times before. I was all right. I found the mike. 'Hello', I said, 'it's good to be back'. It had taken me 54 years.
> 25

This is a skilfully tailored recreation of the author's thoughts and feelings, but it does give an interesting view of the way in which a writer, most at home in the private world of writing, becomes his stage self; Dr Jekyll, as it were, becomes Mr Hyde. The author begins 'to believe that I was Bukowski', an almost larger-than-life, iconoclastic

figure.

Later on in the book from which this account of the event is taken, Shakespeare Never Did This (1979), Bukowski comments on his perception of the cultural differences between German and American audiences. In the States, 'especially in the night clubs where I competed against rock groups', the listeners wanted 'poems that made them laugh'. In Hamburg, 'when I read them a serious poem they applauded strongly....again the German crowd was different: they had my books. In the night clubs most of them brought in paper napkins to be signed'.[26] This presumably indicates that the night club frequenters saw him more as a performer than as a literary figure, and that they were definitely more interested in a writer's celebrity value than in his works. It has remained the case that Bukowski's repute as a serious writer is higher in certain European countries (West Germany and France in particular, though not Britain) than it is in the United States.

The potential dangers to Bukowski's health, and the arguable effect on his verse practice, were probable factors in his decision to give up public readings in the early 1980s. But, as previously indicated, it may well have been simply that readings had turned into a chore, a job of work, which he was now financially secure enough to be able to turn down. He was never enamoured of such events, and has seldom been seen at readings by other writers. Nor was he interested in becoming yet another Californian celebrity, a creature subject to the whims of the mass media.

Bukowski was, however, surely one of the most compelling of poetic presences during the years in which he was personally available to the reading public. Many of the younger writers to whom Bukowski's literary example has

proved inspirational, will have been to one or more of his wonderful readings during the 1970s. Even those Californian talents to whom Bukowski's work has not been congenial are likely to have viewed his rise to a degree of fame and fortune with great interest, and envy, such is the nature of the American cult of celebrity. While Bukowski's influence is clearest amongst a group of younger writers mostly known personally to him, and each other, the ambit of his literary and career example is now considerable.

Over the past two decades, three anthologies have chosen from the numerous poets active within Southern California. Only five writers are represented in each of the anthologies, namely Charles Bukowski, Gerald Locklin, Ron Koertge, John Thomas and Robert Peters. Brief summaries of these publications would seem to be a convenient point of departure for a discussion of the area's writing environment since the early 1970s - its magazines, small presses, reading venues, and general opportunities for writers to publish and perform. The verse practice of writers particularly associated with Bukowski will be discussed, amplifying the present author's earlier published comments on this loose group of Los Angeles and Long Beach poets: Locklin, Koertge, Chris Daly, Nichola Manning, and Fred Voss.[27]

The Anthology of L.A. Poets (1972) was brought out by Paul Vangelisti's Red Hill Press, a small enterprise based in Fairfax, California. Introductory comments by Bukowski (one of the co-editors, with Neeli Cherry and Vangelisti himself) depicted the kind of verse being written in the Los Angeles area as informal and anti-academic, and against ideas that poetry should be 'an in-game, a snob game, a game of puzzles and incantations'. A group photograph of the

talents represented therein included Jack Hirschman, Gerda Penfold, Holly Prado, Charles Stetler, Linda King (also a sculptor), Steve Richmond, Neeli Cherry, Paul Vangelisti, John Thomas, Robert Peters, Gerald Locklin, Ron Koertge, and Bukowski.[28]

Edited by the New York poet Edward Field in 1979, A Geography of Poets was predicated on a regional approach to American verse, the subsections being geographical rather than stylistic or thematic. In the Southern California section, as well as the five constant names mentioned, were Elliot Fried, Nila NorthSun, Gary Soto, Kirk Robertson, and Charles Stetler. In his lengthy survey of national trends, Field singled out the lively poetry scene around Long Beach and some of its poets: 'Charles Stetler, Ron Koertge, and Gerald Locklin are writing poems that are direct, funny, and often filthy. Their vernacular style, sassy and jaded, is at the opposite pole from the issue-orientated, righteous poetry of the Bay area to the north'.[29]

Bill Mohr's lavish 1985 publication Poetry Loves Poetry: An Anthology of Los Angeles Poets has room for photographs and details of its sixty-two contributors, and 389 poems. Mohr characterizes the diverse nature of these by writing that many of these Angelenos 'have evolved an idiosyncratic blend of poetics which incorporates everything from O'Hara's "Personism" to Olson's "Projective Verse"'.[30] The work's attempted representativeness draws together black poets such as Wanda Coleman and Michelle T. Clinton, and feminists Kate Braverman, Amy Gerstler, Holly Prado and Suzanne Lummis. There are no such categories or subsections within the book but one can detect a desire to represent various types of writerly and social identities. Gay poets are conspicuous. Amongst those whose work seems most fully achieved are

Dennis Cooper (who edited the important magazine Little Caesar from 1977 to 1983), David Trinidad, and Robert Peters whose one-man performances of his dramatic poems 'Ludwig of Bavaria' and 'The Blood Countess' have been seen all over the United States. There are a number of writers in the anthology who escape straightforward categories, and who are noteworthy voices: Austin Strass, Bob Flanagan, Jack Grapes, Nichola Manning, Eloise Klein Healy, Lewis MacAdams, Leland Hickman (who edited the magazines Bachy and Temblor), and Terryl Hunter. For reasons known to the editor, certain well-established local poets were not included, such as Bob Austin, Charles Stetler, Elliot Fried, Clifton Snider and Darrell Vienna. Other talents currently making a considerable impression on audiences in Southern California and elsewhere are Fred Voss, Tyrrell Estes, Murray McNeill 3, Ray Zepeda and, perhaps most spectacularly, 'La Loca'.

Reading venues in Los Angeles and its environs abound. At least twelve colleges regularly host live events featuring mainly local poetic personnel, as do libraries, recordstores, and bookstores such as 'Chelsea', 'Chatterton's', 'Papa Bach' and 'George Sand'. Other outlets in and around the city include, currently (1989), The Poecentric Lounge, 'Gasoline Alley', The Sculpture Gardens, 'Bebop Records and Fine Arts', The Midnight Special Bookstore, and the Los Angeles Theater Center. The Beyond Baroque Foundation has run regular reading series since 1973 under the direction of poets James Krusoe, Dennis Cooper, and Amy Gerstler. Since 1987, The Moment, edited by Eric Lyden and Kevin Bartnof, has provided a guide to local readings in bars, restaurants, coffeehouses, theatres and cultural centres. Publicity to such events is also given by a bi-weekly radio programme hosted by Austin Strauss and Wanda Coleman on KPFK-FM,

entitled 'The Poetry Connexion'.[31]

A recent report in The Los Angeles Times drew attention to local performance poets. Headlined 'Spoken, Sung or Danced, Poetry Makes a Comeback', the article by journalist Roselle M. Lewis commented that certain practitioners of the poetic art have taken to enhancing the spoken word with 'music, costumes, props or special effects'. She went on to illustrate the contention that the term 'poetry' was being stretched by reference to a reading at 'Bebop Records and Fine Arts', a venue in the San Fernando Valley. The event had been preceded by 'throbbing rock music', and presented 'six young women dressed in fringed leather jackets, theatrical hats and bearing unusual props. Robyn Ryan played "drums" on empty five-gallon water bottles and huge oil cans, while Ellyn Pinsker clutched a wooden dog ("my personality puppet") to underscore points in her ironic poem "Fido"'. The report came to the conclusion that 'poetry readings have come into their own as popular entertainment'.[32] Such a fertilization, or colonization, of poetry by theatrical elements common to the Entertainment Industry should not be a surprising development. The pervasiveness of the products of record companies, film studios, radio and television stations in California, as elsewhere, is perhaps inescapable. Moreover, the career details of those in Poetry Loves Poetry reveals that a large number of them earn their living in employment with just such companies.

The writing talent in Southern California has always been served by a plethora of little magazines. In the mid-1970s, the 'diffuse and discontinuous' writing scene produced two outstanding magazines at least: Dennis Cooper's Little Caesar, and Paul Vangelisti's Invisible City, the latter publishing American poets alongside those from Europe, Africa and Latin America, in translation.[33]

Other notable publications of the 1970s and early 1980s have included Michael C.Ford's Sunset Palms Motel,which ran from 1974 to 1977,Helen Friedland's Poetry LA; Chrysalis and Aleida Rodriguez's Rara Avis opened up spaces for feminist writing. Eliot Weinberger's Montemora and the current Sulphur (edited by Clayton Eshleman) have favoured Black Mountain and Berkeley Renaissance poetics. Magazines which are presently hospitable to many Long Beach and Los Angeles writers sometimes have a neat,but cheaply-produced format, and a distinctly un-literary flavour; one can single out the especially lively and worthwhile Pinchpenny,edited by Tom Miner from Sacramento,California,; Marvin Malone's long-running Wormwood Review (Stockton,California),and Jay Dougherty's Clock Radio.

The area's small presses show similar variations in literary taste and production values. Most produce inexpensive chapbooks,while others,most notably Black Sparrow Press specialize in fine printing and small,relatively expensive editions. Black Sparrow has risen from its origins in the chance meeting of Bukowski and publisher John Martin to its current wide range of books by American avant-garde authors,as well as reprints of works by neglected talents (John Fante,John Sanford,Paul Bowles,Charles Reznikoff) and major Modernists - Gertrude Stein and Wyndham Lewis - in handsome new editions. The press remains Bukowski's principal publisher and is likely to continue as such. The loyalty that Bukowski showed to those editors who championed his work,Jon Edgar Webb and Marvin Malone, is a marked characteristic that has also applied to his dealings with John Martin. In the first two instances,Bukowski earned little or no money from his involvements with their publishing projects; in the third case,the fortunes of both

writer and publisher have been made, and their professional relationship sustained. In a 1988 statement to Jay Dougherty which seems to settle his publishing intentions, Bukowski reflected on the good fortune of finding a congenial and successful publishing enterprise that still remains very much a small press:

> Black Sparrow Press has a limited circulation and this tends to hold down being known widely in the U.S. Yet they have published book after book of mine throughout the years, and most of the books are still in print and available. Black Sparrow and I almost began together and it is my hope that we will end together....If I had gone to a large New York publisher, I might have larger U.S. sales...but I doubt that I would continue writing in a workmanlike and joyful fashion. Also, I doubt that I would have the same uncensored acceptability that I have at Black Sparrow. As a writer I consider myself in the best of worlds: famous elsewhere and working here. The gods have spared me many of the pitfalls of the average American writer. Black Sparrow came to me when nobody else would....It would be ungrateful of me to seek a large New York publisher now. In fact, I don't have the slightest desire to do so.[34]

During the 1970s, other local publishing outlets were John Kay's Mag Press, Bob Austin's True Gripp Press, and Paul Vangelisti's Red Hill Press. Current writing from the Los Angeles and Long Beach area is being served and promoted by the activities of D.H.Lloyd's Applezaba Press and P.Schneidre's Illuminati, while other small-scale publishers vital to the same constituency are distributed throughout California and other States: Roy Shabla's Artaban Press (Downey, California), Kirk Robertson's Duck Down Press (Fallon, Nevada), Leo Mailman's Maelstrom Press (Cape Elizabeth, Maine), and Bill Mohr's Momentum Press (published from Santa Monica, California).

The writing scene has therefore been formulated by social and literary factors: the fertilization from successive waves of immigrants, the local tradition of small press

and little magazine activity, and an essential infrastructure of venues for readings. The enthusiasm and committment of individuals concerned has been channelled by the money that writers and publishers have been able to solicit from sponsors and funding bodies, both public and private sector. Tax laws in the United States allow the writing-off of a proportion of contributions to the Arts for both corporations and individual patrons. Bill Mohr's anthology, for example, was largely paid for by the Atlantic Richfield Foundation. In addition, the role of the National Endowment for the Arts in funding terms has been important, providing well over a quarter of a million dollars in assistance to poets in the Los Angeles area over the past fifteen years. As Mohr stated, this amount includes grants to the Beyond Baroque Foundation, to many of the small presses and magazines, and individual writing fellowships.[35]

The collective energy and enterprise of the Southern California writing scene is formidable, though the ubiquity of performance opportunities, venues and pressures may well have stereotyped the development of some celebrity-driven poets, causing them to produce work of easy acceptability to audiences, pandering to instant consumption and scurrilous effects. An over-concern for accessibility runs the risk of banality, and certainly a good deal of what one reads in anthologies and small press publications seems slapdash, unoriginal and even puerile. But there are refreshing and engaging talents to be heard above the Californian psychobabble, including a number who fully embrace performance modes yet make their words count on the page.

A group of Los Angeles and Long Beach writers who inhabit the latter category have had a particular engagement with Bukowski's literary example, but also have their own

specialities of tone and subject matter to offer the reader or hearer. Gerald Locklin is a skilled audience-worker, who has been known to introduce comical song-and-dance routines into his well-received readings. By all accounts, Ron Koertge and Nichola Manning have given numerous scandalously funny readings. Fred Voss is now a regular participant on the Southern California circuit of bookshops, colleges, and cultural centres, though Chris Daly appears not to read in public very frequently. They inhabit a fifteen-year age range, from Koertge (born in 1940) to Manning, (born in London in 1955), and are mostly known to each other personally. Attempting to discern general characteristics which their diverse works exhibit, one can point out their favouring of narrative over lyric modes, the demotic rather than rhetorical and flamboyant language. There is often a comic collision between streetwise narrators and cultural references, jokey misogyny and heterosexual pratfalls.
As with Bukowski, culture is tossed among the beercans; the signs and surfaces of urban, bluecollar America flourish throughout poems set in bars, at racetracks, blue-movie houses, in factories, on the racially-mixed mean streets. There is a strong streak of what one might call a Surreal vision of the everyday, very marked in the zany humour of Nichola Manning's poems where a celebration of reality-as-it-is-not begins at line one. Fred Voss, a young, still developing talent, takes satirical views of the excesses of the Post Hippy drug subculture, and of the Californian Defence Industry, sometimes combining these subjects with an astute commentary on working-class masculinity.

Ron Koertge, who has been actively writing and encouraging other talents since at least the late 1960s, often turns his back on the cityscape to indulge in flights of fancy

derived from comic strips, television or film characters. The preoccupations of Koertge's narrators, usually sex and horseracing, are facetiously intruded upon by popular culture. In 'Happy Ending', for example, this time King Kong 'gets hip to the biplanes' and he and Fay Wray are then tracked down by 'a scandal mag', finding the odd couple living 'in seclusion at a resort somewhere near/Phoenix'.

> Long lens telephoto shots show them sunning
> by a pool. There are close-ups of Fay straddling
> the monster's tongue and standing in his ear
> whispering something Kong likes. Look, his grin is as
> big as
> a hundred Steinways.
> 36

Other popular figures receive a similarly debunking treatment, as in 'End of Reel I', where Superman is worried about his health and is persuaded that he needs 'a simple suppository'; the poem 'Tonto' jocularly re-works that television character's relationship with The Lone Ranger.

Both Koertge and Locklin occasionally aim for more traditionally lyrical effects, and have written many poems which defy the general characteristics previously outlined. For instance, Gerald Locklin's 'Low Tide Floodtime: Winter 1969' is a lovely descriptive meditation on American freedoms and the Californian landscape, delivered in a casual though dignified manner:

> I had forgotten california could be beautiful.
> I'm glad you're not here with me love; stay
> home and sulk. I'm glad my kids aren't here.
> I'm glad no young girl strikes up a conversation.
>
> is this what we came to california for?
> chromatics of a catalina sunburst?
> bomb-burst? eye-burst? oil lights upon
> the bruised waters? a sound that laves?
>
> this, and the midriffs of young girls, and to be
> where it was happening. It happened
> tonight it is too cold for mermaids and

matrons. the sea is post-coital, blue.

the city lies a-light and preternatural.
from here, neither sailors nor stormtroopers.
only the lights of pensioners' chateaux,
the cyclone racer, battleships at rest.

the texture of wet sand is like the gooseflesh
of the surfers, hauling their boards along the long
beach. the red horse of the horizon ramps
to the burst of the black crust.

we are silhouettes upon the silhouetted
sandwall. the waves are
shadows on the wind, the eucalyptus on
the island, rock upon the sun,

the day within the darkness. we stand
with hands in pockets; one-by-one we go
away. we did not come here to commune.
we came I think, for a last look. [37]

The employment of an engagingly active author/narrator is common to all these writers, and Locklin brings off this narrative tactic especially well in his often uproarious 'Toad' series of poems, and in those where he accompanies 'The Blue Nun' - a character who springs from a wine label to conduct a tour around the sights, mores, and youth culture of California. The subjects of Locklin's poetic output range over the pains and pleasures of parenthood, lapsed Catholicism, the American landscape, skirmishes in the War Between Men and Women, and the teaching of literature. In 'The Death of Jean-Paul Sartre', Locklin's authorial playfulness allows a joking confession that

in college and graduate school, you see,
i basically got by with one term paper.
it was entitled: 'the existentialism of...'
you fill in the blank.
'the existentialism of sartre or camus or tennyson or
byron or kit smart or milton (yes, milton) or
chaucer (his retraction posed a problem), or beowulf
or caedmon or the venerable fucking bede'. [38]

Locklin's work also draws upon a gamut of comic devices. An entire poem may consist of a one or two-line gag, as in

'I've Had My Ups and Downs With Women', which reads: 'usually i knock them up/and they knock me down'. The mild hilarity of 'The Further Adventures of Shane' occurs by virtue of a ludicrous transfer of the Western hero - played in the classic movie by Gary Cooper - to the contemporary milieu, where he settles down and adapts his style:

> When Black Jack Slade once happened through the town
> and issued a series of obnoxious threats,
> Shane picked up the phone and calmly dialed the Highway Patrol
> who had that doughty badman behind bars in nothing flat.[39]

The widely-acknowledged importance of Locklin's contribution to small press activities, and the development of numerous writing talents, in California and elsewhere has recently begun to be rewarded by publishing breakthroughs for his work in West Germany. Charles Bukowski has written introductions to German editions of his poems and stories, a compliment that Bukowski has extended to few others, and given the younger writer equally unusual praise: 'I like his stuff. He swings from the heels, pukes from the bathroom he's open and he calls the shots. He's also funny and he tells the truth'.[40]

Locklin's personal and literary relationship with Bukowski has probably been closer than any other writer in the group being discussed. He informed the present author, in a letter written on 9 February 1985, 'there's no question that I learned a great deal from him, and that others have ....Probably the most important thing I learned from Bukowski was that poetry could be about anything. Could be a story, joke, laundry list, letter-to-the-editor'.[41] There are some significant differences between the two writers as well; Locklin's work covers a wider range of subjects, and

addresses these in a much more avuncular,less alienated and manic-depressive authorial voice than Bukowski is wont to adopt. Locklin's poems and stories are less emotionally raw,more distanced by irony and middle-class perspectives than are those of his mentor. Both writers,however,will require a lot of shelf space for their collected works,and leave themselves open to charges that they have written too much - observations which,at this mature stage in their respective careers,will hardly concern them. Gerald Locklin has been a keen observer of Bukowski's writing,and has sometimes commented upon it in terms that seem analogous to his own practices. For instance,one can take Locklin's view that Bukowski has been 'freed up' by a refusal to operate in an editorial or critical capacity :

> He feels it is his job to write,and leaves the selection and evaluation to others. Thus,he is free to write a lot. The unevenness of his published work leaves Bukowski vulnerable to the critic with an axe to grind,who may select exclusively from the second-rate or from what he needs to prove his thesis. But such critics are easily refuted by anyone who has read along with Bukowski over the years.[42]

This would be not an unsuitable summary of Locklin's work, which is always highly readable even when it is being self-indulgent. As with Bukowski,when one reads a poem written by a top-form Locklin there is a splendid possibility of finding both _gravitas_ and _hilaritas_ at work within it, Existential profundities as well as entertainment.

Another writer that Bukowski might feel affinities with is Chris Daly,whose fictional world is that of low-life Los Angeles,seen from the fascinated but detached viewpoint of a taxi-driver. His narrators report to the reader on the activities of prostitutes and the poor,drug dealers and enlivening characters encountered during an otherwise

humdrum occupation, as in 'A Little Typewriting':

> black girls are always
> taking cabs from one house
> to another in the middle of the night.
>
> seldom the white
> ones except the old
> and occasionally the fat and the
> ugly and there's a bar at one
> if not both ends of the trip. mex
>
> ican girls i took
> only once and they had
> 4 to 7 children between
> three of them and they had me
> stop on the way for a few minutes
> of duking in the street with that bitch
> bubbles who fucked
> oscar. no pachucos were at
> either end. orientals are
> rare; once i sped an aging
> masseuse from one parlor to another.
> all european girls have at least 4 men with them
> and are going to places with no beds.
>
> but black girls!
> they even go to ships.
> they know the berth numbers better
> than i do. they speak I9 languages.
> they know about candy bars and about scotch.
>
> took one across town to
> willie lowman's. he opened the door
> and said, 'shit, the guy you're looking for
> moved down the hall'. 'git out the way',
> she said. 'don't change that', he said,
> 'i was watching something'. then as the channels
> clicked he turned to pay.[43]

Such an offhand narrative immediately suggests certain Bukowskian connections; it offers the vicarious pleasure of glimpsing an urban underclass of whores, pimps, their customers, and unusually exotic characters abroad at a time when middle-class Americans are safely sleeping. The stated locales - bars, massage parlours, cheap apartments and hotels - are those that Bukowski has made his own, allowing the male reader to gain a heady scent of drink and sex in a way intrinsically appealing to masculine tastes, not to mention fantasies.

The poem's language also suggests some indebtedness to

Bukowski's praxis, in its structural simplicity, interpolations of slang ('duking', 'pachucos'), swearing ('shit') and idiomatic expressions ('git out the way'). One can also note the oddity of encountering 'willie lowman', the main character in Arthur Miller's play Death of a Salesman, within Daly's story, transformed into a slightly embarrassed whoremonger. All of this group of writers casually slip literary references into their vernacularly-informed poetics. Daly's work - like that of Douglas Goodwin, yet another interesting young writer influenced by Bukowski, who has been a past resident in the Los Angeles area - is more substantial than a brief discussion of its derivations might suggest. Chris Daly's first chapbook was published in 1986, and his poems have appeared in a wide spread of little magazines including The Wormwood Review.

Bukowski's effect on these writers has not simply been a stylistic and ideational one, but has also inhered in the example he has given them; that a small press poet can eventually gain a measure of recognition and material reward, and achieve a long march to success on his own terms. Many other writers in Southern California, whether their attitude is pro or contra Bukowski's literature, have similarly been impressed. Some will want to escape Bukowski's huge shadow, while others will not be able to. Locally at least, his manner is highly influential now. Despite its undoubted limitations, the vitality of the writing scene ensures that Los Angeles is known for more than its Detective Fiction, film and television studios.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

I. Kenneth Rexroth, American Poetry in the Twentieth Century, (New York,1973),pp.137-138.

2. Allen Ginsberg, Composed on the Tongue,p.86.

3. Lawrence Ferlinghetti,interview with Gavin Selerie, The Riverside Interviews,2, (London,1980),pp.7-8.

4. Richard Eberhart article,reprinted in Allen Ginsberg, Howl,Original Draft Facsimile,pp.154-155.

5. Tony Quagliano,'The Ground in Los Angeles',Schist,4/5, (1976) 37-42,(p.37).

6. Bill Mohr,'Self Portraits in Los Angeles', Poetry Loves Poetry: An Anthology of Los Angeles Poets, (Santa Monica,1985),p.ii.

7. An Anthology of L.A.Poets,edited by Charles Bukowski, Neeli Cherry,Paul Vangelisti, (Fairfax,California,1972),n.p.

8. Charles Bukowski,letter to Charles Potts,dated 16 April 1968,reprinted in Poems Written Before Jumping Out of an 8 Story Window,n.p.
Charles Bukowski,letter to Carl Weissner,reprinted in Dougherty/Bukowski interview,Gargoyle,35,p.101.

9. Guy Williams,letter to Lafayette Young,reprinted in Second Coming,2,no.3,(1974),n.p.

10. Karl Shapiro,interview with Ralph J.Mills Jr and Michael Anania,in Triquarterly,43,(Fall 1978),p.210.

11. Wennersten/Bukowski interview,London Magazine,14,no.5, (December 1974) 35-54.

12. Gerald Locklin,'Two Poets',in Second Coming,2,no.3,n.p.

13. Esterly,Rolling Stone,215,p.10.

14. Andrews/Bukowski interview,Easy Reader,p.9.

15. Stephen Kessler,'Notes on a Dirty Old Man',in The Review of Contemporary Fiction,V,no.3, (Bukowski/Butor Number),(Fall 1985) 60-63,(p.60).

16. Charles Bukowski,'Notes of a Dirty Old Man',in Sherman,Friendship,Fame and Bestial Myth, 35-38,(p.37).

17. 'Poetry Reading',Mockingbird Wish Me Luck,pp.31-32. 'On and Off the Road','The Hustle',War All the Time,pp.73-74,pp.259-260.

18. 'This Poet', Love is a Dog From Hell,pp.79-80.

19. Michael Hamburger, The Truth of Poetry,p.344.

20. 'The Catch', Burning in Water...pp.185-186.

21. Charles Bukowski, 'He Beats His Women', Second Coming, 2, no.3, (1974), n.p.

22. William Carlos Williams, 'The Sea Elephant', Selected Poems, edited by Charles Tomlinson, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1976), pp.73-75.
Robert Frost, 'Neither Out Far Nor in Deep', Selected Poems, edited by Ian Hamilton, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1976), pp.178-179.

23. Joe Wolberg, 'Bukowski: The People's Poet', Oui, (c.1981), p.119.

24. Dougherty/Weissner interview, Gargoyle, 35, p.81.

25. Charles Bukowski, Shakespeare Never Did This, (San Francisco, 1979), Section 16, n.p.

26. Shakespeare Never Did This, Section 16, n.p.

27. Julian Smith, 'Introducing Six Poets from Los Angeles and Long Beach', Bête-Noire, 4, (Winter, 1987) 122-125.

28. Charles Bukowski, introduction, Anthology of L.A. Poets, n.p.

29. Edward Field, Introduction, A Geography of Poets, edited by Edward Field, (New York, 1979), xxix-xlvi, (p.xxxix).

30. Bill Mohr, 'Self Portraits in Los Angeles', Poetry Loves Poetry: An Anthology of Los Angeles Poets, (Santa Monica, California, 1985), p.v.

31. Much of the information about magazines, small presses and reading venues in the Los Angeles area is taken from Bill Mohr's essay in Poetry Loves Poetry, and an article in The Los Angeles Times detailed in footnote 32.

32. Roselle M. Lewis, 'Poetry Makes a Comeback', The Los Angeles Times (1 April 1989)
A copy of the article was kindly sent to me by the poet 'La Loca' (Pamala Karol) of Hollywood, California.

33. Tony Quagliano, Schist, 4/5, (pp.39-40).

34. Dougherty/Bukowski interview, Gargoyle, 35, pp.93-94.

35. Bill Mohr, Poetry Loves Poetry, p.xii.

36. Ron Koertge, 'Happy Ending', 'End of Reel 1', reprinted in Poetry Loves Poetry, nos. 24, 23.
'Tonto' reprinted in A Geography of Poets, pp.127-129.

37. Gerald Locklin, 'Low Tide Floodtime: Winter 1969', Poetry Loves Poetry, no.37.

38. Gerald Locklin, 'The Death of Jean-Paul Sartre', The Death of Jean-Paul Sartre and Other Poems, (Madison, Wisconsin, 1987), pp.9-11.

39. Gerald Locklin,'I've Had My Ups and Downs With Women', Children of a Lesser Demagogue,issued as The Wormwood Review, 106-107,(1987),p.46.
'The Further Adventures of Shane',reprinted in Bête-Noire, 4,(Winter 1987),pp.135-136.

40. Charles Bukowski comment re Locklin reprinted on the back page of Gerald Locklin, The Death of Jean-Paul Sartre and Other Poems.

41. Gerald Locklin,letter to the present author,dated 9 February 1985. The correspondence,chapbooks,literary materials etc generously given to the present author have been indispensible to the writing of the sixth chapter,and highly useful to the scope of the study as a whole. The contacts which I have also enjoyed with a number of West Coast writers have largely come through Gerald Locklin's agency,and I gratefully acknowledge the stimulation of his interest in my work.

42. Gerald Locklin,'Setting Free the Buk',Review of Contemporary Fiction (Bukowski/Butor Number),27-31,(p.29).

43. Chris Daly,'A Little Typewriting',reprinted in Bête-Noire,4,(Winter 1987),pp.130-131.

CONCLUSION

In trying to identify reasons for the success of Bukowski's work, the particularity of its appeal, one can first point out its most obvious qualities: a marvellous readability and anti-depressant humour. Bukowski packs so much human interest into his poems, which are moreover often life-enhancingly funny to read, that he makes most other poets seem dull by comparison. The seemingly liberated aspects of his art have proved persuasive to an international readership; while his stories, novels, and recent film screenplay Barfly (1987) have brought a mass audience, his repute as a poet is now established.

One factor in the readerly response to his work is the element of masculine wish-fulfillment, the downmarket but tempting world of male interests - loose women, gambling, drink - and fantasies that is conjured up on his pages. An escape from everyday routines, bourgeois morality and the work ethic is suggested, a satirical critique of societal norms dramatized. The reader is invited to relax, to loaf and take his ease, to imagine what things might be like if he were to live by his wits, like a bum or an artist, and light out for the territory of a more vibrant life - especially with such a knowledgable narrator as a companion. It is a reasonable supposition that the majority of Bukowski's readers are male, and therefore highly susceptible to the blandishments of his narrators. It is no coincidence that almost all of the commentary on the Bukowski phenomenon has been written by men. But he should not be regarded simply as a writer of male escapist fantasy. Rather, Bukowski's is a promotional plea for the American

dream of a free life,a continuity of concerns with the most characteristic American literature. As has been argued,this concern for freedom aligns itself with Bukowski's practice as a writer,his subject matter,his reworking of American popular mythology,and with the avant-gardist's anti-bourgeois rhetoric.

His books have thus far been translated into at least fifteen languages. Among European countries,they are most popular in West Germany (where sales of over 2.5 million books had been attained by 1988),France,Italy,Spain,and Greece. He is also a well-known author in Latin America; during 1983-1984 'three Bukowski titles appeared on the best-seller list in Brazil,two of them simultaneously'. No such high name-recognition in Britain; despite many favourable reviews within the small press scene,and latterly in quality newspapers and periodicals,sales of his works have not been high. The 1980 reissue of the novel Post Office sold less than one thousand hardback copies. Though several of Bukowski's novels are available in cheap paperback editions,his British admirers have generally preferred to acquire the Black Sparrow titles,which are only obtainable in specialist bookshops and by mail order from bookdealers. In the United States itself,though his standing with literary critics remains equivocal,some of his novels (Post Office and Women) have sold over one hundred thousand copies each. A number of his verse collections are into their twentieth printings. There is a ready market for the almost annual Black Sparrow volume by the author,with the signed,limited hardback First Edition usually being over-subscribed.[1]

This pattern is partly due to Bukowski's thirty-year ascent to prominence in the United States,but a much faster

rise in Europe - the latter fact perhaps attributable to the renown of his French admirers (Jean-Paul Sartre,Jean Genet,Jean-Luc Godard) or,more likely,the acuity of translators and publishers,especially in West Germany. The first half of his career attracted a small press audience only,scant critical attention,and no prospect of earning a living with the typewriter. While this was a frustrating, financially difficult situation,it did mean that he was able to develop without conforming pressures from mainstream publishers,agents,the mass media,or simply the burden of expectations caused by reputations made too early. In the first period of his resumed career,Bukowski was eager for recognition yet also highly suspicious of the potential consequences. He wrote to Jon Edgar Webb in 1962,at a time when his readers could almost be counted in handfuls, rather mournfully reflecting on his prospects: 'But fame? I think it would taste like shit. Hem blew his face off, Faulkner conked out....But they'd made it,and I hang here by a thread,just starting and past 40'.[2]

By the fifth and sixth decades of his life,when Bukowski had achieved a measure of this despised fame,and the film industry had begun to cannibalise his writings, the Los Angeles writer continued to show the same endemic mistrust of celebrity and the dangers of over-exposure to the public. Pointedly,he gave up live readings,and has refused opportunities to hype his work on popular American television shows such as '60 Minutes' and 'The Johnny Carson Show'. He is no publicity-hound _à la_ Norman Mailer, Gore Vidal or Truman Capote. He has handled the entrapments of media attention - especially when _Barfly_ was being promoted - rather more comfortably than Hemingway and Faulkner,and certainly has avoided Jack Kerouac's self-

destructive embrace of fame.[3]

Bukowski's primary objectives remain his own writerly productivity and integrity, the freedom to write on his own terms. A mystique of No Compromise has always attached itself to him, a characteristic now working to his advantage. As Gerald Locklin has observed,

> Bukowski has no illusions about invitations to the White House. His books do not even appear among the finalists for the Los Angeles Times Book Prizes. Thus, with plenty of money and permanently alienated from the literary establishment, Bukowski has no reason to compromise what may be the greatest freedom enjoyed by any published writer in American literary history.[4]

Bukowski's insistence on liberty as a writer means several things. Firstly, freedom to pepper his texts with words and phrases that Gertrude Stein would have found horribly vulgar, inaccrochable, and to use raucously sexist terminology designed to be insulting to decent, civilized, liberal values. Bukowski seldom seems to mind offending sensibilities, and revels in being deliberately provocative. For example, the poem 'Independence Day' shows little inhibition in sending up even such a Sacred Cow as respect for maternal feelings, when a skid row couple begin to argue.

> 'I miss my children', said the
> whore, 'I wonder if I'll ever
> see Ronnie and Lila again?'
> 'will you stop that shit?'
> I asked. 'I heard that shit
> all last night long'.
> the whore began crying.
> I went to the bathroom and
> puked again,
> cracked a new can of ale and
> sat next to the whore
> in my bed.
> 'don't mourn, Lilly', I said,
> 'you give a great blowjob and
> that counts for something'.[5]

This passage manages to be highly offensive, even brutal, yet many of his readers will find it rather funny. One may laugh uncomfortably, against one's own best instincts to find such palpable abuse unpalatable. Bukowski chafes against the restrictions of literary tact and good taste.

Secondly, though Bukowski has always exercised the freedom to write whatever and as much as he likes, the fact that there is now a market for all his wares has encouraged his tendencies towards prolificity. His last two volumes of new poems, You Get So Alone at Times That it Just Makes Sense (1986) and War All the Time (1984) are, by the usual standard size of poetry collections, massive. There is likely to be a great deal of new poetry to come. Bukowski informed Kurt Ninno, a small press editor, in a letter dated 3 March 1986, that his publisher John Martin 'has thousands of my poems...a build-up of 20 years of sending him work. He could run off 5 or 6 or 7 [more] books of my poetry without any problem'.[6] Bukowski is no languid aesthete producing the occasional slim volume, nor does he exhibit the care and fastidiousness of a Philip Larkin, whose publishers were prepared to wait a decade between The Whitsun Weddings (1964) and the appearance of High Windows (1974). Larkin's posthumous Collected Poems (1988) shows that he wrote a number of fine poems between those dates which did not appear in either of the two rigorously-selected volumes. They appeared in magazines, or remained in privately-circulated typescript copies during his life-time, presumably because they did not fit the structure that Larkin wanted in his books, or were regarded by him as works of secondary intensity.

In keeping with a literary stance rather different from Larkin's, Bukowski's books are large and inclusive,

containing virtually everything that he writes. He and his publisher, though the internal arrangement of his books is far from being a hotch-potch, trust to the sifting processes of time - perhaps even critics - to sort out how much of their contents is of permanent fascination. One of his earliest published stories bears the unusually erudite title 'Cacoethes Scribendi', meaning 'an irresistable urge to write'.[7] It might well serve as an appropriate epigraph to a future edition of his Collected Works, which will stretch over numerous fat volumes. Of course, such tendencies are often identified with American authors - one may think of Thomas Wolfe, Norman Mailer, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, etc - who have written too profligately for the good of their critical standing. All have produced large bodies of work with much repetitiousness of theme and a surprisingly low percentage of truly first-rate literary achievement; yet each were influential writers of their era, and their importance within American literature is now beyond doubt. Randall Jarrell's appreciation of Whitman and W.C.Williams can be regarded as applicable to all these writers, including Bukowski; Jarrell found within the works of Walt and Dr Williams 'something more valuable than any faultlessness: a wonderful largeness, a quantitative and qualitative generosity'.[8]

Another liberty that Bukowski's texts take is a cavalier attitude to category restrictions, with the same material sometimes being cheerfully repackaged in verse, prose, or anecdote. For instance, an episode involving whores and an eccentric rich man's desire to write an opera called 'The Emperor of San Francisco' occurs in the poem 'Did I Ever Tell You?' (1957), a 1966 essay, and in the novel Factotum (1975). The factor of repetition can also be

detected in Bukowski's limited subject matters - out of which he extracts an extraordinary amount - and the small number of obsessively recurrent Existential themes that he constantly revisits: the omnipresence of death, the provisional nature of life and human relations, the need to 'gamble' on existence and seize the moment. His characters act out the Romantic urge for a life of sensations rather than thoughts. Bukowski might agree with one of George Barker's flippant observations: 'Personally, I never met an idea that had long legs, yellow hair, and a taste for whisky. Therefore I have very little time for ideas'.[9]

Bukowski is a very smart literary intelligence, but he leans upon a determined anti-intellectualism, which shows itself in an avoidance of polysyllabic vocabulary, and a reluctance to discuss aesthetics, ideology, or the craft of writing in anything other than life-related terms. He did attend Los Angeles City College, but he follows Twain and Hemingway in being an autodidact, proud to have learned how to write from self-directed reading and attendance at The University of Life; all three emphasize these factors, though their numerous artistic contacts played a part in their development as writers. The 'self-taught' image that Bukowski has nurtured shows through in the intuitive, occasionally prejudiced, statements that the author is apt to make in interviews about writers, and writing which does not have a concern for its Existential authenticity, or is 'too intellectual' or 'too careful'. Joe Wolberg, sometime manager of the City Lights Bookstore who was at one point preparing a biography of Bukowski, is of the opinion that the author 'lives and works by some semi-articulated strictures which he most often states in the negative. He has some very specific advice...on what a writer should

not do....I do not believe he maintains an untutored image, merely a self-tutored one'.[10]

In a very real sense, Bukowski lives for writing, the activity of which is of the utmost importance to him. During a rare period of 'Writer's Block' during the 1960s, Bukowski wrote to his friend Carl Weissner, telling him of attempts to allow 'the concern of the poem to form itself': 'now sometimes I just climb in bed and...listen to sounds ...this way I can work it out pretty good, in a kind of black cave of my mind, making little quiet adjustments like a tailor'.[11] An image of Bukowski as 'a tailor', sewing words together patiently and relentlessly is a partial corrective to ideas about him as a purely inspirational typist. Ernest Hemingway, a far more careful writer but with a similarly elegiac impulse behind a stress on writerly hard work, which 'could cure almost anything', told the interviewer George Plimpton that once 'writing has become your major vice and greatest pleasure only death can stop it'.[12] Bukowski has a therapeutic sense about writing, calling it a process of 'easing the monsters in the brain by moving them to paper'. This goes some way towards explaining his compulsiveness, keeping consciousness of death at bay by constant acts of creation. Some such thinking seems to lie behind a recent comment of Bukowski's.

> Poems about whores showing their panties and spilling beer on my fly no longer seem quite apt. I don't mind nearing death; in fact, it almost feels good. But different paints are needed for the damned canvas.... As I go on, I write as I please and as I must. I don't worry about critics or style or fame or lack of fame. All I want is the next line as it truly comes to me.[13]

In his latest volumes, there is a sense of <u>déjà vu</u>, of territory being re-visited; but there is still a death-

driven urgency behind most of their contents, a pressure built into his ordinary words in extraordinary combinations.

Bukowski's best poems are dispersed, though not submerged, amid myriads of lesser efforts. Though he wrote some outstanding poems in the late 1950s - such as 'The Twins', 'I Cannot Stand Tears' and 'The Gypsies near Del Mar' - his greatest period of achievement in poetry, and prose, runs from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s. Randall Jarrell expressed his engaging perception of literary merit in this way: 'A good poet is someone who manages, in a lifetime of standing out in thunderstorms, to be struck by lightning five or six times; a dozen or two dozen times and he is great'.[14] It remains to be seen how many times Bukowski will be judged as having been struck by poetic lightning. It is possible that Bukowski has written only one poem that deserves to become a classic - 'Something For the Touts, the Nuns, the Grocery Clerks and You'. But there are at least thirty poems in his _oeuvre_ that are remarkable enough to be News that Stays News, to borrow Ezra Pound's touchstone for literature. Such poems include 'Fire Station', 'Waxjob', 'Don't Come Round But If You Do', 'Crucifix in a Deathhand', 'The Catch', 'Shot of Red Eye', 'Ivan the Terrible', 'The Shower', 'Palm Leaves', 'Experience', 'A Report Upon the Consumption of Myself' and 'Eating My Senior Citizen's Dinner at The Sizzler'. An authoritative 250-page volume of _Selected Poems_, showing the development of his poetic voice and including his best work, will eventually be needed.

Though Bukowski does not countenance the theorizing usually associated with the term Post-Modernism, a label of convenience for avant-garde movements and individual artists dating from the mid-1950s to the present day, he is of the same company as the Post-Moderns. Coming after the

heyday of Modernism but clearly learning from it, Bukowski then added extra elements, such as authorial playfulness and a revival of narrative, as well as a reinscription of Romantic concerns about poetry's mode of address to the reader. Bukowski deserves a place alongside Burroughs, Ginsberg, Kerouac, Creeley, Ashbery, O'Hara, Snyder, Corso _et al._ Posterity will surely conclude that his overall achievement in poetry and prose is of the same order as theirs. He has certainly written some great work.

An indication that Bukowski's reputation will continue to grow can be gleaned from the prospect of a future academic industry on his work, the raw materials of which are already accumulating in the United States. The Charles Bukowski Archive has been established at the University of California, Santa Barbara, since the mid-1970s and contains manuscripts, correspondence, memorabilia and First Editions. Other caches of Bukowski's voluminous correspondence are to be found at the University of Arizona at Tucson, Northwestern University, and California State University, Long Beach. His work now regularly finds its way onto Contemporary Literature courses at British and American Universities. A full-length biography of the author is currently being prepared for Random House by Neeli Cherkovski, an associate of Bukowski's during the 1960s and 1970s, whose previous study was of Lawrence Ferlinghetti.

Despite Bukowski's long-time residence on the doorsteps of Hollywood, the transposition of his work to the cinema screen was first accomplished by European film-makers. Jean-Luc Godard incorporated some Bukowskian words into his film _Sauve Qui Peut (La Vie)_. Marco Ferreri's 1981 picture _Tales of Ordinary Madness_ featured Ben Gazzara and the Italian actress Ornela Muti, and was loosely based upon

Bukowski's 1972 collection of stories from City Lights. A small budget Belgian film entitled Crazy Love was released early in 1989, which links together three more of his anarchic tales. But it was the French director Barbet Schroeder's persistence with Bukowski's film screenplay Barfly that has gathered most attention from the mass media. Financed by the Cannon Group and shot on the West Coast, starring Faye Dunaway and Mickey Rourke, the picture was the official American entry at the 1987 Cannes Film Festival and a commercial success at the Box Office in America. The enterprise signalled the almost inevitable breakthrough of his work to the mainstream cinema.

One says 'almost inevitable' for a number of reasons. Bukowski's affiliations with experimental, tough-guy and Existential authors have already been commented upon. Most of these began in poverty and obscurity, like Bukowski, but ended up being rewarded with money, fame, high status with literary critics, and a degree of name-recognition amongst a wider reading audience. This is the predominant pattern followed by avant-gardists within societies energized by Consumer Capitalism, and is particularly marked in the United States. Ernest Hemingway's career is a spectacular instance of this. Originating within expatriate American circles and the Paris avant-garde, his experimental prose rapidly gathered the acclaim of other artists, then mainstream critics; his books became bestsellers, eventually earning still more vast amounts of money from film and television deals in his latter years. He won the Nobel Prize, and has now achieved firm status as a classic American author. Hemingway garnered plenty of Hollywood contacts and contracts; among his personal friends were the actors Gary Cooper, Marlene Dietrich, Ava Gardner, Ingrid

Bergman, and the director Howard Hawks. Most of Hemingway's books have been made into movies, a number during his lifetime. Bukowski's attitude to Hollywood has been more wary, and the industry took much longer to latch onto his work, but their eventual meeting was hardly unexpected. A section of photographs in the published screenplay of Barfly shows the author on the set of the movie, posing with Barbet Schroeder (a personal friend of Bukowski's), Faye Dunaway and Mickey Rourke. One picture, coincidentally, finds Bukowski talking to Isabella Rosselini (daughter of Ingrid Bergman) and the director David Lynch.

As we have seen, many of Bukowski's narrators and characters approximate to Hollywood icons - Humphrey Bogart, James Cagney, W.C.Fields, and Mae West. For all Bukowski's insistence on 'reality', the raw materials of his art are those of American popular culture and mythology. As with Hemingway, Bukowski draws upon essential figments of the American Imagination; namely, that beneath his conformist exterior, every American is an ethical Outsider trying to get along in a corrupt world, patrolling the mean streets, doing what a man's got to do and 'telling it like it is'. This, of course, is exactly the subtext that Hollywood's film products have based their perennial appeal on. The Americanness of his work resides in recourse to national myths, as well as the vernacular language he favours.

Bukowski is a mythic American writer, fundamentally serious of purpose - however often comedy blissfully interrupts his world-view. He is one of the most distinctive of his American literary generation, and perhaps the most entertaining. Bukowski's work is like a breath of invigoratingly pungent air, a roomful of 'Gauloises'.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

I. Much of the statistical information in this paragraph is taken from the preamble to the Dougherty/Weissner interview, in Gargoyle, 35, 68-86 (p.69). Information about the sales of the British edition of Post Office was supplied to the present author by the publishers, Melbourne House.

2. Charles Bukowski, letter to Jon Edgar Webb, in The Outsider, 3, (1963), p.94.

3. Comment by Weissner: 'In the wake of the Barfly movie, I think, he turned down invitations to 20-20, 60 Minutes, and the Johnny Carson show, because he knows that the constipated format of these shows doesn't allow you to be yourself. You can't even bring a bottle of wine'. Dougherty/Weissner interview, Gargoyle, 35, p.82.

4. Gerald Locklin, 'Setting Free the Buk', Review of Contemporary Fiction, V, no. 3, (1985), 27-3I (p.28)

5. 'Independence Day', Dangling in the Tournefortia, pp. 26-30.

6. Charles Bukowski, letter to Kurt Ninno (editor of Planet Detroit) dated 3 March 1986; a copy of the letter was supplied by Jack Madigan, of Berkeley, California.

7. "Cacoethes Scribendi', Matrix, IO, nos. 3-4, (Fall/Winter 1947), pp. 32-34.

8. Randall Jarrell, 'William Carlos Williams', in Poetry & the Age, (London, 1973), p. 218.

9. George Barker, 'Asterisks', Essays, (London, 1970), p. I48.

IO. Joe Wolberg, letter to the present author, dated 2I December 198I.

II. Charles Bukowski, letter (1967) to Carl Weissner, reprinted in Laugh Literary and Man the Humping Guns, I, no. 2, (1969), n.p.

I2. 'work could cure almost anything', in Ernest Hemingway, A Moveable Feast (1964; St. Albans, Herts, 1977), pp. 23-24. Ernest Hemingway, interview with George Plimpton, Writers At Work: The Paris Review Interviews, 2nd. Series, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1979), 217-239, (p. 233).

I3. Dougherty/Bukowski interview, Gargoyle, 35, p.98, p.IO3.

I4. Randall Jarrell, 'Reflections on Wallace Stevens', Poetry & the Age, I24-I36, (p.I36).

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