



**YOU GET  
SO  
ALONE  
AT TIMES  
THAT IT  
JUST  
MAKES  
SENSE**

**CHARLES  
BUKOWSKI**

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**Charles Bukowski**

**You Get So Alone at Times That It  
Just Makes Sense**

 HarperCollins e-books

for Jeff Copland

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## 1813-1883

listening to Wagner

as outside in the dark the wind blows a cold rain the  
trees wave and shake lights go  
off and on the walls creak and the cats run under the  
bed...

Wagner battles the agonies, he's emotional but  
solid, he's the supreme fighter, a giant in a world of  
pygmies, he takes it straight on through, he breaks  
barriers

an

astonishing FORCE of sound as

everything here shakes

shivers

bends

blasts

in fierce gamble

yes, Wagner and the storm intermix with the wine as

nights like this run up my wrists and up into my head and

back down into the

gut

some men never

die

and some men never

live

but we're all alive

tonight.

## red Mercedes

naturally, we are all caught in  
downmoods, it's a matter of  
chemical imbalance  
and an existence  
which, at times,  
seems to forbid  
any real chance at  
happiness.

I was in a downmood  
when this rich pig  
along with his blank  
inamorata  
in this red Mercedes  
cut  
in front of me  
at racetrack parking.  
it clicked inside of me

in a flash:

I'm going to pull that fucker  
out of his car and  
kick his  
ass!

I followed him  
into Valet parking  
parked behind him  
and jumped from my  
car  
ran up to his  
door  
and yanked at  
it.

it was  
locked.  
the  
windows were  
up.

I rapped on the window

on his

side:

“open up! I’m gonna

bust your

ass!”

he just sat there

looking straight

ahead.

his woman did

likewise.

they wouldn’t look

at me.

he was 30 years

younger

but I knew I could

take him

he was soft and

pampered.

I beat on the window

with my

fist:

“come on out, shithead,

or I’m going to start

breaking

glass!”

he gave a small nod

to his

woman.

I saw her reach

into the glove

compartment

open it

and slip him the

.32

I saw him hold it

down low

and snap off the

safety.

I walked off  
toward the  
clubhouse, it looked  
like a damned good  
card  
that  
day.

all I had to do  
was  
be there.

## retired

pork chops, said my father, I love  
pork chops!

and I watched him slide the grease  
into his mouth.

pancakes, he said, pancakes with  
syrup, butter and bacon!

I watched his lips heavy wetted with  
all that.

coffee, he said, I like coffee so hot  
it burns my throat!

sometimes it was too hot and he spit it  
out across the table.

mashed potatoes and gravy, he said, I  
love mashed potatoes and gravy!

he jowled that in, his cheeks puffed as  
if he had the mumps.

chili and beans, he said, I love chili and  
beans!

and he gulped it down and farted for hours  
loudly, grinning after each fart.

strawberry shortcake, he said, with vanilla  
ice cream, that's the way to end a meal!

he always talked about retirement, about  
what he was going to do when he  
retired.

when he wasn't talking about food he talked  
on and on about  
retirement.

he never made it to retirement, he died one day while  
standing at the sink  
filling a glass of water.

he straightened like he'd been  
shot.

the glass fell from his hand  
and he dropped backwards

landing flat

his necktie slipping to the

left.

afterwards

people said they couldn't believe

it.

he looked

great.

distinguished white

sideburns, pack of smokes in his

shirt pocket, always cracking

jokes, maybe a little

loud and maybe with a bit of bad

temper

but all in all

a seemingly sound

individual

never missing a day

of work.

## working it out

in this steamy a.m. Hades claps its Herpes hands and  
a woman sings through my radio, her voice comes clambering  
through the smoke, and the wine fumes...

it's a lonely time, she sings, and you're not  
mine and it makes me feel so bad,  
this thing of being me...

I can hear cars on the freeway, it's like a distant sea  
sludged with people  
while over my other shoulder, far over on 7th street  
near Western

is the hospital, that house of agony—  
sheets and bedpans and arms and heads and  
expirations;

everything is so sweetly awful, so continuously and  
sweetly awful: the art of consummation: life eating  
life...

once in a dream I saw a snake swallowing its own

tail, it swallowed and swallowed until  
it got halfway round, and there it stopped and  
there it stayed, it was stuffed with its own  
self. some fix, that.

we only have ourselves to go on, and it's  
enough...

I go downstairs for another bottle, switch on the  
cable and there's Greg Peck pretending he's  
F. Scott and he's very excited and he's reading his  
manuscript to his lady.

I turn the set  
off.

what kind of writer is that? reading his pages to  
a lady? this is a violation...

I return upstairs and my two cats follow me, they are  
fine fellows, we have no discontent, we have no  
arguments, we listen to the same music, never vote for a  
president.

one of my cats, the big one, leaps on the back  
of my chair, rubs against my shoulders and

neck.

“no good,” I tell him, “I’m not going  
to read you this  
poem.”

he leaps to the floor and walks out to the  
balcony and his buddy  
follows.

they sit and watch the night; we’ve got the  
power of sanity here.

these early a.m. mornings when almost everybody  
is asleep, small night bugs, winged things  
enter, and circle and whirl.

the machine hums its electric hum, and having  
opened and tasted the new bottle I type the next  
line. you

can read it to your lady and she’ll probably tell you  
it’s nonsense. she’ll be  
reading *Tender Is the  
Night*.

## beasts bounding through time—

Van Gogh writing his brother for paints

Hemingway testing his shotgun

Celine going broke as a doctor of medicine

the impossibility of being human

Villon expelled from Paris for being a thief

Faulkner drunk in the gutters of his town

the impossibility of being human

Burroughs killing his wife with a gun

Mailer stabbing his

the impossibility of being human

Maupassant going mad in a rowboat

Dostoevsky lined up against a wall to be shot

Crane off the back of a boat into the propeller

the impossibility

Sylvia with her head in the oven like a baked potato

Harry Crosby leaping into that Black Sun

Lorca murdered in the road by the Spanish troops

the impossibility

Artaud sitting on a madhouse bench

Chatterton drinking rat poison

Shakespeare a plagiarist

Beethoven with a horn stuck into his head against deafness

the impossibility the impossibility

Nietzsche gone totally mad

the impossibility of being human

all too human

this breathing

in and out

out and in

these punks

these cowards

these champions

these mad dogs of glory

moving this little bit of light toward

us

impossibly.

## trashcan lives

the wind blows hard tonight

and it's a cold wind

and I think about

the boys on the row.

I hope some of them have a bottle

of red.

it's when you're on the row

that you notice that

*everything*

is owned

and that there are locks on

*everything.*

this is the way a democracy

works:

you get what you can,

try to keep that

and add to it

if possible.

this is the way a dictatorship

works too

only they either enslave or

destroy their

derelicts.

we just forget

ours.

in either case

it's a hard

cold

wind.

## the lost generation

have been reading a book about a rich literary lady  
of the twenties and her husband who  
drank, ate and partied their way through  
Europe  
meeting Pound, Picasso, A. Huxley, Lawrence, Joyce,  
F. Scott, Hemingway, many  
others;  
the famous were like precious toys to  
them,  
and the way it reads  
the famous allowed themselves to become  
precious toys.  
all through the book  
I waited for just *one* of the famous  
to tell this rich literary lady and her  
rich literary husband to  
get off and out

but, apparently, none of them ever  
did.

Instead they were photographed with the lady  
and her husband  
at various seashores  
looking intelligent  
as if all this was part of the act  
of Art.

perhaps because the wife and husband  
fronted a lush press that  
had something to do  
with it.

and they were all photographed together  
at parties  
or outside of Sylvia Beach's bookshop.

it's true that many of them were  
great and/or original artists,  
but it all seems such a snobby precious  
affair,  
and the husband finally committed his

threatened suicide

and the lady published one of my first

short stories in the

40's and is now

dead, yet

I can't forgive either of them

for their rich dumb lives

and I can't forgive their precious toys

either

for being

that.

## no help for that

there is a place in the heart that

will never be filled

a space

and even during the

best moments

and

the greatest

times

we will know it

we will know it

more than

ever

there is a place in the heart that

will never be filled

and

we will wait

and

wait

in that

space.

## my non-ambitious ambition

my father had little sayings which he mostly shared during dinner sessions; food made him think of survival:

“succeed or suck eggs...”

“the early bird gets the worm...”

“early to bed and early to rise makes a man (etc.)...”

“anybody who wants to can make it in America...”

“God takes care of those who (etc.)...”

I had no particular idea who he was talking to, and personally I thought him a crazed and stupid brute but my mother *always* interspersed these sessions with: “Henry, *listen* to your father.”

at that age I didn't have any other choice

but as the food went down with the

sayings

the appetite and the digestion went  
along with them.

it seemed to me that I had never met  
another person on earth  
as discouraging to my happiness  
as my father.

and it appeared that I had  
the same effect upon  
him.

“You are a *bum*,” he told me, “and you’ll  
always be a *bum*!”

and I thought, if being a bum is to be the  
opposite of what this son-of-a-bitch  
is, then that’s what I’m going to  
be.

and it’s too bad he’s been dead  
so long  
for now he can’t see

how beautifully I've succeeded

at

that.

## education

at that small inkwell desk

I had trouble with the words

“sing” and “sign.”

I don’t know why

but

“sing” and “sign”:

it bothered

me.

the others went on and learned

new things

but I just sat there

thinking about

“sing” and “sign.”

there was something there

I couldn’t

overcome.

what it gave me was a

bellyache as

I looked at the backs of all those  
heads.

the lady teacher had a

very fierce face

it ran sharply to a

point

and was heavy with white

powder.

one afternoon

she asked my mother to come

see her

and I sat with them

in the classroom

as they

talked.

“he’s not learning

anything,” the teacher

told my

mother.

“please give him a  
chance, Mrs. Sims!”

“he’s not *trying*, Mrs.  
Chinaski!”

my mother began to  
cry.

Mrs. Sims sat there  
and watched  
her.

it went on for some  
minutes.

then Mrs. Sims said,  
“well, we’ll see what we  
can do...”

then I was walking with  
my mother  
we were walking in

front of the school,  
there was much green grass  
and then the  
sidewalk.

“oh, Henry,” my mother said,  
“your father is so disappointed in  
you, I don’t know what we are  
going to do!”

father, my mind said,  
father and father and  
father.

words like that.

I decided not to learn anything  
in that  
school.

my mother walked along  
beside me.

she wasn’t anything at  
all.

and I had a bellyache

and even the trees we walked

under

seemed less than

trees

and more like everything

else.

## downtown L.A.

throwing your shoe at 3 a.m. and smashing the window, then sticking your head through the shards of glass and laughing as the phone rings with authoritative threats as you curse back through the receiver, slam it down as the woman screeches: “WHAT THE FUCK YA DOIN’, YA ASSHOLE!”

you smirk, look at her (what’s this?), you’re cut somewhere, love it, the dripping of red onto your dirty torn undershirt, the whiskey roaring through your invincibility: you’re young, you’re big, and the world stinks from centuries of Humanity while

you’re on course

and there’s something left to drink—

it’s good, it’s a dramatic farce and you can handle it with

verve, style, grace and elite

mysticism.

another hotel drunk—thank god for hotels and whiskey and ladies of the street!

you turn to her: “you chippy hunk of shit, don’t bad mouth me! I’m

the toughest guy in town, you don't know who the hell you're in this room with!"

she just looks, half-believing...a cigarette dangling, she's half-insane, looking for an out; she's hard, she's scared, she's been fooled, taken, abused, used, over-used...

but, under all that, to me she's the *flower*, I see her as she was before she was ruined by the lies: theirs and hers.

to me, she's new again as I am new: we have a chance together.

I walk over and fill her drink: "you got class, doll, you're not like the others..."

she likes that and I like it too because to make a thing true all you've got to do is believe.

I sit across from her as she tells me about her life, I give her refills, light her cigarettes, I listen and the City of the Angels listens: she's had a hard row.

I get sentimental and decide not to fuck her: one more man for her

won't help and one more woman for me won't  
matter—besides, she doesn't look that  
good.

actually, her life is boring and rather common but most are—mine is too  
except when lifted by

whiskey

she gets into a crying-jag, she's cute, really, and pitiful, all she wants  
is what she always wanted, only it's getting further and further  
away.

then she stops crying, we just drink and smoke, it's  
peaceful—I won't bother her that  
night...

I have trouble trying to yank the pull-down bed from the wall, she  
comes up to help, we pull together—suddenly, it releases—flings  
itself upon us, a hard death-like mindless object, it knocks us upon  
our asses beneath it as  
first in fear we scream  
then begin laughing, laughing like  
crazy.

she gets the bathroom first, then I use it, then we stretch out and sleep.

I am awakened in the early morning...she is down at my center, she has me in her mouth and is working furiously.

“it’s all right,” I say, “you don’t have to do that.”

she continues, finishes...

in the morning we pass the desk clerk, he has on thick-rimmed dark glasses, seems to sit in the shade of some tarantula dream: he was there when we entered, he is there now: some eternal darkness, we are almost to the door when he says:

“don’t come back.”

we walk 2 blocks up, turn left, walk one block, then one block south, enter Willie’s at the middle of the block, place ourselves at bar center.

we order beer for starters, we sit there as she searches her purse for cigarettes, then I get up, move toward the juke box, put a coin within, come back, sit down, she lifts her glass, “the first one’s best,”

and I lift my drink, “and the last...”

outside, the traffic runs up and down, down and

up,

going

nowhere.

## another casualty

cat got run over

now silver screw holding together a broken

femur

right leg

bound in bright red

bandage

got cat home from vet's

took my eye off

him for

a moment

he ran across floor

dragging his red

leg

chasing the female

cat

worst thing the

fucker could

do

he's in the penalty

box

now

sweating it

out

he's just like the

rest of

us

he has these large

yellow eyes

staring

only wanting to

live the

good

life.

## driving test

drivers

in defense and anger

often give the

finger

to those

who become involved in their

driving problems.

I am aware what the

signal of the finger

implies

yet when it is directed

at me

sometimes

I can't help laughing at

the florid

twisted

faces

and

the gesture.

yet today

I found myself

giving the finger

to some guy

who pulled directly

into my lane

without waiting

from a supermarket

exit.

I shook the finger at

him.

he saw it

and I drove along right on his

rear

bumper.

it was my first

time.

I was a member of the

club

and I felt like a

fucking

fool.

## that's why funerals are so sad

he's got all the tools but he's lazy, has no  
fire, the ladies drain his senses, his  
emotions, he just wants to drive his  
flashy car

he gets a wax job once a month  
throws away his shoes when they get  
scuffed

but

he's got the best right hand in the  
business

and his left hook can cave in a man's ribs  
*if* I can get him to do it

but

he has no god damned imagination

he's in the top ten

but the music is missing.

he makes the money

but it's all going to get away from  
him.

some day he's not going to be able to do  
even the little  
he's doing now.

his idea of victory is to pull down as  
many women's panties as he  
can.

he's  
champ at that.

and when you see me screaming at him  
in his corner between  
rounds

I'm trying to awaken him to the fact that  
the TIME is  
NOW.

he just grins at me:

“hell, *you* fight him, he's a  
bitch...”

you have no idea, cousin, how many

men

can do it

but

won't.

## cornered

well, they said it would come to  
this: old. talent gone. fumbling for  
the word

hearing the dark  
footsteps, I turn  
look behind me...

not yet, old dog...  
soon enough.

now  
they sit talking about  
me: "yes, it's happened, he's  
finished...it's  
sad..."

"he never had a great deal, did  
he?"

"well, no, but now..."

now

they are celebrating my demise

in taverns I no longer

frequent.

now

I drink alone

at this malfunctioning

machine

as the shadows assume

shapes

I fight the slow

retreat

now

my once-promise

dwindling

dwindling

now

lighting new cigarettes

pouring more

drinks

it has been a beautiful

fight

still

is.

## bumming with Jane

there wasn't a stove  
and we put cans of beans  
in hot water in the sink  
to heat them  
up  
and we read the Sunday papers  
on Monday  
after digging them out of the  
trash cans  
but somehow we managed  
money for wine  
and the  
rent  
and the money came off  
the streets  
out of hock shops  
out of nowhere

and all that mattered  
was the next  
bottle  
and we drank and sang  
and  
fought  
were in and out  
of drunk  
tanks  
car crashes  
hospitals  
we barricaded ourselves  
against the  
police  
and the other roomers  
hated  
us  
and the desk clerk  
of the hotel  
feared

us

and it went on

and

on

and it was one of the

most wonderful times

of my

life.

## darkness

darkness falls upon Humanity  
and faces become terrible  
things  
that wanted more than there  
was.

all our days are marked with  
unexpected  
affronts—some  
disastrous, others  
less so  
but the process is  
wearing and  
continuous.  
attrition rules.  
most give  
way  
leaving

empty spaces

where people should

be.

our progenitors, our

educational systems, the

land, the media, the

way

have

deluded and misled the

masses: they have been

defeated

by the aridity of

the *actual*

dream.

they were

unaware that

achievement or victory or

luck or

whatever the hell you

want to call

it  
must have  
its defeats.

it's only the re-gathering and  
going on  
which lends substance  
to whatever magic  
might possibly  
evolve.

and now  
as we ready to self-destruct  
there is very little left to  
kill

which makes the tragedy  
less and more  
much much  
more.

## termites of the page

the problem that I've found with  
most poets that I have known is that  
they've never had an 8 hour job  
and there is nothing  
that will put a person  
more in touch  
with the realities  
than  
an 8 hour job.

most of these poets  
that I have known  
have  
seemingly existed on  
air alone  
but  
it hasn't been truly  
so:

behind them has been  
a family member  
usually a wife or mother  
supporting these  
souls  
and  
so it's no wonder  
they have written so  
poorly:  
they have been protected  
against the actualities  
from the  
beginning  
and they  
understand nothing  
but the ends of their  
fingernails  
and  
their delicate  
hairlines

and

their lymph

nodes.

their words are

unlived, unfurnished, un-

true, and worse—so

fashionably

dull.

soft and safe

they gather together to

plot, hate,

gossip, most of these

American poets

pushing and hustling their

talents

playing at

greatness.

poet (?):

that word needs re-

defining.

when I hear that

word

I get a rising in the

gut

as if I were about to

puke.

let them have the

stage

so long

as I need not be

in the

audience.

## a good time

now look, she said, stretched out on the bed, I don't want anything personal, let's just do it, I don't want to get involved, got it?

she kicked off her high-heeled shoes...

sure, he said, standing there, let's just pretend that we've already done it, there's nothing less involved than that, is there?

what the hell do you mean? she asked.

I mean, he said, I'd rather drink anyhow.

and he poured himself one.

it was a lousy night in Vegas and he walked to the window and looked out at the dumb lights.

you a fag? she asked, you a god damned fag?

no, he said.

you don't have to get shitty, she said, just because you lost at the tables—we drove all the way here to have a good time and now look at you: sucking at that booze, you coulda done that in L.A.!

right, he said, one thing I do like to get involved with is the fucking bottle.

I want you to take me home, she said.

my pleasure, he said, let's go.

it was one of those times where nothing was lost because nothing had ever been found and as she got dressed it was sad for him

not because of him and the lady but because of all the millions like him and the lady

as the lights blinked out there, everything so effortlessly false.

she was ready, fast: let's get the hell out of here, she said.

right, he said, and they walked out the door together.

## the still trapeze

Saroyan told his wife, “I’ve got to  
gamble in order to  
write.” she told him to  
go ahead.

he lost \$350,000.00  
mostly at the racetrack  
but still couldn’t write *or*  
pay his taxes.

he ran from the govt. and exiled himself  
in Paris.

he later came back, sweated it  
out  
in hock up to his  
ass—  
royalties dropping  
off.

he still couldn't write or  
what he wrote didn't  
work  
because that tremendous  
brave optimism  
that buoyed everybody up  
so well  
during the depression  
just turned to  
sugar water  
during  
good times.  
he died  
a dwindling legend  
with a huge handlebar  
mustache  
just like his father  
used to have  
in the old Fresno  
Armenian way

in a world that  
could no longer  
use  
William.

## January.

here

you see this

hand

here you see this

sky

this

bridge

hear this

sound

the agony of the

elephant

the nightmare of the

midget

while

caged parrots

sit in a

flourish of

color

while pieces of

people

fall over the

edge

like pebbles

like

rocks

madhouses screaming in

pain

as the royalty of the

world is

photographed

say

on horseback

or

say

watching a procession

in their

honor

as

the junkies junk

as the alkies drink

as the whores whore

as the killers kill

the albatross blinks its

eyes

the weather stays

mostly

the same.

## sunny side down

NOTHING. sitting in a cafe having breakfast. NOTHING. the waitress,  
and the people eating. the traffic runs by. doesn't matter what  
Napoleon did, what Plato said. Turgenev could have been a fly. we are  
worn-  
down, hope stamped out. we reach for coffee cups like the robots about  
to replace us. courage at Salerno, bloodbaths on the Eastern front didn't  
matter. we know that we are beaten. NOTHING. now it's just a matter of  
continuing  
anyhow—  
chew the food and read the paper. we  
read about ourselves. the news is  
bad. something about  
NOTHING.  
Joe Louis long dead as the medfly invades Beverly Hills.  
well, at least we can sit and  
eat. it's been some rough  
trip. it could be  
worse. it could be worse than

NOTHING.

let's get more coffee from the  
waitress.

that *bitch*! she knows we are trying to get her  
attention.

she just stands there doing

NOTHING.

it doesn't matter if Prince Charles falls off his horse  
or that the hummingbird is so seldom  
seen

or that we are too senseless to go  
insane.

coffee. give us more of that NOTHING  
coffee.

## the man in the brown suit

fuck, he was small

maybe 5-3,

135 pounds,

I didn't like

him,

he sat there at his desk

at the

bank

and as I waited in line

he seemed to have a way

of glancing at

me

and I stared

back,

I don't know what

it was

that caused the

animosity.

he had this little mustache

that drooped

at the ends,

he was in his mid-forties

and like most people who worked

in banks

he had a non-committal

yet self-important

personality.

one day I almost went

over the railing

to ask him

what the hell

was he looking

at?

today I went in

and stood in line

and saw him leave his

desk.

one of the lady tellers was  
having a problem  
with a man  
at her  
window  
and the man  
in the brown suit  
began to hold  
counsel with both of  
them.

suddenly  
the man in the brown suit  
vaulted the  
railing  
got behind the other  
man  
wrapped his arms  
about him  
then dragged him along  
to a latch

entrance

along the railing

reached over

unhooked the latch

while still managing to

hold the

man.

then he dragged him

in there

latched the

gate

and while holding the

man

he told one of the

girls,

“Phone the

police.”

the man he was holding was

about 20, black, a good 6-2,

maybe 190 pounds,

and I thought, hey,  
break loose, man, jail is a  
long time.

but he just stood  
there  
being  
held.

I left before the  
police  
arrived.

the next time  
I went to the bank  
the man in the brown suit  
was behind his  
desk.

and when he glanced at  
me  
I smiled just a  
little.

## a magician, gone...

they go one by one and as they do it gets closer

to me and

I don't mind that so much, it's

just that I can't be practical about the

mathematics that take others

to the vanishing point.

last Saturday

one of racing's greatest harness drivers

died—little Joe O'Brien.

I had seen him win many a

race. he

had a peculiar rocking motion

he flicked the reins

and rocked his body back and

forth. he

applied this motion

during the stretch run and

it was quite dramatic and  
effective...

he was so small that he couldn't  
lay the whip on as hard as the  
others

so

he rocked and rocked

in the sulky

and the horse felt the lightning

of his excitement

that rhythmic crazy rocking was

transferred from man to

beast...

the whole thing had the feel of a

crapshooter calling to the

gods, and the gods

so often answered...

I saw Joe O'Brien win

endless photo finishes

many by a

nose.

he'd take a horse

another driver couldn't get a

run out of

and Joe would put his touch

to it

and the animal would

most often respond with

a flurry of wild energy.

Joe O'Brien was the finest harness driver

I had ever seen

and I'd seen many over the

decades.

nobody could nurse and cajole

a trotter or a pacer

like little Joe

nobody could make the magic work

like Joe.

they go one by one

presidents

garbage men

killers

actors

pickpockets

boxers

hit men

ballet dancers

fishermen

doctors

fry cooks

like

that

but Joe O'Brien

it's going to be hard

hard

to find a replacement for

little Joe

and

at the ceremony

held for him

at the track tonight

(Los Alamitos 10-1-84)

as the drivers gathered in a

circle

in their silks

at the finish line

I had to turn my back

to the crowd

and climb the upper grandstand

steps

to the wall

so the people wouldn't

see me

cry.

## well, that's just the way it is...

sometimes when everything seems at

its worst

when all conspires

and gnaws

and the hours, days, weeks

years

seem wasted—

stretched there upon my bed

in the dark

looking upward at the ceiling

I get what many will consider an

obnoxious thought:

it's still nice to be

Bukowski.

## the chemistry of things

I always thought Mary Lou was skinny and  
not much to look at  
while almost all the other guys  
thought she was a  
hot number.

maybe that's why she hung around me  
in Jr. High.  
my indifference must have attracted  
her.

I was cool and mean in those days  
and when the guys asked me,  
“you banged Mary Lou yet?”  
I answered them with the  
truth: “she  
bores me.”

there was this guy  
he taught chemistry.

Mr. Humm. Humm wore a little bow  
tie and a black coat, a  
cheap wrinkled job, he was  
supposed to have  
brains

and one day Mary Lou came to  
me  
and said Humm kept her  
after class  
and had taken her into the  
closet and  
kissed her and  
fondled her  
panties.

she was crying, “what will I  
do?”

“forget it,” I told her,  
“those chemicals have scrambled  
his brain. we have an English teacher  
who hikes her skirt up around her

hips every day and wants to go to bed with every guy in class. we enjoy her but ignore her.”

“why don’t you beat Mr. Humm up?” she asked me.

“I could but they’d transfer me to Stuart Hall.”

in Stuart Hall they beat the shit out of you and they ignored math, English, music, they just stuck you into auto shop where you fixed up old cars which they resold at big profits.

“I thought you cared for me,” said Mary Lou, “don’t you realize he kissed me, stuck his tongue down my throat and had his hand up my

behind?”

“well,” I said, “we saw Mrs. Lattimore’s  
pussy the other day, in English.”

Mary Lou walked off  
crying...

well, she told her  
mother and Humm got his, he  
had to  
resign, poor son of a  
bitch.

after that the guys asked me,  
“hey, what do you think of Humm  
sticking his hand up your girl’s  
ass?”

“just another guy with no  
taste,” I answered.

I was cool and mean  
in those days and I went on to  
high school, the same one

Mary Lou attended  
where she secretly got  
married  
during her senior year  
to a guy  
I knew, a guy I  
outdrank and beat the shit out of  
a couple of  
times.

the guy thought he had  
something.

he wanted me to be  
best man.

I told him, no thanks and lots of  
luck.

I never could see what  
they saw in  
Mary Lou.

and poor Humm: what a  
lonely sick old

fart.

anyhow, then I went on to

city college

where the only molesting I

could see going on

was what they did to your

mind.

## rift

“I can’t live with you anymore,”

she said,

“*look* at you!”

“uuh?” I

asked.

“*look* at you!

sitting in that god

damned

chair!

your belly is sticking out

of your

underwear,

you’ve burnt cigarette

holes in all your

shirts!

all you *do* is suck

on that god damned

beer,  
bottle after bottle,  
what do you get out of  
that?"

"the damage has been  
done," I told  
her.

"what're you talking  
about?"

"nothing matters and  
we know nothing matters  
and *that*  
matters..."

"you're drunk!"

"come on, baby, let's get  
along, it's  
easy..."

"not for *me!*" she screamed,  
"not for

*me!*”

she ran into the bathroom to

put on her

makeup.

I got up for another

beer.

I sat back down

just had the new bottle

to my mouth

when she came out of the

bathroom.

“holy shit!” she screamed,

“you’re

*disgusting!*”

I laughed right into the

bottle, gagged, spit a mouthful of

beer across my

undershirt.

“my god!” she

said.

she slammed the door and

was gone.

I looked at the closed door

and at the doorknob

and strangely

I didn't feel

alone.

## my friend, the parking lot attendant

—he’s a dandy

—small black mustache

—usually sucking on a cigar

he tends to lean into the cars as he

transacts business

first time I met him, he said,

“hey! ya gonna make a

killin’?”

“maybe,” I answered.

next meeting it was:

“hey, Ramrod! what’s

*happening?*”

“very little,” I told

him.

next time I had my girlfriend with me

and he just

grinned.

next time I was

alone.

“hey,” he asked, “where’s the young chick?”

“I left her at home...”

“*Bullshit!* I’ll bet she dumped you!”

and the next time

he really leaned into the car:

“what’s a guy like *you* doing driving a BMW? I’ll bet you inherited your money, you didn’t get this car with your brains!”

“how’d you guess?” I

answered.

that was some weeks ago.

I haven’t seen him lately.

fellow like that, chances are he just moved on  
to better  
things.

## miracle

I have just listened to this  
symphony which Mozart dashed off  
in one day  
and it had enough wild and crazy  
joy to last  
forever,  
whatever forever  
is  
Mozart came as close as  
possible to  
that.

## a non-urgent poem

I had this fellow write me that  
he felt there wasn't the  
"urgency" in my poems  
of the present  
as compared to my poems  
of the past.

now, if this *is* true  
why did he write me  
about it?  
have I made his days  
more  
incomplete?  
it's  
possible.

well, I too have felt  
let down  
by writers

I once thought were

powerful

or

at least

very damned

good

but

I never considered

writing them to

inform them that I

sensed their

demise.

I found the best thing

I could do

was just to type away

at my own work

and let the dying

die

as they always

have.

## my first affair with that older woman

when I look back now  
at the abuse I took from  
her  
I feel shame that I was so  
innocent,  
but I must say  
she did make me drink for  
drink,  
and I realized that her life  
her feelings for things  
had been ruined  
along the way  
and that I was no more than a  
temporary  
companion;  
she was ten years older  
and mortally hurt by the past

and the present;  
she treated me badly:  
desertion, other  
men;  
she brought me immense  
pain,  
continually;  
she lied, stole;  
there was desertion,  
other men,  
yet we had our moments; and  
our little soap opera ended  
with her in a coma  
in the hospital,  
and I sat at her bed  
for hours  
talking to her,  
and then she opened her eyes  
and saw me:  
“I knew it would be you,”

she said.

then she closed her

eyes.

the next day she was

dead.

I drank alone

for two years

after that.

## the freeway life

some fool kept blocking me and I finally got around him, and in the elation of freedom I ran it up to 85 (naturally, first checking the rear view for our blue suited protectors); then I felt and heard the SMASH of a hard

object upon the bottom of my car, but wanting to make the track I willed myself to ignore it (as if that would make it vanish) even though I began to smell gasoline.

I checked the gas gauge and it *seemed* to be holding...

it had been a terrible week already

but, you know, defeat can strengthen just as victory can weaken, and if you have the proper luck and the holy endurance the gods just *might* deliver the proper admixture...

then

traffic backed up and stopped, and then I really smelled gas and I saw my gas gauge dipping rapidly, then my radio told me that a man

3 miles up

on the Vernon overpass had one leg over the side and was threatening suicide,

and there I was threatened with being blown to hell  
as people yelled at me that my tank was broken and pouring gasoline;  
yes, I nodded back, I know, I know...  
meanwhile, waving cars off and working my way over to the outer lane  
thinking, they are more terrorized than I am:  
if I go, those nearby might go also.

there was no motion in the traffic—the suicide was still trying to make  
up his mind and my gas gauge dipped into the red  
and then the necessity of being a proper citizen and waiting for opportunity  
vanished and I made my move  
up and over a cement abutment  
bending my right front wheel

I made it to the freeway exit which was totally  
clear  
then worked on down to a gas station on Imperial Highway  
parked it  
still dripping gas, got out, made it to the phone, got in a call  
for the tow truck, not a long wait at all, nice drive back in with a black  
fellow who told me strange stories about stranded motorists...  
(like one woman, her hands were frozen to the wheel, took 15 minutes of

talking and prying to make her let go.)

had the car back in a couple of days, was driving back from the track,  
hit the brake and it wouldn't go down, luckily I wasn't on the freeway  
yet, cut the ignition, glided to the curb, noted that the steering  
column cover had ripped loose and blocked the brake, ripped that away,  
then  
ripped some more to make sure, then a whole mass of wires spilled out,  
s h i t...

I turned the key, hit the gas but the car STARTED  
and I drove off with the dangling wires against my leg  
thinking

do these things happen to other  
people or am

I just the chosen one?

I decided it was the latter and got onto the freeway where  
some guy in a volks swung over and blocked my  
lane

whereupon I swung around the son-of-a-bitch and hit  
75, 80, 85...

thinking, the courage it took to get out of bed each

morning

to face the same things

over and over

was

enormous.

## the player

I had 40 win on the 6 horse  
he had 2 lengths in the stretch  
was running along the rail  
when the jock whipped him  
right-handed  
and the horse hit the wood  
spilled  
threw the jock  
and there went the race  
for me.

that was the 7th race  
and I considered that the horse  
might have lost  
anyhow  
and then I considered leaving  
but I decided to play the  
8th,

hit 20 win on a 5 to one  
shot.

in the 9th I went 40 win  
on the second favorite  
and when the bell rang to start them  
the horse reared and  
left my jock  
in the stall.

I took the escalator down  
and walked out the  
gate  
where a young man asked me  
for a dollar so he could  
take the bus  
home.

I gave him the buck and  
told him,  
“you ought to stay away from this  
place.”

“yeah,” he said, “I  
know.”

then I walked toward parking  
searching my coat for  
cigarettes.

nothing.

[p.o. box 11946, Fresno, Calif. 93776](#)

drove in from the track after losing \$50.

a hot day out there

they pack them in on a Saturday;

my feet hurt and I had pains in the neck

and about the shoulders—

nerves: large crowds of people more than

unsettle me.

pulled into the driveway and got the

mail

moved up and parked it

went in and opened the IRS letter

form 525 (SC) (Rev. 9-83)

read it

and was informed that I owed

TWELVE THOUSAND SIXHUNDREDFOUR DOLLARS AND

SEVENTY EIGHT CENTS

on my 1981 income tax plus

TWO THOUSAND EIGHTHUNDREDEIGHTYTHREE DOLLARS

AND TWELVE CENTS interest

and that further interest was being

compounded

DAILY.

I went into the kitchen and poured a

drink.

life in America was a curious

thing.

well, I *could* let the interest

build

that's what the government

did

but after a while they would

come for me

or whatever I had

left.

at least that \$50 loss at the

track didn't look so

bad anymore.

I'd have to go tomorrow and  
win \$15,487.90 plus  
daily compounded  
interest.

I drank to that,  
wishing I had purchased a  
Racing Form  
on the way  
out.

## poor Al

I don't know how he does it  
but every woman he meets is  
crazy.

he will get rid of one  
crazy woman

but he never gets any  
relief—

another crazy moves right in  
with him.

it's only after they move in  
and begin acting

more than strange

that they admit to him

that they've done madhouse

time

or that their families have

a long history of mental

illness.

his last one

he sent to a shrink

once a week:

\$75 for 45 minutes.

after 7 months

she walked out on the

shrink

and said to Al,

“that god damned fag doesn’t know  
anything.”

I don’t know how they all find

Al.

he says you can’t tell at the first

meeting

they have their guard up

but after 2 or 3 months the

guard comes down

and there’s Al with

another one.

It got so bad that Al thought  
maybe it was  
him  
so he went to a shrink  
and asked  
and the shrink said,  
“you’re one of the sanest men  
I’ve ever met.”

poor Al.

that made him feel  
worse  
than ever.

## for my ivy league friends:

many of those I met on the reading circuit or heard about on the reading circuit in the old days are now either teaching or poets-in-residence and have garnered Guggenheims and N.E.A.'s and sundry other grants.

well, I tried for a Gugg once myself, even got an N.E.A. so I can't

knock the act

but

you should have seen them back then: raggedy-ass, wild-eyed, raving

against the order

now

they have been ingested, digested, rested

they write reviews for the journals

they write well-worked, quiet, inoffensive poesy

they edit so many of the magazines that I have no idea where I should send this

poem

since they attack my work with alarming regularity

and

I can't read theirs

yet their attacks upon me have been effective in this country

and

if it weren't for Europe I'd probably still be a starving writer

or down at the row

or diggin weeds out of your garden

or...?

well

you know the old saying: it's all a matter of

taste

and

either they're right and I'm wrong or I'm right and they're all

wrong

or

maybe it's some place in between.

most of the people in the world could care less

and

I often feel the same

way.

## helping the old

I was standing in line at the bank today  
when the old fellow in front of me  
dropped his glasses (luckily, within the  
case)  
and as he bent over  
I saw how difficult it was for  
him  
and I said, “wait, let me get  
them...”  
but as I picked them up  
he dropped his cane  
a beautiful, black polished  
cane  
and I got the glasses back to him  
then went for the cane  
steading the old boy  
as I handed him his cane.

he didn't speak,

he just smiled at me.

then he turned

forward.

I stood behind him waiting

my turn.

## bad times at the 3rd and Vermont hotel

Alabam was a sneak and a thief and he came to my  
room when I was drunk and  
each time I got up he shoved me back  
down.

you prick, I told him, you know I can  
take you!

he just shoved me down  
again.

when I sober up, I said, I'm going to kick you  
all the way to hell!

he just kept pushing me  
around.

I finally caught him a good one, right over the  
temple  
and he backed off and  
left.

it was a couple of days later

I got even: I fucked his

girl.

then I went down and knocked on his

door.

well, Alabam, I fucked your woman and now I'm going to

kick you all the way to

hell!

the poor guy started crying, he put his hands over his

face and just cried

I stood there and watched

him.

I said, I'm sorry,

Alabam.

then I left him there, I went back to

my room.

we were all alkie and none of us had jobs, all we had

was each other.

even then, my so-called woman was in some bar or  
somewhere, I hadn't seen her in a couple of  
days.

I had a bottle of port  
left.

I uncorked it and took it down to Alabam's  
room.

said, how about a drink,

Rebel?

he looked up, stood up, went for two  
glasses.

## the Master Plan

starving in a Philadelphia winter

trying to be a writer

I wrote and wrote and drank and drank and

drank

and then stopped writing and concentrated on

the drinking.

it was another

art-form.

if you can't have any luck with one thing you

try another.

of course, I had been practicing on the

drinking-form

since the age of

15.

and there was much competition

in that field

also.

it was a world full of drunks and writers and  
drunk writers.

and so

I became a starving drunk instead of a starving  
writer.

the best thing was the instant  
result.

and I soon became the biggest and  
best drunk in the neighborhood and  
maybe the whole  
city.

it sure as hell beat sitting around waiting for  
those rejection slips from *The New Yorker* and *The  
Atlantic Monthly*.

of course, I never really considered quitting the  
writing game, I just wanted to give it a  
ten year rest  
figuring if I got famous too early

I wouldn't have anything left for the stretch run

like I have now, thank

you,

with the drinking still thrown

in.

## garbage

I had taken a tremendous beating,  
I had chosen a real bull, and because of  
the girls and for himself and just because of his  
brutal escaping energy  
he had almost murdered me:  
I learned later  
that even after I was out  
he had kicked my head again and  
again  
and then had emptied several garbage cans  
over me  
and then they had left me there  
in that alley.  
I was the guy from out of town.  
it was around 6 a.m. on a Sunday  
morning when I came  
around.

my face was a mass of  
bruises, scabs, clots, bumps, lumps, my lips  
thick and numb, my eyes almost swollen  
shut  
but I got to my feet and began  
walking;  
I could see traces of the sun, houses, the shaking  
sidewalk as I  
moved toward my room  
then I heard shuffling sounds from the  
center of the street  
and I forced my eyes to  
focus and saw this  
man staggering  
his clothing ripped and bloody  
he smelled of death and darkness  
but he kept moving forward  
down the middle of the street  
as if he had been walking for  
miles

from some event so ugly that  
the mind itself might refuse to accept it  
as part of life.

my impulse was to help him  
and I stepped off the  
curbing  
and moved toward him.

he couldn't see me, he moved forward  
looking for somewhere to go,

anywhere, and

I saw one of his eyes hanging  
out of the socket,  
dangling.

I backed away.

he was like a creature not of the  
earth.

I let him go

by.

I heard him moving away  
behind me

those blind steps

lurching, in

agony,

senselessly

alone.

I got back on the

sidewalk.

I got back to my

room.

I got myself to the

bed.

fell face up

the ceiling up there above me,

I waited.

## my vanishing act

when I got sick of the bar

and I sometimes did

I had a place to go:

it was a tall field of grass

an abandoned

graveyard.

I didn't consider this to be a

morbid pastime.

it just seemed to be the best

place to be.

it offered a generous cure to

the vicious hangover.

through the grass I could see

the stones,

many were tilted

at strange angles

against gravity

as though they must

fall

but I never saw one

fall

although there were many of those

in the yard.

it was cool and dark

with a breeze

and I often slept

there.

I was never

bothered.

each time I returned to the bar

after an absence

it was always the same with

them:

“where the hell you

been? we thought you

died!”

I was their bar freak, they needed me

to make themselves feel

better.

just like, at times, I needed that

graveyard.

## let's make a deal

in conjunction with  
these rivers of shit  
that keep rolling through my brain, Captain  
Walrus, I can only say that I hardly understand  
it and would say  
any number of HAIL MARYS  
to put a stop to it—  
I'd even go back to living with that whore with the  
heart of brass just  
to keep these rivers of shit from rolling through my  
brain, Captain Walrus, but  
of course  
I would never stop playing the horses or  
drinking  
but  
Captain  
to keep these rivers from flowing

I'd promise to never  
eat eggs again and  
I'd shave my head and my balls, I'd live in  
the state of Delaware and I'd even  
force myself to sit through any movie acted in by  
any member of the Fonda  
family.

think about it, Captain Walrus, the  
plum is in the pudding and the parasol bends to  
the West wind

I've got to do something about all  
this...

it seems like it never  
stops.

each man's hell is in a different  
place: mine is just up and  
behind

my ruined  
face.

## 16-bit Intel 8088 chip

with an Apple Macintosh

you can't run Radio Shack programs

in its disc drive.

nor can a Commodore 64

drive read a file

you have created on an

IBM Personal Computer.

both Kaypro and Osborne computers use

the CP/M operating system

but can't read each other's

handwriting

for they format (write

on) discs in different

ways.

the Tandy 2000 runs MS-DOS but

can't use most programs produced for

the IBM Personal Computer

unless certain

bits and bytes are

altered

but the wind still blows over

Savannah

and in the Spring

the turkey buzzard struts and

flounces before his

hens.

## zero

sitting here watching the second hand on the TIMEX go around and  
around...

this will hardly be a night to remember

sitting here searching for blackheads on the back of my neck

as other men enter the sheets with dolls of flame

I look into myself and find perfect emptiness.

I am out of cigarettes and don't even have a gun to point.

this writer's block is my only possession.

the second hand on the TIMEX still goes around and  
around...

I always wanted to be a writer

now I'm one who can't.

might as well go downstairs and watch late night tv with the wife

she'll ask me how it went

I'll wave a hand nonchalantly

settle down next to her

and watch the glass people fail

as I have failed.

I'm going to walk down the stairway now

what a sight:

an empty man being careful not to trip and bang his empty

head.

## putrefaction

of late

I've had this thought

that this country

has gone backwards

4 or 5 decades

and that all the

social advancement

the good feeling of

person toward

person

has been washed

away

and replaced by the same

old

bigotries.

we have

more than ever

the selfish wants of power

the disregard for the

weak

the old

the impoverished

the

helpless.

we are replacing want with

war

salvation with

slavery.

we have wasted the

gains

we have become

rapidly

less.

we have our Bomb

it is our fear

our damnation

and our

shame.

now

something so sad

has hold of us

that

the breath

leaves

and we can't even

cry.

## I'll take it...

maybe I'm going crazy, that's all right  
but these poems keep rising to the top of my  
head with more and more  
force. now  
after the oceans of booze that I have  
consumed  
it would only seem that attrition would  
be my rightful reward as I continue to  
consume—while  
the madhouses, skidrows and graveyards are  
filled with the likes of  
me—  
yet each night as I sit down to this machine  
with my bottle  
the poems flare and jump out, on and  
on—roaring in the glee of  
easy power: 65 years

dancing—my mouth curling into a  
tiny grin  
as these keys keep meting out a  
substantial energy of cock-  
eyed miracle.

the gods have been kind to me through this  
life-style that would have killed  
an ox of a man  
and I'm no ox of a  
man.

I sensed from the beginning, of  
course, that there was a strange gnawing  
inside of me  
but I never dreamed this  
luck  
this absolute shot of  
grace  
my death will at most seem  
an

afterthought.

## supposedly famous

not much to hang onto in this early morning growling,

my wife, poor dear, downstairs,

I am at the racetrack all day and

up here all night with the bottle and

this machine.

my wife, poor dear, may she find her place

in heaven.

then too

the few people that I have

known, the people I thought had that

little extra flare

that inventive humanity, well, they

dissolved

but

being a natural loner

I am not over-

distraught—

there are still my 5

cats: Ting, Ding, Beeker, Bleeker and

Blob.

not much to hang on to in this early morning growling.

I am now a

supposedly famous

writer

influencing hordes of

typists.

would

that I could

laugh

at all

this.

Fame is the last whore, all the others are

gone.

well, the competition ain't been

much

but that's no hair off my

wrists: I realized all that

long ago while  
starving and  
pissing out the  
window  
while smashing waterglasses of  
booze against the behind-in-the-  
rent  
walls.

Ting, Ding, Beeker, Bleeker and  
Blob.

now Death is a plant growing in my  
mind

not much to hang on to in this early morning growling.

I am sad for the dead and I am sad for the living  
but not for my 5 cats or  
for my wife, my wife who will  
find her place in  
heaven.

and as for the people

dissolved

I didn't dissolve them, they dissolved  
themselves.

and that the sidewalks are empty while

full of feet

passing—

this is the working of the

way.

not much to hang on to

as

a man plays a piano

through my radio and

the walls

stand up and

down

as the courage of everything

even the fleas

the lice

the tarantula

astounds me

in this early morning

growling.

## the last shot

here we are, once again, the last drink, the last  
poem—decades of this splendid luck—another drunken  
a.m., and not on the drunktank floor tonight waiting for  
the black pimp to get off the phone so I can put through my one  
allowed call (so many of those a.m.s too) it took  
me a long time to find the most interesting person to  
drink with: myself, like this, now reaching to my left  
for the last glass of the Blood of the  
Lamb.

## whorehouse

my first experience in a whorehouse  
was in Tijuana.

it was a large place on the edge of  
the city.

I was 17, with two friends.

we got drunk to get our guts

up

then went on

in.

the place was packed with

servicemen

mostly

sailors.

the sailors stood in long

lines

hollering, and beating on

the doors.

Lance got in a short  
line (the lines indicated the  
age of the whore: the shorter the  
line the older the  
whore)

and got it over  
with, came out bold and  
grinning: “well, what you guys  
waiting for?”

the other guy, Jack, he passed me  
the tequila bottle and I took a  
hit and passed it back and he  
took a hit.

Lance looked at us: “I’ll be  
in the car, sleeping it  
off.”

Jack and I waited until he was  
gone  
then started walking toward the  
exit.

Jack was wearing this big

sombrero

and right at the exit was an

old whore sitting in a

chair.

she stuck out her leg

barring our

way: “come on, boys, I’ll make

it *good* for you and

*cheap!*”

somehow that scared the

shit out of Jack and he

said, “my god, I’m going to

PUKE!”

“NOT ON THE FLOOR!” screamed

the whore

and with that

Jack ripped off his

sombrero

and holding it

before him

he must have puked a  
gallon.

then he just stood there

staring down

at it

and the whore

said, “get out of

here!”

Jack ran out the door with

his sombrero

and then the whore

got a very kind look upon her

face and said to me:

“*cheap!*” and I walked

into a room with her

and there was a big fat man

sitting in a chair and

I asked her, “who’s

that?”

and she said, “he’s here to  
see that I don’t get  
hurt.”

and I walked over to the  
man and said, “hey, how ya  
doin’?”

and he said, “fine,  
señor...”

and I said,  
“you live around  
here?”

and he said, “give  
her the  
money.”

“how much?”

“two dollars.”

I gave the lady the two  
dollars  
then walked back to the

man.

“I might come and live  
in Mexico some day,” I  
told him.

“get the hell out of  
here,” he said,  
“NOW!”

as I walked through the  
exit  
Jack was waiting out there  
without his  
sombrero  
but he was still  
wavering  
drunk.

“Christ,” I said, “she was  
*great*, she actually got my  
balls into her  
mouth!”

we walked back to the car.

Lance was passed out, we  
awakened him and he drove us  
out of  
there

somehow

we got through the border  
crossing

and all the way

driving back to

L.A.

we rode Jack for being a

chickenshit

virgin.

Lance did it in a gentle

manner

but I was loud

demeaning Jack for his lack of

guts

and I kept at it

until Jack passed out

near

San Clemente.

I sat up there next to

Lance as we passed the last

tequila bottle back and

forth.

as Los Angeles rushed toward

us

Jack asked, “how was

it?”

and I answered

in a worldly

tone: “I’ve had

better.”

## starting fast

we each

at times

should

remember

the most

elevated

and

lucky

moment

of

our

lives.

for me

it

was

being

a

very young

man

and

sleeping

penniless

and

friendless

upon a

park

bench

in a

strange

city

which

doesn't say

much

for all

those

many

decades

which

followed.

## the crazy truth

the nut in the red outfit  
came walking down the street  
talking to himself  
when a hotshot in a sports car  
cut into an alley  
in front of the nut  
who hollered, “HEY, DOG DRIP!  
SWINE SHIT! YOU GOT PEANUTS FOR  
BRAINS?”

the hotshot braked his sports  
car, backed toward the nut,  
stopped,  
said: “WHAT’S THAT YOU SAID,  
BUDDY?”

“I said, YOU BETTER  
DRIVE OFF WHILE YOU CAN,  
ASSHOLE!”

the hotshot had his girl in the  
car with him and started to  
open the door.

“YOU BETTER NOT GET OUT OF THAT  
CAR, PEANUT BRAIN!”

the door closed and the sports car  
roared  
off.

the nut in the red outfit then  
continued to walk down the  
street.

“THERE AIN’T NOTHIN’ NOWHERE,”  
he said, “AND IT’S GETTING TO BE  
LESS THAN NOTHING ALL THE  
TIME!”

it was a great day  
there on 7th Street just off  
Weymouth  
Drive.

## drive through hell

the people are weary, unhappy and frustrated, the people are

bitter and vengeful, the people are deluded and fearful, the

people are angry and uninventive

and I drive among them on the freeway and they project

what is left of themselves in their manner of driving—

some more hateful, more thwarted than others—

some don't like to be passed, some attempt to keep others

from passing

—some attempt to block lane changes

—some hate cars of a newer, more expensive model

—others in these cars hate the older cars.

the freeway is a circus of cheap and petty emotions, it's

humanity on the move, most of them coming from some place they

hated and going to another they hate just as much or

more.

the freeways are a lesson in what we have become and

most of the crashes and deaths are the collision

of incomplete beings, of pitiful and demented  
lives.

when I drive the freeways I see the soul of humanity of  
my city and it's ugly, ugly, ugly: the living have choked the  
heart  
away.

## for the concerned:

if you get married they think you're

finished

and if you are without a woman they think you're

incomplete.

a large portion of my readers want me to

keep writing about bedding down with madwomen and

streetwalkers—

also, about being in jails and hospitals, or

starving or

puking my guts

out.

I agree that complacency hardly engenders an

immortal literature

but neither does

repetition.

for those readers now

sick at heart

believing that I'm a contented

man—

please have some

cheer: agony sometimes changes

form

but

it never ceases for

anybody.

## a funny\_guy.

Schopenhauer couldn't abide the masses,  
they drove him mad  
but he was able to say,  
“at least, I am not them.”  
and this consoled him to some  
extent  
and I think one of his most humorous writings  
was when he expostulated against some man who  
uselessly cracked his whip  
over his horse  
completely destroying a thought process  
Arthur was involved  
in.  
but the man with the whip was a part of the  
whole  
no matter how seemingly useless and  
stupid

and once great thoughts

often with time

become useless and

stupid.

but Schopenhauer's rage was so

beautiful

so well placed that I laughed

out loud

then

put him down

next to Nietzsche

who was also

all too

human.

## shoes

when you're young

a pair of

female

high-heeled shoes

just sitting

alone

in the closet

can fire your

bones;

when you're old

it's just

a pair of shoes

without

anybody

in them

and

just as

well.

## coffee

I was having a coffee at the

counter

when a man

3 or 4 stools down

asked me,

“listen, weren’t you the

guy who was

hanging from his

heels

from that 4th floor

hotel room

the other

night?”

“yes,” I answered, “that

was me.”

“what made you do

that?” he asked.

“well, it’s pretty  
involved.”

he looked away  
then.

the waitress  
who had been  
standing there  
asked me,

“he was joking,  
wasn’t  
he?”

“no,” I  
said.

I paid, got up, walked  
to the door, opened  
it.

I heard the man  
say, “that guy’s  
nuts.”

out on the street I

walked north

feeling

curiously

honored.

## together

HEY, I hollered across the  
room to her,

DRINK SOME WINE OUT OF  
YOUR SHOE!

WHY? she  
screamed.

BECAUSE THIS USELESSNESS  
NEEDS SOME  
GAMBLE!

I yelled  
back.

HEY, the guy in the next  
apartment beat on the  
wall, I'VE GOT TO GET UP  
IN THE MORNING AND GO  
TO WORK SO FOR CHRIST'S  
SAKE, SHUT

UP!

he damn near broke the wall  
down and had a most  
powerful  
voice.

I walked over to  
her, said, listen, let's  
be quiet, he's got some  
rights.

FUCK YOU, YOU ASSHOLE!

she screamed  
at me.

the guy began pounding  
on the wall  
again.

she was right and he was  
right.

I walked the bottle over  
to the window and

looked out into the  
night.

then I had a good roaring  
drink

and I thought, we are all  
doomed

together, that's all there is  
to

it. (that's all there was  
to that particular drink, just  
like all the  
others.)

then I walked  
back to her and  
she was asleep in  
her  
chair.

I carried her to  
the bed

turned out the  
lights  
then sat in the  
chair by the  
window  
sucking at the  
bottle, thinking,  
well, I've gotten  
this far  
and that's  
plenty.  
  
and now  
she's sleeping  
and  
maybe  
he can  
too.

## the finest of the breed

there's nothing to

discuss

there's nothing to

remember

there's nothing to

forget

it's sad

and

it's not

sad

seems the

most sensible

thing

a person can

do

is

sit

with drink in

hand

as the walls

wave

their goodbye

smiles

one comes through

it

all

with a certain

amount of

efficiency and

bravery

then

leaves

some accept

the possibility of

God

to help them

get

through

others

take it

straight on

and to these

I drink

tonight.

## close to greatness

at one stage in my life

I met a man who claimed to have  
visited Pound at St. Elizabeths.

then I met a woman who not only  
claimed to have visited

E.P.

but also to have made love  
to him—she even showed  
me

certain sections in the

*Cantos*

where Ezra was supposed to have  
mentioned

her.

so there was this man and

this woman

and the woman told me

that Pound had never  
mentioned a visit from this  
man  
and the man claimed that the  
lady had had nothing to do  
with the  
master  
that she was a  
charlatan.

and since I wasn't a  
Poundian scholar  
I didn't know who to  
believe  
but  
one thing I do  
know: when a man is  
living  
many claim relationships  
that are hardly  
so

and after he dies, well,  
then it's everybody's  
party.

my guess is that Pound  
knew neither the lady or the  
gentleman

or if he knew  
one

or if he knew  
both

it was a shameful waste of  
madhouse  
time.

## the stride

Norman and I, both 19, striding the streets of  
night...feeling big, young young, big and  
young

Norman said, "Jesus Christ, I bet nobody  
walks with giant strides like we do!"

1939

after having listened to

Stravinsky

not long

after,

the war got

Norman.

I sit here now

46 years later

on the second floor of a hot

one a.m. morning

drunk

still big

not

so young.

Norman, you would

never guess

what

has happened to

me

what

has happened to

all of

us.

I remember your

saying: “make it or

break it.”

neither happened and

it

won't.

## final story

god, there he is drunk again  
telling the same old stories  
over and over again  
as they push him for  
more—some with nothing  
else to do, others  
secretly snickering  
at this  
great writer  
babbling  
drooling  
in his little white  
rat  
whiskers  
talking about  
war  
talking about the

wars

talking about the brave

fish

the bullfights

even about his wives.

the people

come into the

bar

night after night

for the same old

show

which he will one day

end

alone

blowing his brains to

the walls.

the price of creation

is never

too high.

the price of living

with other people

always

is.

## friends within the darkness

I can remember starving in a  
small room in a strange city  
shades pulled down, listening to  
classical music

I was young I was so young it hurt like a knife  
inside

because there was no alternative except to hide as long  
as possible—

not in self-pity but with dismay at my limited chance:  
trying to connect.

the old composers—Mozart, Bach, Beethoven,  
Brahms were the only ones who spoke to me and  
they were dead.

finally, starved and beaten, I had to go into  
the streets to be interviewed for low-paying and  
monotonous  
jobs

by strange men behind desks

men without eyes men without faces

who would take my hours

break them

piss on them.

now I work for the editors the readers the

critics

but still hang around and drink with

Mozart, Bach, Brahms and the

Bee

some buddies

some men

sometimes all we need to be able to continue alone

are the dead

rattling the walls

that close us in.

## death sat on my knee and cracked with laughter

I was writing three short stories a week  
and sending them to the *Atlantic Monthly*  
they would all come back.  
my money went for stamps and envelopes  
and paper and wine  
and I got so thin I used to  
suck my cheeks  
together  
and they'd meet over the top of my  
tongue (that's when I thought about  
Hamsun's *Hunger*—where he ate his own  
flesh; I once took a bite of my wrist  
but it was very salty).

anyhow, one night in Miami Beach (I  
have no idea what I was doing in that  
city) I had not eaten in 60 hours

and I took the last of my starving

pennies

went down to the corner grocery and

bought a loaf of bread.

I planned to chew each slice slowly—

as if each were a slice of turkey

or a luscious

steak

and I got back to my room and

opened the wrapper and the

slices of bread were green

and mouldy.

my party was not to be.

I just dumped the bread upon the

floor

and I sat on that bed wondering about

the green mould, the

decay.

my rent money was used up and

I listened to all the sounds

of all the people in that  
roominghouse

and down on the floor were  
the dozens of stories with the  
dozens of *Atlantic Monthly*  
rejection slips.

it was early evening and I  
turned out the light and  
went to bed and  
it wasn't long before I  
heard the mice coming out,  
I heard them creeping over my  
immortal stories and  
eating the  
green mouldy bread.

and in the morning  
when I awakened  
I saw that  
all that was left of the

bread

was the green

mould.

they had eaten right to the

edge of the mould

leaving chunks of

it

among the stories and

rejection slips

as I heard the sound of

my landlady's vacuum

cleaner

bumping down the

hall

slowly approaching my

door.

## oh yes

I've been so  
down in the mouth  
lately  
that sometimes when I  
bend over to  
lace my shoes  
there are  
three  
tongues.

## O tempora! O mores!

I get these girly magazines in the mail because

I'm writing short stories for them again

and here in these pages are these ladies

exposing their jewel boxes—

it looks more like a gynecologist's

journal—

everything boldly and clinically

exposed

beneath bland and bored physiognomies.

it's a turn-off of gigantic

proportions:

the secret is in the

imagination—

take that away and you have dead

meat.

a century back

a man could be driven mad

by a well-turned  
ankle, and  
why not?  
one could imagine  
that the rest  
would be  
magical  
indeed!

now they shove it at us like a  
McDonald's hamburger  
on a platter.

there is hardly anything as beautiful as  
a woman in a long dress  
not even the sunrise  
not even the geese flying south  
in the long V formation  
in the bright freshness  
of early morning.

## the passing of a great one

he was the only living writer I ever met who I truly  
admired and he was dying when I met  
him.

(we in this game are shy on praise even toward  
those who do it very well, but I never had this  
problem with J.F.)

I visited him several times at the  
hospital (there was never anybody else  
about) and upon entering his room  
I was never sure if he was asleep  
or?

“John?”

he was stretched there on that bed, blind  
and amputated:  
advanced  
diabetes.

“John it’s

Hank...”

he would answer and then we would talk for a short bit (mostly he would talk and I would listen; after all, he was our mentor, our god):

*Ask the Dust*

*Wait Until Spring, Bandini*

*Dago Red*

all the others.

to end up in Hollywood writing

movie scripts

that’s what killed

him.

“the worst thing,” he told me,

“is bitterness, people end up so

bitter.”

he wasn’t bitter, although he had

every right to

be...

at the funeral I  
met several of his script-writing  
buddies.

“let’s write something about  
John,” one of them  
suggested.

“I don’t think I can,” I  
told them.

and, of course, they never  
did.

## the wine of forever

re-reading some of Fante's

*The Wine of Youth*

in bed

this mid-afternoon

my big cat

BEAKER

asleep beside

me.

the writing of some

men

is like a vast bridge

that carries you

over

the many things

that claw and tear.

Fante's pure and magic

emotions

hang on the simple

clean

line.

that this man died

one of the slowest and

most horrible deaths

that I ever witnessed or

heard

about...

the gods play no

favorites.

I put the book down

beside me.

book on one side,

cat on the

other...

John, meeting you,

even the way it

was was the event of my

life. I can't say

I would have died for

you, I couldn't have handled

it that well.

but it was good to see you

again

this

afternoon.

## true

one of Lorca's best lines

is,

“agony, always

agony...”

think of this when you

kill a

cockroach or

pick up a razor to

shave

or awaken in the morning

to

face the

sun.

## Glenn Miller

long ago

across from the campus

in the malt shop

the juke box going

the young girls perfectly in tune

dancing with the football players

and the college bright boys

Glenn Miller was the big thing then

and everybody stepped

almost everybody

I sat with a couple of disciples

we were supposed to be outlaws

the explorers of Truth

but I liked the music

and the laziness of waiting

as the world rushed toward war

as Hitler speechified

the girls whirled  
graceful  
showing leg  
that last bright sunshine  
we warmed ourselves in it  
shutting away everything else  
while the universe opened its mouth  
in an attempt to  
swallow us all.

## Emily Bukowski

my grandmother always attended the sunrise

Easter service

and the Rose Bowl

parade.

she also liked to go to the

beach, sit on those benches

facing the sea.

she thought movies were

sinful.

she ate enormous platefuls of

food.

she prayed for me

constantly.

“poor boy: the devil is inside

of you.”

she said the devil was

inside her husband

too.

though not divorced

they lived

separately

and had not seen each

other

for 15 years.

she said that hospitals were

nonsense

she never used them

or

the doctors.

at 87

she died one evening

while feeding her

canary.

she liked to

drop the seed

into the cage

while making these

little

bird sounds.

she wasn't very

interesting

but few people

are.

## some suggestions

in addition to the envy and the rancor of some of  
my peers

there is the other thing, it comes by telephone and  
letter: “you are the world’s greatest living  
writer.”

this doesn’t please me either because somehow  
I believe that to be the world’s greatest living  
writer

there must be something  
terribly wrong with you.

I don’t even want to be the world’s greatest  
dead writer.

just being dead would be fair  
enough.

also, the word “writer” is a very tiresome  
word.

just think how much more pleasing it would be

to hear:

you are the world's greatest pool

player

or

you are the world's greatest

fucker

or

you are the world's greatest

horseplayer.

now

that

would really make

a man feel

good.

## invasion

I didn't know that  
there was anything  
in the closet  
although some nights  
my sleep would be  
interrupted by strange  
rumblings  
but  
I always thought  
these to be  
minor  
quakes.

the closet was  
the one  
down the hall  
and  
was seldom

used.

the curious thing

for me

was that

the cats

(I had 4 of

them)

appeared to be

leaving

large

droppings

about

(and

they were

house-broken).

then

the cats

vanished

one by

one

but the fresh  
droppings  
kept  
appearing.

it was one night  
while I was  
reading the  
stock market  
quotations  
that I  
looked up  
and  
there stood  
the  
lion  
in the bedroom  
doorway.

I was  
in bed

propped up  
with a  
couple of  
pillows  
and drinking a  
hot  
chocolate.

now  
nobody  
can believe  
a lion  
in a  
bedroom—  
at least  
not  
in a city  
of any  
size.

so  
I just kept

looking at the

lion

and not

quite

believing.

then

it turned and

walked down the

stairway.

I

followed it—

a good

18 feet

behind—

clutching my

baseball bat

in one

hand

and my

4-inch knife

in the

other.

I watched the

lion

go down the

stairway

then walk

across the front

room

it paused

before the large

plate glass

sliding

doors

which faced the

yard and the

street.

they were

closed.

the lion

emitted an

impatient

growl

and

leaped through the

glass

crashing through

into the

night.

I sat

on the couch

in the

dark

still unable

to believe

what

I had

seen.

then

I heard

a scream

of such utter

agony and

terror

that

for a

moment

I could

neither

see

breathe nor

comprehend.

I rose,

turned to

barricade myself

in the

bedroom

only to see

3 small  
lion cubs  
trundling  
down  
the stairway—  
cute  
devilish  
felines  
as the  
mother  
returned  
through the  
night and the  
shattered glass  
door  
half dragging  
half carrying  
a bloodied  
man  
across the

rug

leaving a

red

trail

the cubs

rushed

forward

and the

moon

came through

to light

the

whirling

feast.

## hard times

as I got out of my car down at the docks

two men started walking toward

me.

one looked old and mean and the other was

big and smiling.

they were both wearing

caps.

they kept walking toward me.

I got ready.

“something bothering you guys?”

“no,” said the old

guy.

they both stopped.

“don’t you remember us?”

“I’m not sure...”

“we painted your house.”

“oh, yeah...come on, I’ll buy you a  
beer...”

we walked toward a cafe.

“you were one of the nicest guys we ever  
worked for...”

“yeah?”

“yeah, you kept bringing us beer...”

we sat at one of those rough tables

overlooking the harbor. we

sucked at our

beers.

“you still live with that young

woman?” asked the old

guy.

“yeah. how you guys doing?”

“there’s no work now...”

I took out a ten and handed it to the old

one.

“listen, I forgot to tip you guys...”

“thanks.”

we sat with our beer.

the canneries had shut down.

Todd Shipyard had failed

and was

phasing them

out.

San Pedro was back in the

30's.

I finished my beer.

“well, you guys, I gotta go.”

“where ya gonna go?”

“gonna buy some fish...”

I walked off toward the fish market,

turned halfway there

gave them

thumb-up

right hand.

they both took their caps off and  
waved them.

I laughed, turned, walked  
off.

sometimes it's hard to know  
what to  
do.

## longshot

of course, I had lost much blood  
maybe it was a different kind of  
dying  
but I still had enough left to wonder  
about  
the absence of fear.

it was going to be easy: they had  
put me in a special ward they had  
in that place  
for the poor who were  
dying.

—the doors were a little thicker  
—the windows a little smaller  
and there was much  
wheeling in and out of  
bodies  
plus

the presence of the priest  
giving last  
rites.

you saw the priest all the time  
but you seldom saw a  
doctor.

it was always nice to see a  
nurse—  
they rather took the place of  
angels  
for those who  
believed in that sort of  
thing.

the priest kept bugging me.

“no offense, Father, but I’d  
rather die without  
it,” I whispered.

“but on your entrance application you  
stated ‘Catholic.’”

“that was just to be  
social...”

“my son, once a Catholic, always a  
Catholic!”

“Father,” I whispered, “that’s not  
true...”

the nicest thing about the place were  
the Mexican girls who came in to  
change the sheets, they giggled, they  
joked with the dying and  
they were  
beautiful.

and the worst thing was  
the Salvation Army Band who  
came around at  
5:30 a.m.

Easter Morning  
and gave us the old  
religious feeling—horns and drums

and all, much  
brass and  
pounding, tremendous volume  
there were 40 or so  
in that room  
and that band  
stiffened a good  
10 or 15 of us by  
6 a.m.

and they rolled them right out  
to the morgue elevator  
over to the west, a very  
busy elevator.

I stayed in Death's waiting room for  
3 days.

I watched them roll out close to  
fifty.

they finally got tired of waiting  
for me

and rolled me

out of there.

a nice black homosexual fellow

pushed me

along.

“you want to know the odds of

coming out of that ward?”

he asked.

“yeah.”

“50 to one.”

“hell,

got any

smokes?”

“no, but I can get you

some.”

we rolled along

as the sun managed to come through the

wire-webbed windows

and I began to think of

that first drink when

I got

out.

## concrete

he had set up the

reading

he was one of the foremost practitioners

of concrete poetry

and after I read I went

up there to where he

lived

his place was high in the

mountains and

we drank and looked out the large

window at very large

birds

flying about

gliding mostly

he said they were eagles

(he might have been putting me

on)

and his wife played the

piano

a bit of

Brahms

he didn't talk

much

he was a concrete

man

his wife was very

beautiful

and the way the eagles

glided

that was very beautiful

also

then it was twilight

then it was night

and you couldn't see the eagles

anymore

it had been an afternoon

reading

we drank until one

a.m.

then I got into my car

and drove the winding

narrow road

d

o

w

n

I was too drunk to fear the

danger

when I got to my place I

drank two bottles of

beer and went to

bed.

then the phone

rang

it was my

girlfriend

she had been calling all

night

she was angry

she accused me of fornicating with

another

I told her about the beautiful

eagles

how they glided

and that I had been with a concrete

man

bullshit

she said

and hung

up

I stretched out there

looked at the ceiling and

wondered what the eagles

ate

then the phone rang

again

and she asked

did the concrete man have a

concrete wife and did you stick you

dick in her?

no

I answered

I fucked an

eagle

she hung up

again

concrete poetry

I thought

what the hell is

it?

then I went to sleep and I

slept and I

slept.

## Gay Paree

the cafes in Paris are just like you imagine

they are:

very well-dressed people, snobs, and

the snob-waiter comes up and takes your

order

as if you were a

leper.

but after you get your wine

you feel better

you begin to feel like a snob

yourself

and you give the guy at the next table

a sidelong glance

he catches you and

you twitch your nose

a bit as if you had just smelled

dogshit

then you

look away.

and the food

when it arrives

is always too mild.

the French are delicate with their

spices.

and

as you eat and drink

you realize that everybody is

terrorized:

too bad

too bad

such a lovely city

full of

cowards.

then

more wine brings more

realization:

Paris is the world and the world

is

Paris.

drink to it

and

because of

it.

## I thought the stuff tasted worse than usual

I used to drink with Jane

every night

until two or

three

a.m.

and I had to

report for

work

at 5:30

a.m.

one morning

I was sitting

checking mail

next to this

healthy

religious

fellow

and he said,

“hey, I *smell*

something, don’t

you?”

I answered in the

negative.

“actually,” he said,

“it smells something

like

gasoline.”

“well,” I told

him, “don’t light a

match or

I might

explode.”

## the blade

there was no parking near the post office where

I worked at night

so I found this splendid spot

(nobody seemed to care to park there)

on a dirt road behind a

slaughterhouse

and as I sat in my car

just before work

smoking a last cigarette

I was treated to the same

scene

as each evening tailed off into

night—

the pigs were herded out of the

yard pens

and onto runways

by a man making pig sounds and

flapping a large canvas  
and the pigs ran wildly  
up the runway  
toward the waiting  
blade,  
and many evenings  
after watching that  
after finishing my  
smoke

I just started the car  
backed out of there and  
drove away from my  
job.

my absenteeism reached such astonishing  
proportions  
that I had to finally  
park  
at some expense  
behind a Chinese bar  
where all I could see were tiny shuttered

windows

with neon signs advertising some

oriental

libation.

it seemed less real, and that was

what was

needed.

## the boil

I was making good with the girls on the assembly line at

Nabisco, I had recently beaten up the company

bully

on my lunch hour,

things were going well, I was from out of

town, the stranger who seldom spoke to

anybody, I was the mystery man, I was the

cool number,

almost all those fillies had an interest

in me

and the guys didn't know

what the hell.

then one morning I awakened in my

room

with a huge boil on the side of

my head (right cheek)

and

it was damn near the size of a  
golf ball.

I should have phoned in sick  
but

I didn't have the sense and  
went on in  
anyhow.

it made a difference: the women's eyes  
fell away from mine, and the guys  
no longer acted fearful  
and I felt defeated by  
fate.

the boil remained

for

2 days

3 days

4 days.

on the 5th day the foreman handed me  
my papers: "we're cutting back, you're

finished.”

this was one hour before

lunch.

I walked to my locker, opened it,

took off my apron and cap

threw them in there

along with the

key

and walked

out

a truly horrible walk

to the street

where I turned around

and looked back at the building

feeling as if they had

discovered

something

hideously indecent

about me.

## not listed

my horse was the grey  
a 4 to one shot  
with early lick  
and he had a length and  
a half  
3/4's of the way  
down the stretch  
when his left front leg  
snapped  
and he tumbled  
tossing the jock  
over his neck and  
head.  
luckily  
the field avoided both  
the horse and the  
jock—who

got up and limped away  
from the kicking  
animal.

accident potential:  
that's something  
that's not listed in  
the Racing Form.

in the clubhouse

I saw Harry  
standing in a far-  
off corner.

he was an x-jock's  
agent

now working as a  
trainer

but not having  
too many mounts  
to train.

he was behind his

dark shades

looking

awful.

“you have the grey?”

I asked.

“yeah,” he said,

“heavy...”

“you need a transfusion,

it’s not much but...”

I slipped

3 folded 20’s

into his coat

pocket.

“thanks,” he

said.

“put it on a good one.”

Harry had done me some

nice things

and anyhow  
he was one of the  
best  
working for an edge  
in one of the bloodiest  
rackets  
around: we are trying to  
beat the percentages  
and each day  
some must fall  
so that  
others can go  
on. (the track is just  
like anyplace else  
only there  
it usually happens  
more  
quickly.)  
I walked over and got  
a coffee.

I liked the next

race

a six furlong affair for

non-winners of

two.

one good hit

would put the gods in

place

and cure

everything

in a flash of

glory...

## I'm not a misogynist

more and more

I get letters from

young ladies:

“I’m a well-built 19

am between jobs and

your writing turns me

on

I’m a good housekeeper

and secretary and

would *never* get in

your way

and

would send a

photo but that’s

so tacky...”

“I’m 21

tall and attractive

have read your books

I work for a

lawyer and

if you're ever in

town

please call me."

"I met you

after your reading

at the Troubadour

we had a night

together

do you remember?

I married

that man

you told me had a

mean voice

when you phoned and

he answered

we're divorced now

I have a little

girl

age 2

I am no longer in

the music

business but

miss it

would like to

see you

again...”

“I’ve read

*all* your books

I’m 23

not much

breast

but have *great*

legs

and

just a few

words

from you

would mean

so much

to me...”

girls

please give your

bodies and your

lives

to

the young men

who

deserve them

besides

there is

no way

I would welcome

the

intolerable

dull

senseless hell

you would bring

me

and

I wish you

luck

in bed

and

out

but not

in

mine

thank

you.

## the lady in the castle

she lived in this house

that looked like a

castle

and when you got inside

the ceilings were so very

high

and I was poor

and it all rather

fascinated

me.

she

was no longer

young

but she had

masses

of hair

that damn near

went down to her  
ankles  
and  
I thought about  
how strange  
it would be  
doing it  
with all that  
hair.

I drove up there  
several times  
in my old  
car  
and she had fine  
liquors to  
drink  
and we sat  
but I could  
never quite get  
near her

and though I didn't

push at

it

something about

not

connecting

*did* offend my

ego

for ugly as I was

I had always been

lucky with the

ladies.

it confused me

and I suppose

I needed

that.

she liked to

talk about

the arts and

about

film making  
and listening  
to all that  
only made me  
drink  
more.

I  
finally  
just  
gave her  
up  
and a good year  
or so  
went by  
when  
one night  
the phone  
rang: it was the  
lady.

“I want to come see

you,” she said.

“I’m writing now, I’m  
hot...I can’t see  
anybody...”

“I just want to come  
by, I won’t bother you,  
I’ll just sit on the couch,  
I’ll sleep on the couch, I  
won’t bother you...”

“NO! JESUS CHRIST, I  
CAN’T SEE ANYBODY!”

I hung up.

the lady who was *actually*  
on the couch  
said, “oh, you’re all  
SOFT now!”

“yeah.”

“come here...”

she took my penis

in her hand

flicked out her

tongue

then

stopped.

“what are you writing?”

“nothing...I’ve got writer’s

block...”

“sure you have...your pipes are

clogged...you need to get

cleaned out...”

then she had me in her

mouth

and then the phone rang

again...

in a fury

I ran over to the

phone

picked it

up.

it was the lady in the

castle:

“listen, I won’t bother you,

you won’t even know I’m

there...”

“YOU WHORE, I’M GETTING A

BLOW JOB!”

I hung up and

turned back.

the other lady was walking

toward the

door.

“what’sa matter?” I

asked.

“I can’t STAND that

term!”

“what term?”

“BLOW JOB!” she

screamed.

she slammed the door and

was gone...

I walked to where the

typewriter sat

put a new piece of paper

in there.

it was one

a.m.

I sat there and

drank scotch and

beer chasers

smoked cheap

cigars.

3:15 a.m.

I was still sitting

there

re-lighting old  
cigar stubs and  
drinking ale.

the new  
piece of paper was still  
unused.

I switched out the  
lights  
worked my way toward  
the bedroom  
got myself on the  
bed  
clothes still  
on

I could hear the toilet  
running  
but couldn't get up  
to tap the handle  
to end that

sound

my god damned pipes were  
clogged.

## relentless as the tarantula

they're not going to let you  
sit at a front table  
at some cafe in Europe  
in the mid-afternoon sun.  
if you do, somebody's going to  
drive by and  
spray your guts with a  
submachine gun.

they're not going to let you  
feel good  
for very long  
anywhere.

the forces aren't going to  
let you sit around  
fucking-off and  
relaxing.

you've got to do it

their way.

the unhappy, the bitter and

the vengeful

need their

fix—which is

you or somebody

anybody

in agony, or

better yet

dead, dropped into some

hole.

as long as there are

human beings about

there is never going to be

any peace

for any individual

upon this earth (or

anywhere else

they might

escape to).

all you can do  
is maybe grab  
ten lucky minutes  
here  
or maybe an hour  
there.

something  
is working toward you  
right now, and  
I mean you  
and nobody but  
you.

## their night

never could read *Tender Is the*

*Night*

but they've made a

tv adaptation of the

book

and it's been running

for several

nights

and I have spent

ten minutes

here and there

watching the troubles of

the rich

while they are leaning

against their beach chairs

in Nice

or walking about their

large rooms

drink in hand while

making

philosophical

statements

or

fucking up

at the

dinner party

or the

dinner dance

they really have no

*idea*

of what to do with

themselves:

swim?

tennis?

drive up the

coast?

down the

coast?

find

new beds?

lose old

ones?

or

fuck with the

arts and the

artists?

having nothing to struggle

against

they have nothing to struggle

for.

the rich are different

all right

so is the ring-

tailed

maki and the

sand

flea.

## huh?

in

Germany France Italy

I can walk down the streets and be

followed by

young men laughing

young ladies

giggling and

old

ladies turning their noses

up...

while

in America

I am just another

tired

old man

doing whatever

tired old men

do.

oh, this has its

compensations:

I can take my pants

to the cleaners or

stand in a

supermarket line

without any

hubbub at

all:

the gods have allowed me

a gentle

anonymity.

yet

at times

I do consider my

overseas fame

and

the only thing

I can come up with is

that

I must have some

great motherfucking

translators.

I must

owe them

the hair on my

balls

or

possibly

my balls

themselves.

## it's funny, isn't it? #1

we were standing around

at this birthday party

at this fancy

restaurant

and

many

special people were

about

preening their

fame.

I wanted to run

out

when a man

standing near by

said something

exactly appropriate

to the

occasion.

“hey,” I said to

my wife, “this

guy’s got

something. when we are

seated

let’s try to

sit next to

him.”

we did and as

the drinks were

poured

the man began

talking

he began on a

long story

which was

building toward a

punch

line.

my problem was that

I could guess

what the

punch line

was

going to

be.

and

he talked

on and

on

then

dropped the

line.

“shit,” I

told him, “that

was

awful, you’ve

really

disappointed

me...”

he

only began

on another

story.

I walked over to

another table

and stood behind

the now

great

movie star.

“listen,

when I first met

you

you were just a nice

German boy.

now

you’ve turned into

a

conceited

prick. you've

really

disappointed

me.”

the great movie

star (who was a

man

mighty of

muscle) growled

and

shook his

shoulders.

then I walked over to

the table

where the birthday lady

sat

surrounded by

all these

media

folk.

“looking at you

people,” I said, “makes

me feel like

vomiting

all over

your

inept

plausibilities!”

“oh,” said the lady

to her

guests, “he

*always* talks

that

way!”

and she gave a

laugh, poor

dear.

so

I said, “Happy

birthday,

but

I warned you

never to

invite me to these

things.”

then

I walked back to

my table

motioned the waiter

for

another

drink.

the man

was telling

another

story

but

it was not

nearly

as good

as

this

one.

## it's funny, isn't it? #2

when we were kids

laying around the lawn

on our

bellies

we often talked

about

how

we'd like to

die

and

we all

agreed on the

same

thing:

we'd all

like to die

fucking

(although  
none of us  
had  
done any  
fucking)  
and now  
that  
we are hardly  
kids  
any longer  
we think more  
about  
how  
not to  
die  
and  
although  
we're  
ready

most of

us

would

prefer to

do it

alone

under the

sheets

now

that

most of

us

have fucked

our lives

away.

## the beautiful lady editor

she was a beautiful woman, I used to see photographs of her in the literary magazines of that day.

I was young but always alone—I felt that I needed the time to get something done and the only way I could buy time was with poverty.

I worked not so much with craft but more with getting down what was edging me toward madness—and I had flashes of luck, but it was hardly a pleasurable existence.

I think I showed a fine endurance but slowly then health and courage began to leak away.

and the night arrived when everything fell apart—and fear, doubt, humiliation entered...

and I wrote a number of letters using my last stamps

telling a few select people that I had made a  
mistake, that I was starving and trapped in a small  
freezing shack of darkness in a strange city in  
a strange  
state.

I mailed the letters and then I waited long wild days and  
nights, hoping, yearning at last for a decent  
response.

only two letters ever arrived—on the same day—  
and I opened the pages and shook the pages looking for  
money but there was  
none.

one letter was from my father, a six-pager telling me that  
I deserved what was happening, that I should have become  
an engineer like he told me, and that nobody would ever read  
the kind of stuff I wrote, and on and on, like  
that.

the other letter was from the beautiful lady editor, neatly typed on  
expensive stationery, and she said that she was no longer

publishing her literary magazine, that she had found God and was living in a castle on a hill in Italy and helping the poor, and she signed her famous name, with a “God Bless you,” and that was that.

ah, you have no idea, in that dark freezing shack, how much I wanted to be poor in Italy instead of Atlanta, to be a poor peasant, yes, or even a dog on her bedspread, or even a flea on that dog on that bedspread: how much I wanted the tiniest warmth.

the lady had published me along with Henry Miller, Sartre, Celine, others.

I should never have asked for money in a world where millions of peasants were crawling the starving streets

and even some years later when the lady editor died

I still thought her beautiful.

## about the PEN conference

take a writer away from his typewriter

and all you have left

is

the sickness

which started him

typing

in the

beginning.

## everybody talks too much

when

the cop pulled me

over

I

handed him my

license.

he

went back

to radio in

the make

and model

of my car

and

get clearance on

my plates.

he wrote

the ticket

walked  
up  
handed it  
to me  
to  
sign.

I did  
he gave  
me  
back the  
license.

“how come  
you  
don't  
say  
anything?”  
he asked.

I shrugged  
my

shoulders.

“well, sir,”

he

said, “have

a

good day

and

drive

carefully.”

I

noticed

some sweat

on his

brow

and the

hand

that held

the

ticket

seemed to

be

trembling

or

perhaps

I

was only

imagining it?

anyhow

I

watched him

move

toward

his

bike

then I

pulled

away...

when confronted

with

dutiful

policemen

or

women

in rancor

I

have nothing

to

say

to them

for

if I

truly

began

it would

end

in

somebody's

death:

theirs or

mine

so

I

let them

have

their

little

victories

which

they need

far

more

than

I

do.

## me and my buddy.

I can still see us

together

back then

sitting by the river

while shit-

faced on the

grape

and playing with the

poem

knowing it to be

utterly useless

but something to

do

while

waiting

the Emperors

with their frightened

clay faces

watch us as we

drink

Li Po crumbles his

poems

sets them on

fire

floats them down the

river.

“what have you

done?” I

ask him.

Li passes the

bottle: “they are

going to end

no matter what

happens...”

I drink to his

knowledge

pass the bottle

back

sit tightly upon my

poems

which I have

jammed halfway up my

crotch

I help him burn

some more of his

poesy

they float well

down

the river

lighting up the

night

as good words

should.

## song

Julio came by with his guitar and sang his latest song.

Julio was famous, he wrote songs and also published books of little drawings and poems.

they were very good.

Julio sang a song about his latest love affair.

he sang that it began so well then it went to hell.

those were not the words exactly but that was the meaning of the words.

Julio finished

singing.

then he said, “I still care for  
her, I can’t get her off my  
mind.”

“what will I do?” Julio  
asked.

“drink,” Henry said,  
pouring.

Julio just looked at his  
glass:

“I wonder what she’s doing  
now?”

“probably engaging in oral  
copulation,” Henry  
suggested.

Julio put his guitar back in  
the case and  
walked to the  
door.

Henry walked Julio to his car which  
was parked in the  
drive.

it was a nice moonlit  
night.

as Julio started his car and  
backed out the drive  
Henry waved him a  
farewell.

then he went inside  
sat  
down.

he finished Julio's untouched  
drink  
then he  
phoned  
her.

"he was just by," Henry told  
her, "he's feeling very

bad...”

“you’ll have to excuse me,”  
she said, “but I’m busy right  
now.”

she hung  
up.

and Henry poured one of his  
own  
as outside the crickets sang  
their own  
song.

## practice

in that depression neighborhood I had two buddies

Eugene and Frank

and I had wild fist fights with each of

them

once or twice a week.

the fights lasted 3 or 4 hours and we came out

with

smashed noses, fattened lips, black eyes, sprained

wrists, bruised knuckles, purple

welts.

our parents said nothing, let us fight on and

on

watching disinterestedly and

finally going back to their newspapers

or their radios or their thwarted sex lives,

they only became angry if we tore or ruined our

clothing, and for that and only for that.

but Eugene and Frank and I  
we had some good work-outs  
we rumbled through the evenings, crashing through  
hedges, fighting along the asphalt, over the  
curbings and into strange front and backyards of  
unknown homes, the dogs barking, the people screaming at  
us.

we were  
maniacal, we never quit until the call for supper  
which none of us could afford to  
miss.

anyhow, Eugene became a Commander in the  
Navy and Frank became a Supreme Court Justice, State of  
California and I fiddled with the  
poem.

## love poem to a stripper

50 years ago I watched the girls

shake it and strip

at The Burbank and The Follies

and it was very sad

and very dramatic

as the light turned from green to

purple to pink

and the music was loud and

vibrant,

now I sit here tonight

smoking and

listening to classical

music

but I still remember some of

their names: Darlene, Candy, Jeanette

and Rosalie.

Rosalie was the

best, she knew how,  
and we twisted in our seats and  
made sounds  
as Rosalie brought magic  
to the lonely  
so long ago.

now Rosalie  
either so very old or  
so quiet under the  
earth,  
this is the pimple-faced  
kid  
who lied about his  
age  
just to watch  
you.

you were good, Rosalie  
in 1935,  
good enough to remember  
now

when the light is  
yellow  
and the nights are  
slow.

## my buddy

for a 21-year-old boy in New Orleans I wasn't worth

much: I had a dark small room that smelled of

piss and death

yet I just wanted to stay in there, and there were

two lively girls down at the end of the hall who

kept knocking on my door and yelling, "Get up!

There are good things out here!"

"Go away," I told them, but that only goaded

them on, they left notes under my door and

scotch-taped flowers to the

doorknob.

I was on cheap wine and green beer and

dementia...

I got to know the old guy in the next

room, somehow I felt old like

him; his feet and ankles were swollen and he couldn't

lace his shoes.

each day about one p.m. we went for a walk  
together and it was a very slow  
walk: each step was painful for  
him.

as we came to the curbing I helped him  
up and down  
gripping him by an elbow  
and the back of his  
belt, we made it.

I liked him: he never questioned me about  
what I was or wasn't  
doing.

he should have been my father, and I liked  
best what he said over and  
over: "Nothing is worth  
it."

he was a  
sage.

those young girls should have

left him the  
notes and the  
flowers.

## Jon Edgar Webb

I had a lyric poem period down in New Orleans, pounding  
out these fat rolling lines and  
drinking gallons of beer.

it felt good like screaming in a madhouse, the madhouse of  
my world  
as the mice scattered among the  
empties.

at times I went into the bars  
but I couldn't work it out with those people who sat on the  
stools:  
men evaded me and the women were terrified of  
me.

bartenders asked that I  
leave.

I did, struggling back with wondrous six-packs  
to the room and the mice and those fat rolling  
lines.

that lyric poem period was a raving bitch of a  
time  
and there was an editor right around the  
corner who  
fed each page into a waiting press, rejecting  
nothing  
even though I was unknown  
he printed me upon ravenous paper  
manufactured to last  
2,000 years.

this editor who was also the publisher and  
the printer  
kept a straight face as I handed him the ten to  
twenty pages  
each morning:  
“is that all?”

that crazy son of a bitch, he was a lyric  
poem  
himself.

## thank you

some want me to go on writing about whores  
and puking.

others say that type of thing disgusts  
them.

well, I don't miss the  
whores

although now and then one or another makes an  
attempt to locate  
me.

I don't know if they miss all the booze and  
the bit of money I gave them

or if they are enthralled at the way

I've immortalized them in  
literature.

anyhow, they must now make do with  
whatever men

they are able to scrounge

up.

—those poor darlings had no

idea...

and neither did I

that those ugly roaring nights

would be fodder

such as even

Dostoevski

would not shy away

from.

## the magic curse

I never liked skid-row and so I stayed away from the soup  
kitchens, the bloodbanks and all the so-called hand-  
outs.

I got so god damned thin that if

I turned sidewise it was hard to see my shadow under a  
hard noon sun.

it didn't matter to me so long as I stayed away from the  
crowd

and even down there it was a  
successful and an unsuccessful  
crowd.

I don't think I was insane

but many of the

insane think

that

but I think

now

if anything saved me

it was the avoidance of the

crowd

it was my

food

still

is.

get me in a room with more than

3 people

I tend to act

ill

odd.

I once

even asked my wife: look, I must be

sick...perhaps I ought to see a

shrink?

Christ, I said, he might cure me

and then what would I

do?

she just looked at me

and we forgot the

whole

thing.

## party's over

after you've pulled off the tablecloth with

the full plates of food

and broken the windows

and rung the bells of

idiots

and have

spoken true and terrible

words

and have

chased the mob through the

doorway—

then comes the great and

peaceful moment: sitting alone

and

pouring that quiet drink.

the world is better without

them.

only the plants and the animals are  
true comrades.

I drink to them and with  
them.

they wait as I fill their  
glasses.

## no nonsense

Faulkner loved his whiskey

and along with the

writing

he didn't have

time

for much

else.

he didn't open

most of his

mail

just held it up

to the light

and if it didn't

contain a

check

he trashed

it.

## escape

the best part was  
pulling down the  
shades  
stuffing the doorbell  
with rags  
putting the phone  
in the  
refrigerator  
and going to bed  
for 3 or 4  
days.

and the next best  
part  
was  
nobody ever  
missed  
me.

## wearing the collar

I live with a lady and four cats  
and some days we all get  
along.

some days I have trouble with  
one of the  
cats.

other days I have trouble with  
two of the  
cats.

other days,  
three.

some days I have trouble with  
all four of the  
cats  
and the  
lady:

ten eyes looking at me

as if I was a dog.

## a cat is a cat is a cat is a cat

she's whistling and clapping

for the cats

at 2 a.m.

as I sit in here

with my

Beethoven.

“they're just prowling,” I

tell her...

Beethoven rattles his bones

majestically

and those damn cats

don't care

about

any of it

and

if they did

I wouldn't like them

as

well:

things begin to lose their

natural value

when they approach

human

endeavor.

nothing against

Beethoven:

he did fine

for what he

was

but I wouldn't want

him

on my rug

with one leg

over his head

while

he was  
licking  
his balls.

## marching through Georgia

we are burning like a chicken wing left on the grill of an  
outdoor barbecue

we are unwanted and burning we are burning and unwanted we are  
an unwanted

burning

as we sizzle and fry

to the bone

the coals of Dante's *Inferno* spit and sputter beneath

us

and

above the sky is an open hand and

the words of wise men are useless

it's not a nice world, a nice world it's

not...

come on, try this nice burnt chicken-wing poem

it's hot it's tough not much

meat

but 'tis sadly sensible

and one or two bites ends it

thus

## gone

it left like the ladies of old

as I opened the door

to the room

bed

pillows

walls

I lost it

I lost it somewhere

while walking down the street

or while lifting weights

or while watching a parade

I lost it

while watching a wrestling match

or while waiting at a red light

at noon on some smoggy day

I lost it while putting a coin

into a parking meter

I lost it

as the wild dogs slept.

## I meet the famous poet

this poet had long been famous

and after some decades of

obscurity I

got lucky

and this poet appeared

interested

and asked me to his

beach apartment.

he was homosexual and I was

straight, and worse, a

lush.

I came by, looked

about and

declaimed (as if I didn't

know), "hey, where the

fuck are the

babes?"

he just smiled and stroked  
his mustache.

he had little lettuces and  
delicate cheeses and  
other dainties  
in his refrigerator.

“where you keep your fucking  
beer, man?” I  
asked.

it didn't matter, I had  
brought my own  
bottles and I began upon  
them.

he began to look  
alarmed: “I've heard about  
your brutality, please  
*desist* from  
that!”

I flopped down on his

couch, belched,  
laughed: “ah, shit, baby, I’m  
not gonna hurt ya! ha, ha,  
ha!”

“you are a fine writer,” he  
said, “but as a person you are  
*utterly*  
despicable!”

“that’s what I like about me  
best, baby!” I  
continued to pour them  
down.

at once  
he seemed to vanish behind  
some sliding wooden  
doors.

“hey, baby, come on  
out! I ain’t gonna do no  
bad! we can sit around and

talk that dumb literary

bullshit all night

long! I won't

brutalize you,

shit, I

promise!"

"I don't trust you,"

came the little

voice.

well, there was nothing to

do

but slug it down, I was

too drunk to drive

home.

when I awakened in the

morning he was standing over

me

smiling.

"uh," I said,

“hi...”

“did you mean what you  
said last night?” he  
asked.

“uh, what wuz  
ut?”

“I slid the doors back and  
stood there and you saw  
me and you said that  
I looked like I was riding the  
prow of some great sea  
ship...you said that  
I looked like a  
*Norseman!* is  
that true?”

“oh, yeah, yeah, you  
did...”

he fixed me some hot tea  
with toast

and I got that  
down.

“well,” I said, “good to  
have met  
you...”

“I’m sure,” he  
answered.

the door closed behind  
me  
and I found the elevator  
down  
and

after some wandering about the  
beach front

I found my car, got  
in, drove off

on what appeared to be  
favorable terms

between the famous poet and

myself

but

it wasn't

so:

he started writing un-

believably hateful stuff

about

me

and I

got my shots in at

him.

the whole matter

was just about

like

most other writers

meeting

and

anyhow

that part about

calling him a

*Norseman*

wasn't true at

all: I called him

a

*Viking*

and it also

isn't true

that without his

aid

I never would have

appeared in the

*Penguin Collection of*

*Modern Poets*

along with him

and who

was it?

yeah:

Lamantia.

## seize the day

foul fellow he was always wiping his nose on his

sleeve and also farting at regular

intervals, he was

uncombed

uncouth

unwanted.

his every third word was a crass

entrail

and he grinned through broken yellow

teeth

his breath stinking above the

wind

he continually dug into his crotch

left-

handed

and he always had a

dirty joke

at the ready,

a dunce of the lowest

order

a most most

avoided

man

until

he won the state

lottery.

now

you should see

him: always a young laughing lady on

each arm

he eats at the finest

places

the waiters fighting to get him

at their

table

he belches and farts away the

night

spilling his wineglass

picking up his steak with his

fingers

while

his ladies call him

“original” and “the funniest

man I ever met.”

and what they do to him

in bed

is a damned

shame.

what we have to keep

remembering, though, is that

50% of the state lottery is given to the

Educational System and

that’s important

when you realize that

only one person in

nine

can properly spell

“emulously.”

## the shrinking island

I'm working on it as  
the dawn bends toward me...

I almost had it at 3:34 a.m. but it  
slipped away from me  
with the wizardry of a  
silverfish...

now  
as the half-light moves toward me  
like motherfucking death

I give up the battle  
rise

move toward the bathroom

bang

into a wall

give a pitiful mewking

laugh...

flick on the light and

begin to piss, yes, in

the proper place

and

after flushing

think: another night

gone.

well, we gave it a bit of

a roar

anyhow.

we wash our

claws...

flick off the

light

move toward the

bedroom where the

wife

awakens enough

to say: "don't step

on the cat!"

which brings us back

to

matters

real

as we find the bed

slip in

face to ceiling: a

grounded

drunken

fat

old

man.

## magic machine

I liked the old records that

scratched

as the needle slid across

grooves well

worn

you heard the voice

coming through

the speaker

as if there were a person

inside that

mahogany

box

but you only listened while

your parents were

not there.

and if you didn't wind

the victrola

it gradually slowed and  
stopped.

it was best in late  
afternoons  
and the records spoke  
of  
love.

love, love, love.

some of the records had  
beautiful purple  
labels,

others were orange, green,  
yellow, red, blue.

the victrola had belonged to  
my grandfather  
and he had listened to those  
same  
records.

and now I was a boy  
and

I heard them.

and nothing I could think of

in my life then

seemed better than listening

to that

victrola

when my parents weren't

there.

## those girls we followed home

in Jr. High the two prettiest girls were  
Irene and Louise,  
they were sisters;  
Irene was a year older, a little taller  
but it was difficult to choose between  
them;  
they were not only pretty but they were  
astonishingly beautiful  
so beautiful  
that the boys stayed away from them;  
they were terrified of Irene and  
Louise  
who weren't aloof at all,  
even friendlier than most  
but  
who seemed to dress a bit  
differently than the other

girls:

they always wore high heels,

silk stockings,

blouses,

skirts,

new outfits

each day;

and,

one afternoon

my buddy, Baldy, and I followed them

home from school;

you see, we were kind of

the bad guys on the grounds

so it was

more or less

expected,

and

it was something:

walking along ten or twelve feet behind them;

we didn't say anything

we just followed  
watching  
their voluptuous swaying,  
the balancing of the  
haunches.

we liked it so much that we  
followed them home from school  
every  
day.

when they'd go into their house  
we'd stand outside on the sidewalk  
smoking cigarettes and talking.

“someday,” I told Baldy,  
“they are going to invite us inside their  
house and they are going to  
fuck us.”

“you really think so?”

“sure.”

now

50 years later

I can tell you

they never did

—never mind all the stories we

told the guys;

yes, it's the dream that

keeps you going

then and

now.

## fractional note

the flowers are burning

the rocks are melting

the door is stuck inside my head

it's one hundred and two degrees in Hollywood

and the messenger stumbles

dropping the last message into a

hole in the earth

400 miles deep.

the movies are worse than ever

and the dead books of dead men read dead.

the white rats run the treadmill.

the bars stink in swampland darkness

as the lonely unfulfill the lonely.

there's no clarity.

there was never meant to be clarity.

the sun is diminishing, they say.

wait and see.

gravy barks like a dog.

if I had a grandmother

my grandmother could whip your  
grandmother.

free fall.

free dirt.

shit costs money.

check the ads for sales...

now everybody is singing at once

terrible voices

coming from torn throats.

hours of practice.

it's almost entirely waste.

regret is *mostly* caused by not having  
done anything.

the mind barks like a dog.

pass the gravy.

it is so arranged all the way to  
oblivion.

next meter reading date:

JUN 20.

and I feel good.

## a following

the phone rang at 1:30 a.m.

and it was a man from Denver:

“Chinaski, you got a following in  
Denver...”

“yeah?”

“yeah, I got a magazine and I want some  
poems from you...”

“FUCK YOU, CHINASKI!” I heard a voice  
in the background...

“I see you have a friend,”

I said.

“yeah,” he answered, “now, I want  
six poems...”

“CHINASKI SUCKS! CHINASKI’S A PRICK!”

I heard the other  
voice.

“you fellows been drinking?”

I asked.

“so what?” he answered. “you drink.”

“that’s true...”

“CHINASKI’S AN ASSHOLE!”

then

the editor of the magazine gave me the  
address and I copied it down on the back  
of an envelope.

“send us some poems now...”

“I’ll see what I can do...”

“CHINASKI WRITES SHIT!”

“goodbye,” I said.

“goodbye,” said the  
editor.

I hung up.

there are certainly any number of lonely  
people without much to do with

their nights.

## a tragic meeting

I was more visible and available then

and I had this great weakness:

I thought that going to bed with many women

meant that a man was clever and good and

superior

especially if he did it at the age of

55

to any number of bunnies

and I lifted weights

drank like mad

and did

that.

most of the women were nice

and most of them looked good

and only one or two were really dumb and

dull

but JoJo

I can't even categorize.

her letters were slight, repeated

the same things:

“I like your books, would like to meet  
you...”

I wrote back and told her

it would be

all right.

then along came the instructions

where I was to meet

her: at this college

on this date

at this time

just after her

classes.

the college was up in the

hills and

the day and time

arrived

and with her drawings

of twisting streets

plus a road map

I set out.

it was somewhere between the Rose Bowl

and one of the largest graveyards in

Southern California

and I got there early and sat in my

car

nipping at the Cutty Sark

and looking at the

co-eds—there were so many of

them, one simply couldn't have

them *all*.

then the bell rang and I got out of my

car and walked to the front of the

building, there was a long row of

steps and the students walked out of the

building and down the steps

and I stood and

waited, and like with airport

arrivals

I had no idea

which one

it would be.

“Chinaski,” somebody said

and there she was: 18, 19,

neither ugly nor beautiful, of

average body and features,

seeming to be neither vicious,

intelligent, dumb or

insane.

we kissed lightly and then

I asked her if she

had a car

and she said

she had a car

and I said, “fine, I’ll drive you

to it, then you follow

me...”

JoJo was a good follower, she followed me all

the way to my beat-up court in east  
Hollywood.

I poured her a drink and we talked very  
drab talk and kissed a  
bit.

the kisses were neither good nor bad  
nor interesting or un-  
interesting.

much time went by and she drank very  
little

and we kissed some more and she said,  
“I like your books, they really do things  
to me.”

“Fuck my books!” I told her.

I was down to my shorts and I had her  
skirt up to her ass

and I was working hard

but she just kissed and

talked.

she responded and she didn't

respond.

then

I gave up and started drinking

heavily.

she mentioned a few of the other

writers

she liked

but she didn't like any of them

the way she liked

me.

“yeah,” I poured a new one, “is that  
so?”

“I've got to get going,” JoJo said,

“I've got a class in the

morning.”

“you can sleep here,” I suggested, “and

get an early start, I scramble great

eggs.”

“no, thank you, I've got to

go...”

and she left with  
several copies of my books  
she had never seen  
before,  
copies I had given her  
much *earlier* in the  
evening.

I had another drink and decided to  
sleep it off  
as an unexplainable  
loss.

I switched off the lights  
and threw myself upon the  
bed without  
washing-up or  
brushing my  
teeth.

I looked up into the dark

and thought, now, here is one

I will never be able to

write about:

she was neither good nor bad,

real or unreal, kind or

unkind, she was just a girl

from a college

somewhere between the Rose Bowl and

the dumping grounds.

then I began to itch, I scratched

myself, I seemed to feel things

on my face, on my belly, I inhaled,

exhaled, tried to sleep but

the itching got worse, then

I felt a bite, then several bites,

things appeared to be

crawling on me...

I rushed to the bathroom

and switched on the light

my god, JoJo had *fleas*.

I stepped into the shower

stood there

adjusting the water,

thinking,

that poor

dear

girl.

## an ordinary poem

since you've always wanted

to know I am going to admit that I never liked Shakespeare, Browning, the  
Bronte sisters,

Tolstoy, baseball, summers on the shore, arm-

wrestling, hockey, Thomas Mann, Vivaldi, Winston Churchill, Dudley  
Moore, free verse,

pizza, bowling, the Olympic Games, the Three Stooges, the Marx

Brothers, Ives, Al Jolson, Bob Hope, Frank Sinatra, Mickey

Mouse, basketball,

fathers, mothers, cousins, wives, shack jobs (although preferable  
to the former),

and I don't like the Nutcracker Suite, the Academy Awards, Hawthorne,

Melville, pumpkin pie, New Year's Eve, Christmas, Labor Day, the

Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Good Friday, The Who,

Bacon, Dr. Spock, Blackstone and Berlioz, Franz

Liszt, pantyhose,

lice, fleas, goldfish, crabs, spiders, war

heroes, space flights, camels (I don't trust camels) or the

Bible,

Updike, Erica Jong, Corso, bartenders, fruit flies, Jane

Fonda,

churches, weddings, birthdays, newscasts, watch

dogs, .22 rifles, Henry

Fonda

and all the women who should have loved me but

didn't and

the first day of Spring and the

last

and the first line of this poem

and this one

that you're reading

now.

## from an old dog in his cups...

ah, my friend, it's awful, worse

than that—you just get

going good—

one bottle down and

gone—

the poems simmering in your

head

but

halfway between 60 and

70

you pause

before opening the

second bottle—

sometimes

don't

for after 50 years of

heavy drinking

you might assume  
that extra bottle  
will set you  
babbling in some  
rest home  
or tender you  
a stroke  
alone in your  
place  
the cats chewing at  
your flesh  
as the morning fog  
enters the broken  
screen.

one doesn't even *think* of  
the liver  
and if the liver  
doesn't think of  
us, that's  
fine.

but it does seem  
the more we drink  
the better the words  
go.

death doesn't matter  
but the ultimate inconvenience  
of near-death is worse than  
galling.

I'll finish the night off  
with  
beer.

## let 'em go

let's let the bombs go

I'm tired of waiting

I've put away my toys

folded the road maps

canceled my subscription to *Time*

kissed Disneyland goodbye

I've taken the flea collars off my cats

unplugged the tv

I no longer dream of pink flamingoes

I no longer check the market index

let's let 'em go

let's let 'em blow

I'm tired of waiting

I don't like this kind of blackmail

I don't like governments playing cutesy with my life:

either crap or get off the pot

I'm tired of waiting

I'm tired of dangling

I'm tired of the fix

let the bombs blow

you cheap sniveling cowardly nations

you mindless giants

do it

do it

do it!

and escape to your planets and space stations

then you can fuck it

up there too.

## trying to make it

new jock in from Arizona  
doesn't know this town  
but his agent did get him a mount  
in the first race  
last Saturday  
and the jock took the freeway  
in  
on the same day as  
the U.S.C. vs. U.C.L.A. football  
game  
and got caught  
in one of the two special lanes  
which took him to the Rose Bowl  
instead of the race  
track.  
he was forced to drive all the way  
to the football game

parking lot

before he could turn

around.

by the time he got to the track

the first race

was over.

another jock had won with his

mount.

today out there

I noticed on the program that the

new jock from Arizona

had a good mount in the

6th.

then the horse became a late

scratch.

sometimes getting started

in the big time

is tantamount to

trying to raise an erection

in a tornado

and even if you do  
nobody has the time  
to notice.

## the death of a splendid neighborhood

there was a place off Western Ave.

where you went up a stairway

to get head

and there was a big biker

sitting there

wearing his swastika jacket.

he was there to smell you out

if you were the

heat

and to protect the girls

if you weren't.

it was just above the

Philadelphia Hoagie Shop

there in L.A.

where the girls came down

when things got

slow

and ate something

else.

the man who ran the

sandwich shop

hated the girls

he didn't like to

serve them

but he was

afraid not

to.

then one day

I came by

and the biker wasn't there

or the girls

either,

and it hadn't been a simple

bust

it had been a

shoot-out:

there were bullet holes

in the door

above the

stairway.

I went into the Hoagie shop

for a sandwich and a

beer

and the proprietor told

me,

“things are better

now.”

after that

I had to leave town

for a couple of

days

and when I got back

and walked down

to the Hoagie shop

I saw that the plate glass

window

had been busted

out

and was covered with

boards.

inside the walls

and the counter had been

blackened by

fire.

about that same

time

my girlfriend went crazy

and started screwing one man

after

another.

almost everything good was

gone.

I gave my landlord a month's

notice and moved in

3 weeks.

## you get so alone at times that it just makes sense

when I was a starving writer I used to read the major writers in the major magazines (in the library, of course) and it made me feel very bad because—being a student of the word and the way, I realized that they were faking it: I could sense each false emotion, each utter pretense, it made me feel that the editors had their heads up their asses—or were being politicized into publishing in-groups of power

but

I just kept writing and not eating very much—went down from 197 pounds to 137—but—got very much practice typing and reading printed rejection slips.

it was when I reached 137 pounds that I said, to hell with it, quit typing and concentrated on drinking and the streets and the ladies of the streets—at least those people didn't read *Harper's*, *The Atlantic* or *Poetry, a magazine of verse*.

and frankly, it was a fair and refreshing ten year lay-off

then I came back and tried it again to find that the editors still had their heads up their asses and/or etc.

but I was up to 225 pounds

rested

and full of background music—

ready to give it another shot in the

dark.

## a good gang, after all

I keep hearing from the old dogs,

men who have been writing for

decades,

poets all,

they're still at their

typers

writing better than

ever

past wives and wars and

jobs

and all the things that

happen.

many I disliked for personal

and artistic

reasons...

but what I overlooked was

their endurance and

their ability to

improve.

these old dogs

living in smoky rooms

pouring the

bottle...

they lash against the

typer ribbons: they came

to

fight.

this

being drunk at the typer beats being with any woman

I've ever seen or known or heard about

like

Joan of Arc, Cleopatra, Garbo, Harlow, M.M. or

any of the thousands that come and go on that

celluloid screen

or the temporary girls I've seen so lovely

on park benches, on buses, at dances and parties, at

beauty contests, cafes, circuses, parades, department

stores, skeet shoots, balloon flys, auto races, rodeos,

bull fights, mud wrestling, roller derbies, pie bakes,

churches, volleyball games, boat races, county fairs,

rock concerts, jails, laundromats or wherever

being drunk at this typer beats being with any woman

I've ever seen or

known.

## hot

there's fire in the fingers and there's fire in the shoes and there's

fire in walking across a room

there's fire in the cat's eyes and there's fire in the cat's

balls

and the wrist watch crawls like a snake across the back of the

dresser

and the refrigerator contains 9,000 frozen red hot dreams

and as I listen to the symphonies of dead composers

I am consumed with a glad sadness

there's fire in the walls

and the snails in the garden only want love

and there's fire in the crabgrass

we are burning burning burning

there's fire in a glass of water

the tombs of India smile like smitten motherfuckers

the meter maids cry alone at one a.m. on rainy nights

there's fire in the cracks of the sidewalks

and

all during the night as I have been drinking and typing these

eleven or twelve poems

the lights have gone off and on

there is a wild wind outside

and in between times

I have sat in the dark here

electric (haha) typer off lights out radio off

drinking in the dark

lighting cigarettes in the dark

there was fire off the match

we are all burning together

burning brothers and sisters

I like it I like it I like

it.

## late late late poem

you think about the time in

Malibu

after taking the tall girl

to dinner and drinks

you came out to the Volks

and the clutch was

gone

(no Auto Club card)

nothing out there but the

ocean and

25 miles to your

room

(her suitcase there

after an air trip from somewhere

in Texas)

and you say to her, “well,

maybe we’ll swim back in,” and

she forgets to

smile.

and the problem with

writing these poems

as you get into number 7 or

8 or 9

into the second bottle near

3 a.m.

trying to light your

cigarette with a book of

stamps

after already setting the

wastebasket on fire

once

is

that there is still some

adventure and joy

in typing

as the radio roars its

classical music

but the content

begins to get

thin.

## 3 a.m. games:

the worst thing is

being drunk

all the lighters gone

dumb

matchbooks

empty

cigarette and cigar stubs

all about

you find a small pack of

matches

with 3 paper

matches

but the matches go

limp against the worn match

cover

shit:

drink without smoke is like

cock without

pussy

you drink some

more

search about

find one paper match of

happiness

*carefully* scratch it

against the least-worn

empty match

pack

it *flares!*

you've got your

*smoke!*

you light

up

you flick the match

toward a

tray

it misses

and

like that...

a flame rises

everything is BURNING

at last!

: an American Express customer

receipt

: some of the empty match

books

: even one of the dead

lighters

the flame whirls and

leaps

then the whole ashtray of

cigarette and cigar stubs

begins to smoke

as if mouths were inhaling

them

you battle the flames with

various and sundry objects

including your

hands

until finally the flame is

gone and there is nothing but

smoke

as again you get that

re-occurring thought: *I must be*

*crazy.*

you hear your wife's

voice:

“Hank, are you all

right?”

she's on the other side of

the wall in the

bedroom

“oh, I’m fine...”

“I smell smoke...is the house burning  
down?”

“just a small fire, Linda...I got  
it...go to sleep...”

she is the one who got you

the steel wastebasket

after a similar

occurrence

soon she is asleep

again

and you’re searching

for more

matches.

## someday I'm going to write a primer for crippled saints but meanwhile...

as the Bomb sits out there in the hands of a

diminishing species

all you want

is me sitting next to you

with popcorn and Dr. Pepper

as those dull celluloid teeth

chew away at

my remains.

I don't worry too much about the

Bomb—the madhouses are full

enough

and I always remember

after one of the best pieces of ass

I ever had

I went to the bathroom and

masturbated—hard to kill a man

like that with a

Bomb?

anyhow, I've finally shaken

R. Jeffers and Celine from my

belltower

and I sit there alone

with you and

Dostoevsky

as the real and the

artificial heart

continues to

falter,

famished...

I love you but

don't know what to

do.

## help wanted

I was a crazed young man and then found this book written by a

crazed older man and I felt better because he was

able to write it down

and then I found a later book by this same crazed older

man

only to me

he seemed no longer crazed he just appeared to be

dull—

we all hold up well for a while, then inherent with flaws and

skips and misses

most of us

so often deteriorate overnight

into a state so near defecation

that the end result is almost unbearable to the

senses.

luckily, I found a few other crazed men who almost remained that

way until they

died.

that's more sporting, you know, and lends a bit more to our

lives

as we attend to our—

innumerate—

tasks.

## sticks and stones...

complaint is often the result of an insufficient  
ability

to live within

the obvious restrictions of this

god damned cage.

complaint is a common deficiency

more prevalent than

hemorrhoids

and as these lady writers hurl their spiked shoes

at me

wailing that

their poems will never be

promulgated

all that I can say to them

is

show me more leg

show me more ass—

that's all you (or I) have

while

it lasts

and for this common and obvious truth

they screech at me:

**MOTHERFUCKER SEXIST PIG!**

as if that would stop the way fruit trees

drop their fruit

or the ocean brings in the conch and

the dead spores of the Grecian

Empire

but I feel no grief for being called something

which

I am not;

in fact, it's enthralling, somehow, like a good

back rub

on a frozen night

behind the ski lift at

Aspen.

## working

ah, those days when I

ran them

in and out of my

shabby apartment.

god, I was a hairy

ugly

thing

and I backed them

all onto the

springs

flailing

away

I was the mindless

drunken ape

in a sad and

dying

neighborhood.

but strangest

of all

were the

new and continuous

arrivals:

it was a

female

parade

and

I exulted

pranced and

pounced

with hardly

an idea

of what

it

meant.

it was a well-

remembered bed-  
room  
painted a strange  
blue.

and  
most of the  
ladies  
left just before  
noon  
about the time  
the mailman  
arrived.

he spoke to me  
one day, “my god,  
man, where do you  
get them all?”

“I don’t know,” I  
told him.

“pardon me,” he went

on, “but you don’t  
exactly look like  
God’s gift to  
women, how do you  
do it?”

“I don’t know,”  
I said.

and it was  
true: it just  
happened and I  
did it

in my blue  
bedroom  
with my  
dead mother’s  
best lace table  
linen  
tacked up  
over the

window.

I was a

fucking

fool.

## over done

he had somehow located me again—he was on the telephone—talking  
about the old days—

wonder whatever happened to Michael or Ken or

Julie Anne?—

and remember...?

—then

there were his present problems—

—he was a talker—he had always been a

talker—

and I had been a

listener

I had listened because I hadn't wanted to

hurt him

by telling him to shut up

like the others

did

in the old

days

now

he was back

and

I held the phone out

at arm's length

and could still hear the

sound—

I handed the phone to my girlfriend and

she listened for a

while—

finally

I took the phone and told him—

hey, man, we've got to stop, the meat's burning

in the oven!

he said, o.k., man, I'll call you

back—

(one thing I remembered about my

old buddy: he was good for his  
word)

I put the phone back on the  
receiver—

—we don't have any meat in the  
oven, said my  
girlfriend—

—yes, we do, I told her,  
it's  
me.

## our laughter is muted by their agony.

as the child crosses the street as deep sea divers  
dive as the painters paint—  
the good fight against terrible odds is the vindication  
and the glory as the swallow rises toward  
the moon—  
it is so dark now with the sadness of  
people  
they were tricked, they were taught to expect the  
ultimate when nothing is  
promised  
now young girls weep alone in small rooms  
old men angrily swing their canes at  
visions as  
ladies comb their hair as  
ants search for survival  
history surrounds us  
and our lives

slink away

in

shame.

## murder

competition, greed, desire for fame—  
after great beginnings they mostly  
write when they don't want to write, they write to  
order, they write for Cadillacs and younger  
girls—and to pay off  
old wives.

they appear on talk shows, attend parties  
with their peers.

most go to Hollywood, they become snipers and  
gossips  
and have more and more affairs with younger  
and younger girls and/or  
men.

they write between Hollywood and the parties,  
it's timeclock writing  
and in between the panties and/or the  
jockstraps

and the cocaine

many of them manage to screw up with the  
IRS.

between old wives, new wives, newer and  
newer girls (and/or)

all their royalties and residuals—

the hundreds of thousands of

dollars—

are now suddenly

debts.

the writing becomes a useless

spasm

a jerk-off of a once

mighty

gift.

it happens and happens and

continues to:

the mutilation of talent

the gods seldom

give

but so quickly

take.

## what am I doing?

got to stop battling these wild speed jocks on the freeway as we  
roar through hairline openings with stereo blasting through  
noon and evening and darkness  
when actually all we want is to sit in cool green gardens  
talking quietly over drinks.

what makes us this way?—ingrown toenails?—or that the ladies  
are not enough?—what foolishness makes us tweak the nose of  
Death continually?

are we afraid of the slow bedpan?—or slobbering over half-  
cooked peas brought to us by a bored nurse with thick  
dumb legs?

what wanton hare-brained impulse makes us floor it with  
only one hand on the wheel?

don't we realize the peace of aging  
gently?

what hell-call is this to war?

we are the sickest of the breed—as fine museums—great art—

generations of knowledge—are all forgotten  
as we find profundity in being an  
asshole—  
we are going to end up as a  
photograph—almost life-sized—hanging  
as a warning on the  
Traffic Court wall  
and people will shudder just a bit and  
look the other way  
knowing that  
too much ego is not  
enough.

## nervous people

you go in for an item—take it to the clerk at the register—he doesn't know the price—begs leave—returns after a long time—stares at the electronic cash register—rings up the sale with some difficulty: \$47,583.64—you don't have it with you—he laughs—calls for help—another clerk arrives—after another long time he finds a new total: \$1.27. I pay—then must ask for a bag—I thank the clerk—walk to parking with the lady I am with—“you make people nervous,” she tells me—

we drive home with the item—we put the item to its task—it doesn't work—the item has a factory defect—

“I'll take it back,” she says—

I go to the bathroom and piss squarely in the center of the pot—warfare is just one of the problems which besets everyone during the life of a decent day.

## working out

Van Gogh cut off his ear

gave it to a

prostitute

who flung it away in

extreme

disgust.

Van, whores don't want

ears

they want

money.

I guess that's why you were

such a great

painter: you

didn't understand

much

else.

## how is your heart?

during my worst times

on the park benches

in the jails

or living with

whores

I always had this certain

contentment—

I wouldn't call it

happiness—

it was more of an inner

balance

that settled for

whatever was occurring

and it helped in the

factories

and when relationships

went wrong

with the

girls.

it helped

through the

wars and the

hangovers

the backalley fights

the

hospitals.

to awaken in a cheap room

in a strange city and

pull up the shade—

this was the craziest kind of

contentment

and to walk across the floor

to an old dresser with a

cracked mirror—

see myself, ugly,

grinning at it all.

what matters most is

how well you

walk through the

fire.

## forget it

now, listen, when I die I don't want any crying, just get the disposal under way, I've had a full some life, and if anybody has had an edge, I've had it, I've lived 7 or 8 lives in one, enough for anybody.

we are all, finally, the same, so no speeches, please, unless you want to say he played the horses and was very good at that.

you're next and I already know something you don't, maybe.

## quiet

sitting tonight

at this

table

by the

window

the woman is

glooming

in the

bedroom

these are her

especially bad

days.

well, I have

mine

so

in deference

to her

the typewriter

is

still.

it's odd,

printing this stuff

by

hand

reminds me of

days

past

when things were

not

going well

in another

fashion.

now

the cat comes to

see

me

he flops

under the table

between my

feet

we are both

melting

in the same

fire.

and, dear

cat, we're still

working with the

poem

and some have

noted

that there's some

“slippage”

here.

well, at age

65, I can

“slip”

plenty, yet still

run rings

around

those pamby

critics.

Li Po knew

what to do:

drink another

bottle and

face

the consequences.

I turn to my

right, see this huge

head (reflected in the

window) sucking at

a cigarette

and

we grin at

each

other.

then

I turn

back

sit here

and

print more words upon this

paper

there is never

a final

grand

statement

and that's the

fix

and the trick

that works

against

us

but

I wish you could see

my

cat

he has a

splash

of white on his

face

against an

orange-yellow

background

and then

as I look up

and into the

kitchen

I see a bright

portion

under the overhead

light

that shades into

darkness

and then into darker

darkness and

I can't see

beyond

that.

## it's ours

there is always that space there

just before they get to us

that space

that fine relaxer

the breather

while say

flopping on a bed

thinking of nothing

or say

pouring a glass of water from the

spigot

while entranced by

nothing

that

gentle pure

space

it's worth

centuries of

existence

say

just to scratch your neck

while looking out the window at

a bare branch

that space

there

before they get to us

ensures

that

when they do

they won't

get it all

ever.

## About the Author

CHARLES BUKOWSKI is one of America's best-known contemporary writers of poetry and prose, and, many would claim, its most influential and imitated poet. He was born in Andernach, Germany, to an American soldier father and a German mother in 1920, and brought to the United States at the age of three. He was raised in Los Angeles and lived there for fifty years. He published his first story in 1944 when he was twenty-four and began writing poetry at the age of thirty-five. He died in San Pedro, California, on March 9, 1994, at the age of seventy-three, shortly after completing his last novel, *Pulp* (1994).

During his lifetime he published more than forty-five books of poetry and prose, including the novels *Post Office* (1971), *Factotum* (1975), *Women* (1978), *Ham on Rye* (1982), and *Hollywood* (1989). Among his most recent books are the posthumous editions of *What Matters Most Is How Well You Walk Through the Fire* (1999), *Open All Night: New Poems* (2000), *Beerspit Night and Cursing: The Correspondence of Charles Bukowski and Sheri Martinelli, 1960-1967* (2001), and *The Night Torn Mad with Footsteps: New Poems* (2001).

All of his books have now been published in translation in over a dozen languages and his worldwide popularity remains undiminished. In the years to come, Ecco will publish additional volumes of previously uncollected poetry and letters.

Visit [www.AuthorTracker.com](http://www.AuthorTracker.com) for exclusive information on your favorite HarperCollins author.

**BY CHARLES BUKOWSKI**

*The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over the Hills* (1969)

*Post Office* (1971)

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