

RHETORICAL THEORY CONCERNING THE MAKING OF A WRITER
IN THE POETRY OF CHARLES BUKOWSKI

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for Stephanie, my wife, and Thomas, my son,
with thanks and love

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More than any other contemporary American poet, Charles Bukowski devotes the majority of his poetry to the topic of being a writer. As rhetorical theory must ultimately concern itself with the making of a writer, Bukowski's poetry frequently is concerned with the rhetorical theory of invention. He returns again and again to what seems to be his favorite topic, the early training of the writer, the writer's place in the world around him or her, the influences upon the writer, the pains and pleasures of being a working writer, and so on. Bukowski can be studied as a poet who constantly offers guidance and advice to the aspiring writer, and in this regard acts in the role of a rhetorician, not unlike Aristotle, Quintilian, Cicero, Blair, or I. A. Richards. Beneath the veneer of Bukowski's drunken brawls, charity wards, and skidrow alleys, there lies a very established and sound rhetorical theory which can be applied to the college composition course, a theory which calls for extensive early training and inspiration on the part of the writer, practice and endurance, a clear, direct style appropriate for any writing occasion, and the emergence of enjoyment in the writing process.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: BUKOWSKI AS RHETORICIAN

More than any other contemporary American author, Charles Bukowski, who remains an avant-garde legend among open-microphone-poetry-readings and the "little" literary magazine circuit, devotes the majority of his writing to the topic of being a writer. As rhetorical theory must ultimately concern itself with the making of a writer, we can study Bukowski's poetry for its rhetorical theory of invention. Though his numerous works of poetry deal with a wide range of topics--political events, growing up, relationships, lost loves (basically, to all the traditional literary themes)--Bukowski returns again and again to what seems to be his favorite topic, the training and making of a writer, the writer's place in the world around him, the influences upon the writer, the pains and pleasures of being a writer, and so on. Jim Cain argues that Bukowski constantly offers his readers a chronology of the physical, psychological, and, to a greater degree, aesthetic development of the writer (9). In short, it seems to me that much more than any other contemporary

writer, Bukowski can be studied as a poet who constantly offers guidance and advice to the aspiring writer, much in the tradition of that branch of rhetorical theory concerned with such topics, that branch of rhetorical theory called literary rhetoric.

Admittedly, Bukowski himself has often scorned and mocked anything quite so pedantic as rhetorical theory. Bukowski, whom Molly Haskell calls the "West Coast poet and patron saint of drinking writers, or writing drinkers" (11), offers guidance and advice which is a far cry from, say, a Quintilian or a Burke. Bukowski prefers to be inspired by great quantities of alcohol, hapless relationships with down-and-out skidrow girlfriends and wives, and winning afternoons at the local race track. Nonetheless, Bukowski works from a very traditional theory of composition heavily influenced by classical and modern rhetoricians, even if he himself would claim otherwise. In this dissertation I plan to arrive at his rhetorical theory concerning the actual making of a writer. By carefully describing the proper steps one must take to become a true writer, Bukowski in essence can be viewed as a modern rhetorician.

Before arriving at Bukowski's rhetorical theory, I should first briefly explain the difference between classical rhetoric derived from Aristotle and literary

rhetoric concerned with the making of a writer, framing them historically. Only by first proving a distinction does exist between these two schools of rhetorical theory can I next move on to the various poems of Bukowski which in fact work within a long tradition of literary rhetorical theory.

In classical rhetorical theory, as we know, rhetoricians dealt only with the art of spoken persuasion. It is not the purpose of this chapter to enter the academic fray upon the debate of what is "true" rhetoric and what is, according to George Kennedy, "secondary" rhetoric. Aristotle's distinctions in his Rhetoric and in his Poetics seemingly settled firmly any questions concerning the dominion of rhetoric and the dominion of belles lettres. Nonetheless, suffice it to say that as far back as Aristotle, for every treatise we find on rhetoric of the spoken persuasion school, we find parallel treatises on rhetoric of the literary tradition.

As for the relationship between the two types of rhetoric, the primary rhetoric of spoken persuasion and the secondary rhetoric of poetics, according to Kennedy, "Within the pure classical tradition that relationship is rather clear, even if not understood" (114-15). In Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition, Kennedy explains that in the classical world many different

arts were acknowledged, some more basic than others. He writes:

As seen in the so-called liberal arts of later times, basic arts were regarded as limited to grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic, which are the three arts of communication, and geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music, but certain other arts are probably nearly primary, including physics and medicine. Some arts, however, are clearly secondary developments, built upon one or more of the basic arts. Secondary arts include some of the noblest forms, such as architecture, which involves both physics and geometry. In the purest classical tradition, poetics, or the art of poetry, is also a secondary art which uses the three arts of communication --grammar, rhetoric, dialectic--and also uses music in the creation of a text. (115)

For Kennedy, then, what I term a literary rhetoric concerned with the making of a writer is "the study of the specific compositional needs of the poet working within the poetic genres" (115). Kennedy further argues that Aristotle viewed rhetoric as an art of communication, parallel to dialectic, whereas he viewed poetics as a productive art, like painting (116).

It is crucial at this point that I further clarify my own distinctions between poetics proper and literary rhetoric. I am not suggesting that the finished product, such as Robinson Jeffers' poem "Rock and Hawk" is rhetoric (though Kenneth Burke and I. A. Richards might disagree); but if, for example, Jeffers had written a poem on how he created the poem, or even further, what steps one must take in order to be a poet who could write "Rock and Hawk,"

then that would be an example of what I call literary rhetoric, even though this second poem on the making of a writer has nothing to do with Kennedy's art of spoken persuasion. In short, any work which takes on as its primary goal the training of a writer can be classified as literary rhetorical theory.

Can we find this sort of literary rhetorical theory in the classical texts? Undoubtedly Aristotle's Poetics acts in this fashion, but even further, I would argue so does his Rhetoric. As Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg have pointed out in The Rhetorical Tradition:

Aristotle's division between rhetoric and poetic usefully reveals the different purposes, effects, and methods of the two realms of discourse. Nonetheless, from Aristotle's time to our own, rhetoric and poetic have been closely linked.
(912)

Though Aristotle calls rhetoric "the counterpart of Dialectic," concerned with discussing statements and maintaining them, defending ourselves or attacking others (Rhetoric 19) and poetics "the art of imitation" intended to please an audience (Poetics 223), Friedrich Solmsen notes that the two pieces work very well together:

For generations after him Aristotle was to be an authority in both fields; his name and prestige were to do their part in drawing the two subjects together. One reason for this is that poetry serves Aristotle in the Rhetoric as a mine of illustrative material--it is remarkable how many excellent arguments he lifts from speeches of tragedy. ("Introduction" xii)

Clearly, speech and poetry share many characteristics in common. Sooner or later, Solmsen feels, Aristotle became aware of these shared characteristics. He notes, "In the Poetics, when isolating some facets of the finished work, [Aristotle] realizes that they need but little comment since to discuss them fully would mean to duplicate sections of the Rhetoric" (xiii). We should also recall that by Aristotle's day, poetic thought had become quite "rhetorical":

Everything under the sun is discussed; arguments and counter-arguments abound so freely that the larger and small doses of thought that are dispensed in carefully constructed speeches must often have diverted interest from the central idea of the play. (xiii)

Not surprisingly, perhaps, Aristotle himself within the work Poetics refers to his Rhetoric both for teaching the arousing of emotions in speeches and for the portrayal of emotions in plot. Another area of overlapping interests concerns style, which Aristotle writes of in Book III of his Rhetoric: "It is plain that delivery has just as much to do with oratory as with poetry" (165). Solmsen writes:

Aristotle does not in so many words say that the gaps left in his somewhat sketchy discussion of style in the Poetics should be filled by referring to the more detailed analysis presented in the Rhetoric. Nor does he, when dealing with character in the Poetics, remind us of the other work with its sketches . . . of the distinctive character traits of young and old, rich and poor. Posterity, however, needed no reminder. (xiii)

In the following centuries, the discussion of good and

bad style which Aristotle had established applied equally as well to creative writing. As early as Horace, who transferred the character sketches from the Rhetoric to the Poetics, the distinctions between Kennedy's primary rhetoric and the rhetoric of literary interests have often broken down. In fact, many times in history, rhetorical theory has become completely consumed with this literary rhetoric concerned more with the proper training of a writer than the rhetoric of spoken persuasion.

The Romans were to borrow Aristotle's notion of the writer as imitator, or mimesis, along with a number of other rhetorical devices in the forming of their literary rhetoric. Horace's The Art of Poetry and Longinus's On the Sublime represent not only examples of Roman literary criticism but also literary rhetoric. Kennedy writes that for the Romans

rhetoric, thoroughly a part of the framework of thought, found application in forms of creative expression other than spoken oratory and that these other forms became relatively more common and more important. Teachers were perhaps dimly aware of the trend even from an early time and stressed those aspects of rhetoric, such as arrangement and style, which were easily applicable to writing. The use of topics, the structure of exordium, narration, demonstration, and conclusion, and the tropes and figures of speech are the clearest mark of rhetorical literature. (112)

In the period of medieval rhetorical theory, literary rhetoric can be classified as one of the four major trends

of rhetorical theory. Just as the Roman teachers of grammar who analyzed poetry with their students to show correct grammar and the proper use of tropes and figures, the medieval grammarians developed this stylistic approach into an ars poetriae, or art of poetry (Bizzell and Herzberg 374). Medieval grammarians produced what many consider literary rhetorical handbooks, prescriptive in nature, "that explored the use of tropes, figures, and descriptive formulas in such detail as to resemble the rhetorical treatment of style" (374). Texts such as Matthew of Vendome's Ars versificatoria and Geoffrey of Vinsauf's Poetria nova, often referred to as rhetorical treatises, establish their authors as rhetoricians. Kennedy argues that these works and others like them primarily present "methods of rhetorical ornamentation," but more importantly, historically they foreshadow the development of further literary rhetorics in the Renaissance (189).

During the Renaissance, literary rhetoric was greatly affected by the recovery of classical Greek and Roman learning which opened up new interest in the study of literature. Again, literary rhetoric held a dominant position in rhetorical theory, particularly as dialectical rhetoric (i.e. rhetoric as knowledge-generating) fell into disfavor. As Ramist influence with its emphasis on style increased, "rhetoric made a happier alliance with poetry

than with statecraft" (Bizzell and Herzberg 475). Many rhetorical texts produced clearly show a debt to poetic theory. Bizzell and Herzberg note:

Rhetorical texts such as Fraunce's [The Arcadian Rhetoric] show the Ramist influence in their dichotomizing exposition and then illustrate the part of rhetoric they talk about with examples drawn largely from poetry. (475)

Another figure we look upon as a literary rhetorician is Philip Sidney, whose An Apology for Poetry establishes a greater link between rhetoric and poetry and the correct training of the poet. Even the structure of the work takes the form of a persuasive and moving oration, organized in the seven different parts of classical oration (Walter J. Bates 78). Sidney claims that poetry and oratory have "a great affinity in the wordish consideration" (83). Bizzell and Herzberg argue that "Like the earliest Sophists, students of rhetoric in the Renaissance were not concerned to separate rhetoric sharply from poetic" (475).

Following the attack on rhetoric by members of the British Royal Society in 1660, rhetoric again made alliances with poetics. Critics linked rhetoric to the genres of history and literary criticism, or belles lettres. This belletristic movement with its emphasis on the study of poetics and the necessary training of the writer was championed by rhetoricians such as Hugh Blair, whose Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres offered the aspiring

writer guidelines for creating "proper" literature. As we shall see, much of Bukowski's poetry reads like the drunken scribblings of a modern-day Blair intent on training writers. The belletristic movement would have lasting effects on rhetorical theory until the Romantic Period, with its sharp rejection of rhetoric and its emphasis upon a Romantic image of the solitary poet overflowing with spontaneous feelings.

Bizzell and Herzberg argue that the central themes of Romanticism seem fundamentally anti-rhetorical. As Coleridge would plainly state, poetry is not rhetoric at all; poetry, unlike rhetoric, is the expression of the poet's feelings. While rhetoric was allied with literature and literary criticism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, following the Romantic revolution, emphasis was placed on the creator of the art rather than the finished product (Bizzell and Herzberg 665). Terms such as solitude, spontaneity, expression of feeling, Bizzell and Herzberg point out, are "all quite opposed to the rhetorician's concern for society, planned discourse, communication, and moving the will through reason" (665). But ultimately, even throughout this anti-rhetorical movement, there still existed a separate school of thought concerned with the making of a writer, perhaps found most fully in the Romantic figure of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Just

as Bukowski does, Emerson "advocates a rhetoric of personal expression that will stir the audience to their own efforts at creative perception" (Bizzell and Herzberg 666). In other words, both Bukowski and Emerson establish guidelines on what the aspiring writer should do in order to be successful.

As for twentieth-century rhetorical theory, we see a revival of rhetorical theory in not just creative writing but in all forms of discourse. Modern rhetoricians such as Richards and Burke reject the notion that "Literature" is any different from any other form of discourse, thus blending once again any distinctions between rhetorical and poetic theory. According to Bizzell and Herzberg, in the twentieth century,

Both rhetoric and poetry are concerned with ways of moving audiences by means of language. And even if, as many critics have argued, there is a distinction between the 'contemplative' goal of literature and the 'active' goal of rhetoric, literature frequently makes use of persuasion and argumentation. In terms of theory and criticism, rhetoric names the tropes used in poetry, and poetry provides the exemplary forms of the tropes for instruction in rhetoric. Narration is essential to both rhetoric and poetic. (912)

Rhetoric in the twentieth century, in short, once again becomes strongly identified with literature, literary criticism, and literary rhetorical theory.

Perhaps one of the most cogent commentaries to this argument is Winston Weathers' "The Value of Rhetoric to

the Creative Artist." After all, having shown that this literary rhetoric exists since Aristotle, the next obvious question we should ask is what rhetorical theory offers the creative writer? Weathers begins his article by tracing the anti-rhetorical trends favored by the creative writer for the last two hundred years since the Romantic movement. "By refusing to recognize rhetoric as a legitimate part of artistry, the creator handicaps himself and, alas, compromises the very role of art in our society," laments Weathers (38-39).

In calling for a restitution of rhetoric into the creative experience, Weathers suggests many benefits for the writer willing to follow rhetorical theory: rhetoric theory helps the creative writer to maintain an effective relationship with audiences; rhetorical theory enables the creative writer to escape the provincialism of his or her own particular time and place; rhetorical theory rescues the creative writer from a limited notion of what part literature plays in the social order; rhetorical theory helps the creative artist judge literature in terms of audience reception and reaction; and rhetorical theory allows the creative writer to gain expertise in the basic skills of discourse upon which all subsequent discourse must rest (39-42).

Weathers also notes the close alliance between rhetoric

and poetry that I have already touched upon, but further notes that rhetoric's ultimate goal of moving an audience to action gives way "in creative writing to moving an audience into a community of feeling and perception with the audience" (43). Weathers concludes that we must "shatter through the romantic myths of creativity" and "illuminate the creative experience with the rigors and liberations of rhetorical knowledge" (46). In fact, Bukowski does just this. Though the rhetorical theory found in his poetry is concerned more with the making of a creative writer rather than an academic writer, it is nonetheless still a literary rhetorical theory useful to all types of writers.

It is my intention in this dissertation to examine an established creative writer who is adamantly anti-rhetorical but yet within the bulk of his poetry still offers sound rhetorical advice to the aspiring creative writer. This task may be greater than it sounds: for a writer who quips "the world is full of shipping clerks/ who have read the Harvard Classics," Bukowski makes no secret that he eschews anything as "worthless" as rhetorical theory or even academic training in general, apparent in poems such as "NO GROUNDING IN THE CLASSICS" when he writes:

I have read the classics
and on my couch
sleeps a wine-soaked
whore

who for the first
 time has heard
 Beethoven's 9th,
 and bored,
 has fallen asleep,
 politely
 listening
 just think, daddy, she said,
 with your brains
 you might be the first man
 to copulate
 on the moon
 (The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses 93)

Apparently, a classical education offers little in the
 world where Bukowski dwells. Though he is obviously
 familiar with the classical works, he dismisses them as
 useless in his gritty world of roominghouses and skidrow
 alleys. While drawn to the world of the intellectual,
 he nonetheless must put it aside to survive in his everyday
 life, sometimes violent, sometimes mundane, such as in
 "birth," a poem describing the night of his daughter's
 birth:

reading the Dialogues of Plato when the
 doctor walks up and says

how do you still read that high-brow
 stuff? last time I read that I
 was in
 high school.

I read it, I tell
 him.

well, it's a girl, 9#, 3 oz. no trouble at
 all.

shit. great

I sit down to Plato again. there are 4 people
playing cards. one woman has beautiful legs that
she doesn't hide and I keep looking at her legs
until she covers them with a blue sweater.

I am called upstairs. they show me the thing
through glass.
it's red as a boiled crab and tough. it
wall [sic] make it. I will see it through.

hey, look at this, Plato: another broad!
there is a meeow from the screen and I let him
in: sober, indifferent,
hungry. . . .

I get down the can of
catfood and open
it. Plato is left in the
glove compartment.

(Days Run Away Like Wild Horses 109-111)

Like the bored, sleeping prostitute from the first poem,
Bukowski must concern himself with things far more important
than the rhetorical theory found in Plato's Phaedrus and
Gorgias. The idea of studying even literature actually
bores Bukowski, as in "upon first reading the immortal
literature of the world--":

the school children
bang closed
their heavy
books
and run
ever so gladly
to the
yard
or
even more
alarming--

back to
their
horrible
homes.

there is nothing so
boring
as
immortality.

(War All the Time 129)

Even college offers little appeal to Bukowski, as he notes in the poem "a free 25 page booklet":

dying for a beer dying
for and of life
on a windy afternoon in Hollywood
listening to symphony music from my little red
radio
on the floor

. . .
I am too sick to lay down
the sidewalks frighten me
the whole damned city frightens me,
what I will become
what I have become
frightens me

. . .
now I hear a siren
it comes closer
the music stops
the man on the radio says,
"we will send you a free 25 page booklet:
FACE THE FACTS ABOUT COLLEGE COSTS."

(Mockingbird Wish Me Luck 11)

In Bukowski's violent world of the outcast, the very notion of getting ahead in life by earning a college degree is ~~A~~ absurd. The narrator in this poem obviously feels close to death, probably from starvation or alcoholic poisoning, while ironically an advertising announcer assumes the poor slob should be interested in the cost of an education.

And so for Bukowski, or his protagonist, Henry Chinaski, rhetorical theory offers little practical value, as just surviving day-to-day is enough of a full-time pursuit. *

These poems bring me to a point I must touch upon here before I proceed. I will in this study refer to Bukowski himself as the narrator of these poems, a tendency often considered sophomoric, that is, assuming the author is the narrator of the poem or essay (i.e., Swift is the speaker in A Modest Proposal, not a cleverly constructed rhetorical persona). But I feel completely justified in assuming the voice of Charles Bukowski is the narrator of his poems. He has said so many times himself in interviews, and most of Neeli Cherkovski's biography of Charles Bukowski, Hank, clearly reads as though it were lifted directly from the pages of Bukowski's fiction and poetry. As David Montrose points out,

Bukowski, like Henry Miller, turns life directly into art: his novels, stories, and copious poems *are usually autobiographical installments minimally disguised by the adoption of a persona ("Henry Chinaski"), with easily penetrable name-changes. Sometimes, even this thin mask of fictionality is dropped. (1344)

Often the narrator in these poems calls himself "Chuck" for Charles, "Buk" for Bukowski (not "Buck," he reminds us, a nickname he hates, but "Buk," which "rhymes with puke"), or by his penname, Henry "Hank" Chinaski. Lawrence Rungren calls Chinaski "Bukowski's cynical, misogynistic,

yet ultimately sympathetic alter ego" (113). Richard Combs notes the Chinaski character is "more a cipher than a character; he signals the author's fierce attachment to a world of bars, brawls, and broads, and his disgust with everything else" (35). Even more than Nick Adams is Ernest Hemingway, Henry Chinaski is Charles Bukowski, allowing us this unique opportunity to delve into his works of poetry and actually to find his rhetorical theory concerning the making of a writer.

Basically then what I have argued in this opening chapter is my belief that any work or body of work which offers advice to the struggling writer can be seen as a literary rhetoric. Clearly, after removing most of the scholarly "deadwood" of rhetorical theory, this is ultimately what most rhetoricians are interested in, that is, the correct training and making of a writer. What I have also suggested here is that this literary rhetoric concerned with the making of a writer has always existed side-by-side with the rhetoric of spoken persuasion. And while Bukowski may scorn the academic world and rhetorical theory, as we see in the preceding examples of his poetry, he nonetheless in his highly autobiographical work offers advice and guidance to the aspiring writer and thus may be seen thoroughly as a rhetorician. We need only work through the poetry of Bukowski to find this advice, frame

his guidance in some sort of paradigm, and end with a fully developed treatise of rhetorical theory.

Following two chapters introducing the life and times and favorite themes of Charles Bukowski, crucial in later establishing his rhetorical theory, I will divide this dissertation into chapters which examine the different phases in the development of the writer. In Bukowski's poetry we find suggestions for the early training of a writer, warnings on the dangers of becoming a pedant or false writer, examinations into the pleasures and pains of being a writer, guidelines for the work habits of a writer, and other practical advice to the aspiring writer. I will include in these chapters any relevant biographical, scholarly, and critical works regarding the life and writing of Bukowski. As Bukowski is an exceedingly prolific writer, I will have a number of poems to work with which appear in the collections Longshot Pomes for Broke Players (1962), At Terror Street and Agony Way (1968), Poems Written Before Jumping out of an 8 Story Window (1968), The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over the Hills (1969), Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame: Selected Poems 1955-1973 (1974), Love is a Dog from Hell: Selected Poems 1974-1977 (1977), Play the Piano Drunk / Like a Percussion Instrument / Until the Fingers Begin to Bleed a Bit (1979), War All the Time: Poems 1981-1984 (1984), You Get So Alone Sometimes It Just

Makes Sense (1986), Dangling in the Tournefortia (1988), and Septuagenarian Stew (1990). I will conclude this study by examining the applications of Bukowski's rhetorical theory concerning the making of a writer to the composition course.

Ultimately, as I will argue throughout this work, I hope to prove that beneath the veneer of drunken brawls and jail sentences lies a very established and sound rhetorical theory concerning the making of a writer, one fraught with practical advice for the aspiring writer. It is my contention that though the poetry deals with a variety of subject matter, the underlying theme of all of the works--the making of a writer--places Bukowski firmly in the tradition of rhetorical theorists.

CHAPTER II

LITERARY RENEGADE AND POET LAUREATE TO THE LOWLIFE

Before I begin the expressed purpose of this work, that is, the arrival at Charles Bukowski's rhetorical theory concerning the making of a writer, I should first introduce the correct "feel" of Bukowski's work. Even those poems not concerned expressly with rhetorical theory do play a large part in the formation of Bukowski's rhetorical theory, as in order to understand the rhetoric of Bukowski, we must first understand the work of Bukowski. We have already seen from the poems in the preceding chapter that Bukowski's world represents the often-violent world of the skidrow outcast, one which emphasizes an education of the streets rather than of academic or rhetorical theory. In this chapter I will discuss a number of poems and excerpts from his other genres which show most clearly Bukowski's writing style, his themes, his settings, and which will impart upon the reader some sense of the Bukowski "Myth." By examining these brief selections of Bukowski's work, we are able to see quickly how Bukowski has built himself a literary reputation as a literary renegade poet laureate to the lowlife bums he chooses to live among.

At best, Bukowski remains a difficult writer to categorize or define, if for no other reason than his prowess in several different genres. We know he disdains the label poet: "To say I'm a poet puts me in the company of versifiers, neon-tasters, fools, clods, and scoundrels masquerading as wise men" (Contemporary Authors 19).

Bukowski further argues that he does not like "form" in poetry, calling it "a paycheck for learning to turn the same screw that has held things together" (Contemporary Authors 19). He believes that

life is a spider, we can dance in the web so long, the thing is gonna get us. . . I am pretty well hooked-in now, have fallen into some traps, and speak mostly from the bent bone, the flogged spirit. I've had some wild and horrible years and electric and lucky years.

(Contemporary Authors 19)

A good introduction to Bukowski as artist appears in the article "A Singular Self" in which Jules Smith argues that Bukowski's art always carries with it a sense of exclusion and embattlement: "At his best, Bukowski shows an unsparing eye for the pathos, as well as the ridiculousness of human foibles" (Smith 956). Smith commends Bukowski for "his often brilliant use of simple language, his pungent intimacy of address, enlivened by digressions and wisecracks" (956). He further notes

Bukowski has a marvelous way with narrative, sustaining a poem of several pages through short lines and dialogue, sometimes exuberant and sometimes hard-bitten. Aptly hungover lines, usually of one to four words, propel the reader down the page. This tactic of isolating words achieves a memorable terseness and finality. (956)

A fine example of this "brilliant use of simple language" comes from the collection Mockingbird Wish Me Luck, entitled simply, "the mockingbird":

the mockingbird had been following the cat
all summer
mocking mocking mocking
teasing and cocksure;
the cat crawled under rockers on porches
tail flashing
and said something angry to the mockingbird
which I didn't understand.

yesterday the cat walked calmly up the driveway
with the mockingbird alive in its mouth,
wings fanned, beautiful wings fanned and flopping,
feathers parted like a woman's legs,
and the bird was no longer mocking
it was praying
but the cat
striding down through centuries
would not listen.

I saw it crawl under a yellow car
with the bird
to bargain it to another place.

summer was over.

(71) .

Again we easily recognize the world of Bukowski--dangerous, violent, volatile. Interestingly, the cat might be seen first as an oppressed figure, teased and beaten and battered, not unlike Bukowski himself, by the bird, who for Bukowski could represent any number of oppressors, perhaps the abusive father figure we see in so many of his works, the cruel foremen and line bosses at the meaningless jobs, the pestering girlfriends. But Bukowski suggests in this poem that with patience, the oppressed

will eventually rise up, and suddenly, in an instant, the entire structure of the universe will shift drastically.

We see this image of the cat again in "CONVERSATION ON A TELEPHONE," a poem which also hints at the insanity that Bukowski feels he must deal with and fight back every day of his life. This time the insanity, which we will later learn plays a large role in the formation of a writer, takes on the actual form of the cat holding the bird in its fangs:

the cat walks in my mind
and I cannot make him out:
the phone rings,
I answer a voice,
but I see him again and again,
and the loose wings
the loose gray wings,
and this thing held
in a head that knows no mercy
it is the world, it is ours;
I put the phone down
and the cat-sides of the room
come in on me
and I would scream,
but they have places for people
who scream;
and the cat walks
the cat walks forever
in my brain.

(The Days Run Away 36)

For Bukowski, insanity exists just below the surface of daily existence, always present. He must hold himself together, for "they have places for people who scream." This theme, the notion of being the crazed outcast pitted against the rest of the "normal" world, pervades much of Bukowski's work.



To further illustrate this point, we can turn briefly to Ham on Rye, Bukowski's highly autobiographical novel dealing with his often unpleasant childhood. Even at an early age, Bukowski understands that he does not quite belong to the rest of humanity. Upon entering adolescence, Henry Chinaski, the narrator speaking for Bukowski, develops a severe case of boils across his entire body, disfiguring especially his face. Henry undergoes the painful treatment of lancing the boils all the while knowing the doctors are scarring him for life. He feels that he has been selected by forces greater than he can understand to be forever the outcast:

The drilling and squeezing continued for weeks but there was little result. When one boil vanished another would appear. I often stood in front of the mirror alone, wondering how ugly a person could get. I would look at my face in disbelief, then turn to examine all the boils on my back. I was horrified. No wonder people stared, no wonder they said unkind things. It was not simply a case of teen-age acne. These were inflamed, relentless, large swollen boils filled with pus. I felt singled out, as if I had been selected to be this way.

(Ham on Rye 137)

Along with this notion of being an outcast, Bukowski writes in a number of works of his abusive father, who begins beating Henry/Charles at an early age for mundane reasons, such as leaving grass "hairs" standing while mowing the yard:

I heard him get down the razor strop. My right leg still ached. It didn't help, having

felt the strop many times before. The whole world was out there indifferent to it all, but that didn't help. Millions of people were out there, dogs and cats and gophers, buildings, streets, but it didn't matter. There was only my father and the razor strop and the bathroom and me. He used that strop to sharpen his razor, and early in the mornings I used to hate him with his face white with lather, standing before the mirror shaving himself. Then the first blow of the strop hit me. The sound of the strop was flat and loud, the sound itself was almost as bad as the pain. The strop landed again. It was as if my father was a machine, swinging that strop. There was the feeling of being in a tomb. The strop landed again and I thought, that is surely the last one. But it wasn't. It landed again. I couldn't cry. I was too sick to cry, too confused. The strop landed once again. Then he stopped. I stood and waited. I heard him hanging up the strop.

"Next time," he said, "I don't want to find any hairs."

I heard him walk out of the bathroom. He closed the bathroom door. The walls were beautiful, the bathtub was beautiful, the wash basin and the shower curtain were beautiful, and even the toilet was beautiful. My father was gone. (Ham on Rye 70)

And so at an early age, Bukowski learns to escape. In the short story "Son of Satan" during another beating, he again suddenly finds shelter:

The next blow rolled me under the bed. It seemed like a good place to be. I looked up at the springs and I had never seen anything as friendly and as wonderful as those springs up there. Then I laughed, it was a panicked laugh but I laughed. . . .

"What the hell are you laughing at?" my father screamed. "You are surely the Son of Satan, you are not my son!"

I saw his big hand reach under the bed,

searching for me. When it came near I grabbed it with both hands and bit it with all the strength I had. There was a ferocious yowl and the hand withdrew. I tasted wet flesh in my mouth, spit it out. Then I knew . . . I might very well be dead very soon.

"All right," I heard my father say quietly, "now you've really asked for it and by god you are going to get it . . ."

I waited, and as I waited all I could hear were strange sounds. I could hear birds, I could hear the sound of autos driving by, I could even hear my heart pounding and my blood running through my body. I could hear my father breathing, and I moved myself exactly under the center of the bed and waited for the next thing.

(Septuagenarian Stew 37)

This "waiting for the next thing" is a very typical stance in the works of Bukowski. He prefers to hold up drunk in some darkened roominghouse with the torn shades drawn and observe the madness of the rest of the world around him.

Though Bukowski defies neat categorizing, many of his poems could belong to the Confessional School of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, as the poems are often brutally frank and repeatedly dwell upon thoughts of suicide. In "the shoelace," Bukowski assures us that suicide may not only be the answer to the huge problems, but the very small: glancing down and noticing a broken shoelace drives us mad and sends us scurrying for ways to end it all.

Bukowski differs from his Confessional counterparts in that his thoughts of insanity and suicide are often

quite humorous, tinged with a gallows humor of macabre and mirth, apparent even in the title of his "sometimes it's easier to kill somebody else":

I was never a very good suicide, I gave it a go
 now and then but something always seemed to go wrong:
 the time I was living on Kingsley Drive and working for the post office I decided to have another go at it:
 I swigged down a six-pack and then prepared the place
 as an old suicide-pro I knew what to do:
 I taped the cracks around the door,
 jammed newspapers under the door,
 closed all the windows, turned on the oven
 and all the jets on the stove and also
 started up the gas heater.
 the hissing sound of the unlit gas was not unpleasant; waiting there I had no regrets at leaving,
 but
 at once! I jack-knifed, sat up in the bed: a steel band was fastened around my head squeezing hard.

I reached up and tried to pull the ring away, then I started laughing. I got up still laughing
 opened the windows.

so, I sat and thought, maybe I'm now brain-damaged, well, that's all right.

then I noticed an old cigar in the ashtray, I stuck it into my mouth, picked up the lighter and flicked it . . .

there was an explosion, it made this small BANG! and there was a round flame in front of my face.

I smelled burning hair and my face was indecently hot, I picked up the can of beer

went into the bathroom and looked into the mirror: my eye lashes had been burned almost completely off -- a few twists of ravished hair remained and I had no eyebrows at all and my nose was not so red as purple and one strand of twisted burnt hair from my head was dangling into my face

and then I started laughing again.

(Septuagenarian Stew 79-82)

Bukowski presents an otherwise deadly serious topic, suicide, as absurd and humorous. His insistence that he is an "old suicide-pro" prepares us for events to come: he obviously lacks the necessary skills if he can continue to survive to brag about it! In the article "Down and (Far) Out," Tom McDonough points out that the majority of Bukowski's work can be viewed as the "prolonged suicide note of an author whose extinction, in the circular fashion of his funk, can only be postponed by the composition of a boozy suicide note" (28). In this poem, we are left with the typical Bukowski stance: the burnt and crippled outsider chuckling to himself about all of life's foibles and humanity's faults.

One of the most important themes in Bukowski's work deals with his overwhelming desire to take a stand against the status quo. Bukowski wants no part of everyday life. He finds himself baffled by any poor slob who would live

day-in and day-out with the same wife, struggling through
 the mind-numbing boredom of the same job, celebrating those
 same silly holidays the rest of us await so eagerly.

Bukowski attacks the status quo in "THE SCREW-GAME":

one of the terrible things is
 really
 being in bed
 night after night
 with a woman you no longer
 want to screw

they get old, they don't look very good
 anymore -- they even tend to
 snore, lose
 spirit.

so, in bed, you turn sometimes,
 your foot touches hers--
 god, awful!--
 and the night is out there
 beyond the curtains,
 sealing you together
 in the
 tomb.

and in the morning you go to the
 bathroom, pass in the hall, talk
 say odd things; eggs fry, motors
 start.

but sitting across
 you have 2 strangers
 jamming toast into mouths
 burning the sullen head and gut with
 coffee.

in ten million places in America
 it is the same--
 stale lives propped against each
 other
 and no place to
 go.

you get in the car
 and you drive to work
 and there are more strangers there, most of them

wives and husbands of somebody
 else, and besides the guillotine of work, they
 flirt and joke and pinch, sometimes tend to
 work off a quick screw somewhere--
 they can't do it at home--
 and then
 the drive back home
 waiting for Christmas or Labor Day or
 Sunday or
 something.

(The Days Run Away 68-69)

Love and marriage are a tomb; work is a guillotine. Some
 people may survive in this dead world, but Bukowski cannot
 understand how they do it, as in "my friend william":

my friend William is a fortunate man:
 he lacks the imagination to suffer

he kept his first job
 his first wife

he can drive a car 50,000 miles
 without a brake job

he dances like a swan
 and has the prettiest blankest eyes
 this side of El Paso

his garden is a paradise
 the heels of his shoes are always level
 and his handshake is firm

people love him

when my friend William dies
 it will hardly be from madness or cancer

he'll walk right past the devil
 and into heaven

you'll see him at the party tonight
 grinning
 over his martini

blissful and delightful
 as some guy
 fucks his wife in the

bathroom.

(Mockingbird Wish Me Luck 59)

Bukowski remains less than impressed with the "blanked-eyed" William, who simply lacks the imagination to realize he should be suffering. People like William, the status quo, Bukowski portrays as blind to truth, be it infidelities on the part of their spouses or the grim ugliness of every day. Throughout Bukowski's works we hear these sentiments. In "some people" he laments:

some people never go crazy.
me, sometimes I'll lie down behind the couch
for 3 or 4 days.
they'll find me there

. . .
then, I'll rise with a roar,
rant, rage --
curse them and the universe
as I send them scattering over the
lawn.
I'll feel much better,
sit down to toast and eggs,
hum a little tune,
suddenly become as lovable as a
pink
overfed whale.

some people never go crazy.
what truly horrible lives
they must lead.

(Burning in Water 190)

Ernest Fontana claims this is the typical Bukowski stance, that of the "monster-outsider" (5). The same stance can also be found in "the puzzle":

my neighbor is a nice guy but he utterly
confounds me:
he gets up very early in the morning, goes
to work;
his wife works, they have two lovely

children;
he is home in the evening, I sometimes see
the children, briefly see the
wife;
by 9 p.m. all the lights in their house are
out;
and his days repeat themselves like this;
he seems a fairly intelligent man
in his early 30's;
the only explanation for his
routine is that he must
enjoy his
work
believe in
God,
sex,
family.

I don't know why
but over there
I always expect some windows to break suddenly
I expect to hear some screams
hear obscene language
see lights at 3 a.m.
see
flying bottles

but for 5 years now
his routine has remained the
same

so
I take care of these other
things for
him
which
I don't think his wife
appreciates:
"Hank, I could have
called the cops
many times but
I haven't."

sometimes
I'd like to call the
cops on them
but I don't think the cops
would understand my
complaint

their red lights flashing.
white-faced in
dark blue:

"Sir, there's no
law
against what they
are
doing . . ."

(War All the Time 251-52)

Bukowski clearly feels there should be laws against the mundane daily existence of people like William, all members of the status quo. In his Rolling Stone interview with Glenn Esterly, Bukowski states, "I've felt kind of unreal and weird all my life. I've always had trouble getting along with people. Sometimes I feel like I'm not really a part of this world" (35). Sometimes Bukowski is moderately amused by the scamlings of the status quo for success, money, power; but other times he is outright disgusted. In "THESE MAD WINDOWS THAT TASTE LIFE AND CUT ME IF I GO THROUGH THEM" Bukowski moves into a new high-rise apartment complex even though he knows he does not belong ("all those years shot through the head / assassinated forever / drunk senseless / hobbled and slugged in factories / poked with bad dreams / across an America without meaning"). Nonetheless he tries just once to buy into the myth of the American dream. When he begins typing in his new home, his new neighbors bang on the walls and threaten him ("'HEY! KNOCK IT OFF!' / 'YOU SON OF A BITCH! WE'LL CALL THE LAW!' / 'GOD DAMN YOU, COOL IT!'",

and he is left to ponder:

these I cannot see through my window
 and for this I am glad
 my stomach is in bad shape from drinking cheap
 wine,
 and so for them
 I become quiet
 I listen to their sounds--
 their baseball games, their comedies, their quiz
 shows,
 their dry kisses, their kindling safety,
 their hard bodies stuffed into the walls and
 murdered
 all of them--
 loving, fucking, eating, shitting,
 frightened of Christ, frightened of poverty,
 frightened of life
 they crawl my walls like roaches . . .
 my shame, my shame
 at not having
 killed
 (razor, carcass, turpentine, gaspipe)
 (good job, marriage, investments in the market)
 what is left of
 myself.

(The Days Run Away 107-08)

For Bukowski, the "good job, marriage, investments in the market" equal death. The obvious escape, short of suicide, is alcohol. Even the casual reader of Bukowski quickly learns that nearly every one of his pages is awash in his favorite medium: whiskey, red wine, good cold German beer. In Ham on Rye, Bukowski recalls how at a young age he discovered alcohol could ease the pain of such a horrendous childhood. Molly Haskell calls Bukowski's alcoholism "a protection from his own acute vision" (11). So much of Bukowski's work deals with the pleasures and pains of alcoholism that it is beyond the scope of this

chapter to include the several hundred poems and short stories that dwell exclusively with the life of an alcoholic. Suffice it to say that Bukowski revels in the consumption of anything alcoholic and absolutely embraces wholeheartedly the life of the "barfly," as is apparent in this scene from his celebrated screenplay of the same title, the entire film of which is little more than a celebration of alcohol:

TULLY

(staring at Henry)

You don't belong here . . .

(waving her hand at the apartment)

HENRY

Like hell I don't. This is the best place I've lived in for years. Refrigerator, bathroom, hot water . . . not too many roaches . . .

Henry's beer can is nearly empty. He tosses it off.

TULLY

Why don't you stop drinking? Anybody can be a drunk . . .

HENRY

Anybody can be a non-drunk. It takes a special talent to be a drunk. It takes endurance. Endurance is more important than truth.

(The Movie: "Barfly" 95-96)

Much of Bukowski's poetry deals with the ugliness in the world, not what most might consider ugly, such as family gatherings, a baseball game, long walks in the park with loved ones. These things are unimaginably horrifying to Bukowski. Rather, Bukowski finds beauty in the strangest

places and in the most bizarre people. In his poetry, Bukowski celebrates human oddities, dwarves and hookers and cripples and skidrow bums. In "the world's greatest loser," Bukowski recalls a colorful figure from the racetrack:

he used to sell papers in front:
 "Get your winners! Get rich on a dime!"
 and about the 3rd or 4th race
 you'd see him rolling in on his rotten board
 with rollar skates underneath
 he'd propel himself along on his hands;
 he just had small stumps for legs
 and the rims of the skate wheels were worn off.
 you could see inside the wheels and they would
 wobble
 something awful
 shooting and flashing
 imperialistic sparks!
 he moved faster than anybody, rolled cigarettes
 dangling
 you could hear him coming
 "god o mighty, what was that?" the new ones asked

he was the world's greatest loser
 but he never gave up
 wheeling toward the 2 dollar window screaming:
 "IT'S THE 4 HORSE, YOU FOOLS! HOW THE HELL YA
 GONNA BEAT THE
 4?"
 up on the board the 4 would be reading
 60 to one.
 I never heard him pick a winner.

they say he slept in the bushes. I guess that's
 where he died. he's not around any
 more. . . .

I miss those
 sparks.

(Mockingbird Wish Me Luck 14-15)

For someone who can easily dismiss most of humanity as worthless, Bukowski always seems to find beauty in the

outcasts, such as the crippled gambler or in "the dwarf,"
the title-character:

we'd had our icecream cones
been scared by a dog
picked flowers
held hands in the sunlight.

my little girl is 6
and as good a girl as can
be.

we walked back to my place
where two ladies were moving
out of the apartment
next door.

one was a dwarf,
quite squat
with short trunk-like
legs.

"Hank, what's wrong with that
woman?"

I'm sorry, little lady,
that my child didn't know
that there wasn't anything
wrong with you.

(Mockingbird Wish Me Luck 126)

In "a wild, fresh wind blowing . . ." Bukowski juxtaposes^{ts}
the ugliness of everyday life with a moment of beauty,
found in the form of his waitress:

but I've lived so often and so long with this
hatred
that
my only freedom, my only peace is when I am away
from
them, when I am anywhere else, no matter where--
some fat old waitress bringing me a cup of coffee
as in comparison
like a fresh wild wind blowing.

(Septuagenarian Stew 219)

Haskell notes, "[Bukowski] talks a tough game, but there's

a wide streak of fellow feeling--for sagging, used-up women, for gamblers, for professionals. For the flotsam and the jetsam" (11).

Always in Bukowski's works we return to this lone outcast rejecting the mainstream, finding escape in alcoholism and hapless relationships with psychotic girlfriends and wives. In the short story "Bring Me Your Love," a character named Harry (again, obviously the Bukowski character) goes to visit his significant other, a woman named Gloria, who has been institutionalized for reasons of which we are initially unaware. Around the doctors, Gloria stays calm and complacent, on the road to recovery. Alone with Harry, she acts quite the opposite:

Gloria didn't answer. Then she brought her right hand up, looked at it, clenched it into a fist and punched herself squarely in the nose, hard. Harry reached across and held both of her hands. "Gloria, please!"

She began to cry. "Why didn't you bring me any chocolates?"

"Gloria, you told me you hated chocolates!"

Her tears rolled down profusely. "I don't hate chocolates! I love chocolates!"

"Don't cry, Gloria, please . . . I'll bring you chocolates, anything you want. . . . Listen, I've rented a motel room a couple blocks away, just to be near you."

Her pale eyes widened. "A motel room? You're there with some fucking whore! You watch x-rated movies together, there's a full-length mirror on the ceiling!"

"I'll be nearby for a couple of days, Gloria," Harry said soothingly. "I'll bring you anything you want."

"Bring me your love, then," she screamed.
"Why the hell don't you bring me your love?"

A few of the patients turned and looked.
(8)

Ironically, we learn, Gloria is absolutely correct: Harry is staying with another woman watching X-rated movies and making love beneath the ceiling mirror. We begin to understand that Harry has driven Gloria mad with his drinking and whoring. Several poems also deal with what Bukowski has called "the female problem." Haskell writes, "Beneath the bravura appetite for female flesh that runs through the stories and poems is a fierce struggle: theirs to seize and capture his pure male essence, his to keep it and move on" (11).

So then, as we see from these selections of poetry and fiction, Bukowski as literary renegade deals with several themes in his work, including the torments of growing up as an outcast from physical deformities under the bullying of an abusive father, the need for escape from and the total and absolute rejection of the status quo, the embrace of alcohol to ease the agony and boredom of everyday life, the constant and pervasive underlying hint of insanity and thoughts of suicide, and finally, the celebration of the odd and unusual, the drunks and

freaks and outcasts like himself. Esterly claims Bukowski writes about what he's experienced--"poverty, menial jobs, chronic hangovers, hard women, jails, fighting the system"--like "someone with his foot in a trap who's trying to gnaw himself free at the ankle" (35). In the settings of his work he never strays far from the back-alleys and cheap bars, prison yards and drunk tanks, roominghouses and charity wards, from where he started. Fontana calls Bukowski the most important California writer because of his choice of setting. "It is through the bars and rooming houses of central Los Angeles, not through its mythical beaches, freeways, and deserts, that Bukowski-Chinaski most freely and easily moves," he writes (5). His literary style is brutal and frank, unpretentious and unpolished, paralleling, as we will see in the next chapter, his own life. Jack Conroy says his use of language, equally as modern and realistic as his topics "can make words dance and roar like an earthquake or whisper softly like a Spring breeze freshening the fetid air of the streets where men past caring sleep fitfully in flophouse cubicles" (5). In his treatment of these themes and settings in an obviously intentional anti-artistic manner, Bukowski can be seen clearly as a literary renegade and poet laureate to the lowlife, so unique that as Kenneth Rexroth states, "No establishment is likely to ever recruit Bukowski" (5)

and as Conroy says, "he cannot be classified or yoked with any other poet, living or dead" (5).

CHAPTER III

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CHARLES BUKOWSKI

If Bukowski is a literary rhetorician, as I have argued in my opening chapter, and if he continually gives advice to the aspiring writer, as I will show in the next several chapters, perhaps the only gap we have yet to bridge is a short biographical chapter concerning the life and times of this colorful figure. After all, beneath all of the several hundred pages of advice on the proper lifestyle of the writer, the proper influences, the proper arrangement of topics, and so forth, the underlying message seems clear: Bukowski tells us that obviously he is the proper model to follow in our rhetorical training as we become writers. It behooves us then to examine at least briefly the life of Bukowski not only because he is still a relatively unknown figure in most academic circles but also because his life as an outcast and literary renegade often has served as catalyst for poetic production. The sources for this chapter are primarily the works of Bukowski, as they are all quite autobiographical, and Neeli Cherkovski's biography Hank: The Life of Charles Bukowski (1991).

Henry Charles Bukowski, Jr., was born in Andernach, Germany, on August 16, 1920. His father, Henry, an American stationed in Andernach in 1920, met his wife-to-be, Katherine Fett, during the First World War. Henry and Katherine, together with Charles, stayed on in Andernach for three years after the war, but then Henry moved his family back to his home in Los Angeles.

Even at this early age, Bukowski tells us, he felt as though he did not fit in. By the time he was ready to enter grade school, the boy had been tormented by other children for his trace of a German accent and the immaculate clothing he was forced always to wear by his strict parents. He describes his mother as indifferent and his father as cruel. In Ham on Rye, the novel dealing with Bukowski's childhood, he explains:

I had begun to dislike my father. He was always angry about something. Wherever we went he got into arguments with people. But he didn't appear to frighten most people; they often just stared at him, calmly, and he became more furious. Once we were in a drug store and my mother and I were standing to one side while my father yelled at a clerk. Another clerk asked my mother, "Who is that horrible man? Every time he comes in here there's an argument." (26)

In Chapter II, I have already touched upon the cruelty inflicted upon Bukowski by his abusive father, and the second other important factor leading to his feeling as an outcast, the boils which disfigured him and alienated

him from his classmates. By the time he graduated from Los Angeles High School in 1937, Bukowski had been labeled as "the class oddball, the outsider, the loner" (Cherkovski 24).

By this time, Bukowski already entertained notions of becoming a writer. As early as the fifth grade, when he completely fabricated an essay on listening to Herbert Hoover speak which earned him the highest grade in the class, Bukowski began to write so as to escape the often-times cruel world he could not belong to. In the fall of 1935, when his boils were at their worst and he was confined to bed, Bukowski wrote his first short story, basing the main character on Baron Manfred Von Richthofen, the World War I flying ace. Bukowski told his biographer:

His [the pilot's] hand was shot off, and he kept fighting guys out of the sky. This is all psychologically impossible, I understand. But, remember, my face was breaking out in boils while everybody else was making love to their fellow students and all that. I was the ugly boy of the neighborhood, so I wrote this long story. It was a little yellow notebook. It cost me six cents. I wrote with a pencil, how this guy with the iron hand shot down this guy and that guy. (qtd. in Cherkovski 34)

This comment offers a clue into Bukowski's theory of writing as escape. As he told interviewer Pamela Cytrynbaum: "Somehow when you get it on paper, tell it, it gets out of your mind. It keeps you from jumping out a window or slitting your throat" (11).

After a series of brief manual-labor jobs, Bukowski enrolled at Los Angeles City College on Western Avenue in September 1940 determined to become a writer. He took a number of journalism classes, but put off by the smug attitudes of his fellow journalism majors, he never worked on the school paper. About this time Bukowski began drinking with local underworld gangster types, and his excessive drinking led him to fight more frequently with his father. The final parting combat came one afternoon when Henry, Sr., found several short stories written by his son that he objected to:

My mother leaped out from behind the bush.
"Henry, Henry, don't go home, don't go home,
your father will kill you!"

"How's he going to do that? I can whip
his ass."

"Henry, he found your short stories and
he read them!"

"I never asked him to read them."

"He found them in a drawer! He read them,
he read them all! . . . He said he was going
to kill you! He said that no son of his could
write stories like that and live under the same
roof with him! . . . Henry, he's thrown all your
clothes out on the front lawn, all your dirty
laundry, your typewriter, your suitcase and your
stories!"

"My stories?"

"Yes, those too . . ."

"I'll kill him!"

I went after my manuscripts first. That

was the lowest of the blows, doing that to me. They were the one thing he had no right to touch. As I picked up each page from the gutter, from the lawn, and from the street, I began to feel better. I found every page I could, placed them in the suitcase under the weight of a shoe, then rescued the typewriter. It had broken out of its case but it looked all right. I looked at my rags scattered about. I left the dirty laundry, I left the pajamas, which were only a handed-down pair of his discards. There wasn't much else to pack. I closed the suitcase, picked it up with the typewriter and started to walk away. I was going to take the "W" streetcar, get a transfer, and go somewhere downtown.

(Ham on Rye 246-47)

Looking back on that time before he left home, Bukowski told interviewer Chris Hodenfield: "I guess a twisted childhood has fucked me up. But that's the way I am, so I'll go with myself. I don't want to be cured of what I am" (57). After several short stints in local roominghouses, Bukowski decided to travel across America in an effort to "forge himself into a smoothly running writing machine" (Cherkovski 59). The war had started, but Bukowski wanted no part, probably secretly sympathizing with the country of his birth. He made no secret about his anti-communist feelings, which often got him in trouble at his city college. Disgusted with his family, the war, and college life, Bukowski left Los Angeles in 1942 to begin his life as a drifter.

Bukowski readily admits the next few years represent to him the "lost years" of drifting, meaningless jobs, casual relationships, and several nights of drunkenness.

His travels took him to Fort Worth, New Orleans, Philadelphia, and New York, where his usual pattern included more roominghouses, more drunk tanks, and more than one evening spent on a park bench or a back alley. During this time, Cherkovski tells us:

The writing kept flowing. Hank traveled often now, frequently pawning his typewriter for food money, which forced him to write in longhand. He hand-printed more than fifty stories in ink, and sent them out. Not unlike other young writers, he amassed a huge collection of rejection slips. His life at that time resembled that of Martin Eden, Jack London's fictional character who nearly starved to death trying to break into the popular magazines. . . . Wherever Hank went, he traveled light, usually having one suitcase in which he could fit a cheap radio, an extra pair of work shoes, shorts, socks, a comb, razor and razor blades, and a few towels. At each new place, he wrote. Most of the pieces were without strong story lines. (76)

During this period of drifting Bukowski was jailed at one point in Moyemensing Prison for failing to notify his draft board of his frequent changes of address. He recalls having a relatively easy time during incarceration, gaining recognition among his fellow inmates for his gambling prowess which earned him much more money than he earned on the outside. When he was released, he was ordered to report to his local induction center, but as he was "thin, disheveled, and generally weakened by heavy bouts of drinking" (Cherkovski 73-74) he was classified as 4-F.

After returning to more menial jobs, Bukowski's first

literary breakthrough came in 1944 when he published "Aftermath of a Lengthy Rejection Slip" in the March-April issue of Story, the famous literary journal which helped launch the careers of writers such as Sherwood Anderson and James Thurber. After publishing a few more short stories, Bukowski grew weary of drifting and returned to Los Angeles in 1946.

One evening, while frequenting one of his favorite bars, Bukowski met the first woman who would prove influential in shaping him as a writer. Like him, Jane Cooney Baker was a true barfly, shunning society in order to stay drunk. During this period, though Bukowski wrote much, he sent out very little for publication. Critics refer to this time as the ten years Bukowski dropped out completely from the literary scene. As Bukowski himself notes in the introduction to Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame, "this author once did vanish (literally) from 1944 to 1954" (1). Jane and Bukowski filled their days and nights with loving, fighting, working minimum wage jobs, and of course, drinking. The most significant occurrence during this period came when Bukowski woke one morning to find himself hemorrhaging, bleeding to death from every orifice due to his excessive drinking. After being released from the charity ward, he began writing again, probably spurred on by his near brush with death.

At this time, he began experimenting with the poem, the genre he would go on to be most adept at.

As the poetry began flowing, Jane introduced Bukowski to the racetrack, an experience which quickly became important in his writing. He became skilled at betting and the thoroughbreds still remain an important element in the bulk of the Bukowski canon.

Jane and Bukowski split after ten years of living together, but they always remained close, so much so that upon the death of Jane due to acute alcoholism in 1958, he was inspired to write the beautiful and deeply moving "Jane" poems which later appeared in The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over the Hills, including "Notice":

the swans drown in bilge-water,
take down the signs,
test the poisons,
barricade the cow
from the bull,
the peonie from the sun,
take the lavender kisses from my night,
put the symphonies out on the streets
like beggars,
get the nails ready,
flog the backs of the saints,
stun frogs and mice for the cat,
burn the enthralling paintings,
piss on the dawn,
my love
is dead.

(34)

and "for Jane":

225 days under grass
and you know more than I.
they have long taken your blood,

you are a dry stick in a basket.

is this how it works?

in this room
the hours of love
still make shadows.

when you left
you took almost
everything.

I kneel in the nights
before tigers
that will not let me be.

what you were
will not happen again.

the tigers have found me
and I do not care.

(35)

The power of the language, the sorrow of the lover left alone in the room of shadows, the complete and total abandonment of anything reasonable--all show the impact of Jane's death upon Bukowski.

At the same time, Bukowski began submitting his poetry to little literary magazines, striking up a correspondence with an editor named Barbara Frye, who published a magazine in Texas called Harlequin. She published his work, and in time their correspondence became personal:

In letter after letter Frye kept referring to the hopelessness of her situation. One night, while in a drunken state, Hank wrote, "For Christ's sake, I'll marry you." He sent the marriage proposal to Barbara, laughing it off as words torn from the craziness of a wild night. The recipient of his offer, however, took it as a serious proposal Feeling like a martyr, Hank thought that at least

he would be able to make her happy, and resigned himself to his fate. As he thought over what he had done he reasoned that if he could bring happiness to one other person in the world then life is worthwhile. (Cherkovski 99)

After they were married, Bukowski moved to Wheeler, Texas, with his new bride, whereupon he happily learned she was a member of a millionaire family that practically owned the town. After many adventures "out West," two years later in 1958 Bukowski and Barbara were divorced after she left him for another man. Bukowski's version of the break-up differs slightly from the truth, as seen in "The Day I Kicked away a Bankroll":

and I said, you can take your rich aunts and
uncles
and grandfathers and fathers
and all their lousy oil
and then seven lakes
and their wild turkey
and buffalo
and the whole state of Texas
and your famous tornadoes,
and your filthy floods
and all your yowling cats
and your subscription to Time,
and shove them, baby,
shove them.

(qtd. in Cherkovski 105)

It was back to Los Angeles and more roominghouses, skidrows, and bars; Bukowski took work at the post office and concentrated on fulfilling his dreams of being a writer. Cherkovski describes his writing conditions:

Discipline became one of his bywords. He set aside a portion of each day for poetry. He knew by now that writing required a place apart to clear his mind. A radio tuned to classical music,

a six-pack of beer, a stack of typing paper, and his typewriter were his stalwart companions. On the typewriter he sang in a voice strengthened by a sense of having served a long, silent apprenticeship, and by an intimate knowledge of himself forged from fighting his demons in solitude. (109)

By the late fifties, Bukowski had published enough poetry in the local literary magazines of Los Angeles to become an important voice in the underground poetry movement. In 1960, E. V. Griffith, editor of Hearse, contacted Bukowski, informing him that he wanted to publish a collection of his poems. The book, Flower, Fist and Bestial Wail was published on October 14, 1960, and Bukowski wrote a letter to his editor the next day:

I went down to the post office this morning with card left in my box yesterday--and yowl!--there it was, set of HEARSE chapbooks by one Charles Bukowski. I opened the package right in the street, sunlight coming down, and there it was: FLOWER, FIST AND BESTIAL WAIL, never a baby born in more pain, but finally brought through by the good Doctor Griffith--a beautiful job, beautiful! The first collected poems of a man of 40, who began writing late.

(qtd in Cherkovski 115)

And so, at the relatively late age of forty, Bukowski embarked upon the next chapter of his life, that of a practicing, publishing author. The chapbooks came quickly now, one followed after another, edited by publishers such as Jon Edgar Webb of The Outsider and John Martin of Black Sparrow Press. Overseas, Carl Weissner of the German literary magazine Klactoveedsteen introduced the poetry

of Bukowski to Europe where it eventually received greater acclaim than in America, particularly in France where his translators catapulted him to great fame. According to Alberto Manguel, Bukowski's books became minor classics in France (63).

In the meantime, Bukowski fathered a child with a woman named Francis Smith whom he had met back in 1962 and had been living with off and on for two years. Determined to be a better father than his own abusive father before him, Bukowski took great pains to prepare for the trials of fatherhood, though he frankly admitted he feared it would take away from the writing. In a letter to his editor in New Orleans, Jon Webb, he wrote:

Francis pregnant, looks as if I'll have to move from here, looks like marriage (again) and disorder but hoping for more suave luck and grace to help me this time. I would not hope to be cruel to either woman or child, god grant me grace for I am weak and sad and do not feel good, but if any disorder happens . . . let it be in my life, not theirs. (qtd. in Cherkovski 138)

Marina Louise Bukowski was born on September 7, 1964.

Though he never married Francis, by all accounts he did not repeat the mistakes of his father. Sources indicate Bukowski was always a good father, providing child support and spending a great deal of time with his daughter as she grew up.

Bukowski continued working his job as a postman as he slowly gained critical acceptance among literary circles

in the 60s. R. R. Cuscaden wrote the first major essay on Bukowski. In "Charles Bukowski: Poet in a Ruined Landscape" (Satis 1962) he compares Bukowski to Charles Baudelaire, whose isolation in a barren world represented a writing tradition that Cuscaden saw in Bukowski's work. In the article, Cuscaden writes:

The serious poet of the past 125 years has been quite aware of how complete and deep has been his estrangement from the world in which he lived. He has known how futile would be his claim to be legislator of anything at all in a world he never made and did not admire. Few of today's poets are as conscious of this, or write so well about it, as Charles Bukowski. (21)

Other critics hailing Bukowski included John William Corrington and John Z. Bennett, who praised Bukowski for his blunt, honest approach to poetry, his taking back the art of poetry from the pedantic stranglehold of the Eliot-Pound legacy. Though many critics insisted Bukowski belonged to the Beat Movement, he had often commented he wanted no part of the antics of Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso. Just as in adolescence, Bukowski remained the outsider, refusing to be categorized with the Beats:

What annoyed him the most about the Beat poets was their engagement in social and political issues. He believed this hampered their poetry, that a true poet had greater concerns than tampering with current affairs.

(Cherkovski 118)

In 1967 in addition to poetry, Bukowski began writing a weekly column for John Bryan's Open City, an important

underground newspaper of the counterculture movement. True to his beliefs that the poet had no business meddling in political affairs, Bukowski steered clear of the Vietnam protests, preferring to narrate adventures from his youth. "Notes of a Dirty Old Man" became an extremely popular column with young people striving to be as defiant as the author himself. Cherkovski writes:

Bukowski's prose had the same kind of lean imagery as Henry Miller's. The sense of the Whitmanic man prevailed, unattached to ideology, yet acutely aware of his own needs and desires and exactly where he stood in relationship to the life around him. The columns were never planned--he did not know where he might be led to next. When he did focus on a social issue, it was usually subordinated to a narrative deriving from his own experiences. (190)

About this time, Bukowski began his own literary magazine, hoping to stir up trouble and question the accepted norms of American poetry. Laugh Literary and Man the Humping Guns first published in February 1969 ran a cover which adequately summed up Bukowski's disgust with the current state of poetry as he saw it. Scrawled in his own hand in big black letters, Bukowski wrote: IN DISGUST WITH POETRY CHICAGO, WITH THE DULL DUMPLING PATTYCAKE SAFE CREELEYS, OLSONS, DICKEYS, MERWINS, NEMEROVS AND MEREDITHS -- THIS IS ISSUE ONE OF VOLUME ONE OF LAUGH LITERARY AND MAN THE HUMPING GUNS. Bukowski explained to co-editor Cherkovski that the title was his way of laughing at the staid literary world and of bringing humor into the scene (196). After

two issues of the poetry journal, Bukowski found the work of editorship took too much time away from his own writing.

Bukowski began making the circuit at local poetry readings, though he soon grew to detest the practice. Often the readings degenerated into drunken brawls, with the poet staggering about, snarling obscenities at the audience, vomiting on stage, insulting the other participants. Nonetheless, the crowds seemed to love his antics and thrive on his rambunctious readings. The drunken violence only further strengthened the myth of Bukowski as a renegade literary figure.

On January 2, 1970, the break Bukowski had been waiting for came: he was given the opportunity to quit his hated job as a mail sorter. In "Black Sparrow: The House a Poet Helped to Build," Joseph Barbato explains the deal struck up between publisher and poet. John Martin of Black Sparrow Press offered Bukowski \$100 a month for the rest of his life if he would take a chance and leave the post office to write full time. Barbato writes:

That doesn't sound like much, even for those days, but it was quite attractive to Bukowski, a hard-drinking, blunt-talking roustabout, who hated his job in the Los Angeles post office and wanted only to sit home writing explicit poems and tales about life at the bottom of East Los Angeles. The \$100 monthly would cover his \$37.50 apartment rent and leave something for bar bills and the track. "Okay, you've got a deal," agreed Bukowski, promising to begin work on a novel. (26)

Three weeks later, Bukowski called Martin and told him to come get his novel. In just twenty days, he had finished the first draft of Post Office, his first novel which has since had 18 printings. Loss Glazier notes the importance of this occasion in his article "Mirror of Ourselves:

Notes on Bukowski's Post Office":

When Post Office, Bukowski's first published novel, came off the press in 1971, an important moment in the history of modern American literature occurred. Bukowski stood like a giant, one foot astride each of two continents: poetry and prose; pornography and belles lettres; suicide and sainthood; Europe and America; the underground press and the brackish water of the literati. A truly historic first novel, Post Office was as definitive as a line drawn in the dirt. (39)

Bukowski recalls being set free from the common labor market in "moving up the ladder":

my editor and publisher (to be)
found me one day, I was a pile
of human rubble sitting among
the beer cans and Scotch bottles
in this bombed-out court in
Hollywood.

he seemed a well-scrubbed and
decent fellow, refused either
scotch or beer, asked, "do you
have any poems?"

I finished my can of beer,
flipped it to the rug,
bleached, pointed toward the
closed closet door.

he opened that and a
mountain of paper, single
sheets that had been
stacked, stuffed and
thrown in there, they came

falling out.

"you wrote all this?" he asked.

"recently," I answered.

he smiled and fell into a fit of reading . . .

an hour or so later my visitor left with a mass of poesy.

2 weeks later he phoned, said he wanted to publish a broadship or two of my work and that he was mailing an advance.

"by the way," he asked, "do you have anything like a novel?"

"I'll dash one off for you," I told him.

I started that afternoon and later that night I . . . poured a tall Scotch to my new life.

(Septuagenarian Stew 227-28)

and in "the good old machine":

I was 50 years old when this fellow took me out of the common labor market so I could sit about all day and all night and write. he promised me a sum of money for life no matter what happened. not that the money was that

much but it was
money.

he even purchased for me
this large typer which I could
bang away at
a great and powerful
old-fashioned machine.
(also, he sent me little
envelopes full of
stamps, a very kindly
gesture).
and I sat about in my shorts
drinking scotch and beer and
banging at the machine.

when I think of that fighting
mad machine down there.
we got so lucky together . . .

that's not saying much
for my thankfulness.

writers, my friend, can sometimes
only write.

(Septuagenarian Stew 251-53)

Free at last from the curse of labor, Bukowski was
now allowed to concentrate fully on his passion, and the
resulting thirty collections of short stories, poetry,
novels, prove he has kept busy. In between the works,
he was coaxed by filmmaker Barbet Schroeder to write Barfly,
the critically acclaimed film and winner of Best Picture
at Cannes Film Festival dealing with Bukowski's youthful
adventures in Philadelphia with Jane.

Following a reading tour in Europe where he was greatly
received by his fans, Bukowski returned to California but
finally left his home in Los Angeles to settle in San Pedro
with his new girlfrind, Linda Lee Beighle. The couple

were married on August 18, 1985. Since then, Bukowski has lived with her in seclusion, turning out approximately one novel or collection a year. His short stories and poems still continue to appear in his favorite media, the little literary magazines.

A brief biography such as this one might not be as important or necessary in a study of other better-known authors, but due to Bukowski's relative obscurity among academic circles, I felt it will help accomplish the task of this project. Perhaps even more important, as I will show in the following chapters, when Bukowski offers guidance and advice to the aspiring writer, often times it comes in the form of a look at his own experiences in his life. This biographical sketch then further establishes the rhetorical theory concerning the making of a writer found in Bukowski's poetry.

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CHAPTER IV
THE EARLY TRAINING OF A WRITER

Of the many poems Charles Bukowski has written which offer some sort of rhetorical theory concerning the making of a writer, several of them deal specifically with the early training a writer must undergo to become successful. Again, we can find this theme repeated throughout several rhetorical treatises, as early as Aristotle and Plato who explain the first stages of training the proper rhetor must undergo, through Blair who dedicates a large section of his lectures to describing the correct study techniques for the writer in training, and even up to twentieth-century Freshman English textbooks which deal at some point with the process of prewriting-writing, or in classical terminology, the invention stage. All of this instruction can be seen as training for the writer before the writer actually begins the craft of composing. Bukowski in a number of poems offers insights on this first step in becoming a writer by writing about his early attempts at becoming published, the influences of other authors, and the first inspirations of the writer.

In studying the poems of Bukowski, we find early on

the romantic notion of writing as a sort of sickness, an urge which cannot be suppressed, an act which the writer has little or no control over. Bukowski suggests writers write simply because they have to write. The writer must be touched by a certain madness. After all, locking oneself away from society for long hours and rejecting the daily patterns of the rest of the status quo is a bit different, a bit strange. Again and again we find this theme of the writer as outcast, forced into this strange aloof existence because he or she must write. This notion of the writer as some strange sort of misanthrope, touched by divine madness, is of course not a new theme. We find it as far back as Coleridge's brilliant definition of this madness:

And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.
(Kubla Khan 49-54)

For as long as writers have undertaken their task, they have questioned what prompted them to do it. For both Coleridge and Bukowski, as well as others, the inspiration is a sort of madness, a sickness which leaves the afflicted with "flashing eyes" and "floating hair." The twentieth-century rhetorician Peter Elbow has also suggested as much, claiming some part of writing simply cannot be taught. The writer must initially be afflicted with these strange desires to create, just as Plato writes of in Phaedrus.

We have seen in the preceding chapter on Bukowski's life that writing for him represented an escape at an early age, an escape from an abusive father and hateful peers, a process which offered him relief in an often cruel and hostile world. But ultimately, the act of composing represents a sickness, a sign that he could not, as much as he would have liked to become a functioning member of society. Thus, to start with, there must be something extremely wrong with the writer to ever begin his or her craft. Bukowski calls them the "mad dogs of glory," and the brief catalogue we find in his poem "beasts bounding through time--" seems to suggest the writer does keep strange company indeed:

Van Gogh writing his brother for paints
 Hemingway testing his shotgun
 Celine going broke as a doctor of medicine
 . . .
 Villon expelled from Paris for being a thief
 Faulkner drunk in the gutters of his town
 Burroughs killing his wife with a gun
 Mailer stabbing his . . .
 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
 . . .
 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
 Artaud sitting on a madhouse bench
 Chatterton drinking rat poison
 Shakespeare a plagiarist
 Beethoven with a horn stuck into his head
 against deafness . . .
 Nietzsche gone totally mad . . .
 these mad dogs of glory . . .
 (You Get So Alone 21)

These are all desperate artists, touched in one way or another by this madness of creative impulse. Often it seems Bukowski tries to fight off the disease. He is, quite frankly, dragged unwillingly into the craft, as in the poem "I didn't want to":

I was always a bad typist and I never learned
to spell because I didn't want to.

I never learned properly how to drive an
automobile and I bought
my first one off a used car lot for \$35,
got in with my drunken lady and almost
ripped off the side of a
hospital making my first left turn.

I didn't want to learn music because I disliked
the teacher with her white wig and her
powdered face

. . .

I didn't learn music and now I listen to
more classical music than the first
hundred people you'll
pass on the street.

I disdained money and my first wife
was a millionairess.
she got rid of me and I never had any more
wives.

I hated poets and I hated poetry and I began
to write poetry.
and one day I looked up and I was in
Hamburg, Germany,
translated into a half dozen languages
and there were over a thousand people
sitting in the seats and aisles,
perched on the rafters.
I read to them and they believed it.

(Dangling in the Tournefortia 35)

In an interview for the Saturday Review, Bukowski said
"Writing to me is a disease. I'd have to do it whether

they paid me or not. The fact that I get paid for it is a real gift, so I am lucky" (58). Bukowski seems to be drawn unwillingly into the art of composing, though he holds nothing but disdain for the literary world of poets and poetry. As for his utter contempt for most poets and poetry in general, he tells Glenn Esterly:

And the poetry--Jesus! When I was growing up, poets were thought of as sissies. It's easy to see why. I mean, you couldn't figure out what the hell they were up to. The poem could be about somebody getting punched in the mouth, but the poet never would come out and say that somebody got punched in the mouth. The reader was supposed to plod through the fucking thing 18 times to somehow puzzle this out. (37)

Nevertheless, Bukowski writes, "when you take a writer away from his typewriter / you are left with nothing but the sickness which drove him there to begin with" (War All the Time 57).

This sickness is not always a bad thing; in fact, according to Bukowski, when we lose our divine madness we lose the ability to create worthy poetry. He explains the importance of madness in "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



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--
innumbrate--
tasks.

(You Get So Alone 290)

And so obviously the madness is important, allowing the
writer to endure the hardships and mundane nature of daily
life. Bukowski suggests the touch of madness which first
drove the writer to the typewriter must stay with him
always, or he or she falls into the fatal trap of becoming
dull and repetitious

This sickness manifests itself in many different ways.
Not only do we have the obsessive need to shun society
and create, we also find a sick obsession with the actual
finished product, as in the aptly-named "the sickness":

if
one night
I write
what I consider to
be
5 or 6 good poems
then I begin
to worry:

suppose the house
burns down?

or

an x-girlfriend
getting in
here



while I'm away
and stealing or
destroying
the poems

sometimes I
hide the poems

then
begins the
search

and the
whole room is
a mass of
papers
anyhow

and

I'm very clever
at
hiding poems
perhaps more
clever than I
am
at

writing
them.

(War All the Time 135-36)

Like Hemingway who never forgave his first wife for losing that infamous suitcase of original manuscripts, Bukowski writes many poems which show his great fears of losing his work in a drunken stupor. In "To the whore who stole my poems," he writes an elegy to a stack of poems snatched away by a prostitute. The obsessional need to produce writing is superseded only by this need to keep the poems to himself. For Bukowski, writing is almost a dirty act, masturbatory in nature, to be done off in private in a darkened room with the shades drawn tightly.

Once the writer knows he or she is touched by this madness, the formal training must come next. As we have seen, the majority of that training must come from experience rather than academic learning. The problem with most poets, says Bukowski in several different places, is that they have never experienced real life, meaningless jobs, hapless relationships, years of drifting. As much as he likes to feed into this myth, though, Bukowski does acknowledge the importance of exposure to great writers before him. As many rhetoricians have taught us, Quintilian chief among them, in order to be a good writer, one must be first and foremost a good reader. During the years of drifting at an early age, Bukowski quickly learned the library offered safe haven from the cold, hard streets. He explains the process to Esterly:

I'd find one writer and then another, and after a while I found that I'd discovered the same ones who had pretty much stood up over the years. I liked the Russians, Chekhov and the boys. There were some others, most of them going a long way back. (37)

The poem "the burning of the dream" which laments the burning down of the old Los Angeles Public Library shows us this picture of the young Bukowski learning from what he has called "the Old Masters" and offers us insight on the early development of his blunt poetic style:

the old L.A. Public Library burned
down
that library downtown
and with it went

a large part of my
youth. . . .

I was a reader
then
going from room to
room: literature, philosophy,
religion, even medicine
and geology.

early on
I decided to be a writer,
I thought it might be the easy
way
out
and the big boy novelists didn't look
too tough to me.
I had more trouble with
Hegel and Kant.

the thing that bothered
me
about everybody
is that they took so long
to finally say
something lively and/
or
interesting.
I thought I had it
over everybody
then.

I was to discover two
things:
a) most publishers thought that anything
boring had something to do with things
profound.
b) that it would take decades of
living and writing
before I would be able to
put down
a sentence that was
anywhere near
what I wanted it to
be.

meanwhile
while other young men chased the
ladies
I chased the old
books.

I was a bibliophile, albeit a
 disenchanted
 one
 and this
 and the world
 shaped me . . .

the old L.A. Public Library remained
 my home
 and the home of many other
 bums.
 we discreetly used the
 restrooms
 and the only ones of
 us
 to be evicted were those
 who fell asleep at the
 library tables . . .

and I checked books in and out
 large stacks of them
 always taking the
 limit allowed:
 Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence,
 e. e. cummings, Conrad Aiken, Fyodor,
 Dos, Dos Passos, Turgenev, Gorky,
 H. D., Freddie Nietzsche, Art
 Schopenhauer,
 Steinbeck,
 Hemingway,
 and so forth . . .

those selves held
 tremendous grace: they allowed
 me to discover
 the early Chinese poets
 like Tu Fu and Li Po
 who could say more in one
 line than most could say in
 thirty or a hundred.
 Sherwood Anderson must have
 read these too.

I also carried the Cantos
 in and out
 and Ezra helped me
 strengthen my arms if not
 my brain.

that wondrous place
 the L. A. Public Library

it was a home for a person who had had
 a home of hell
 BROOKS TOO BROAD FOR LEAPING
 FAR FROM THE MADDENING CROWD
 POINT COUNTER POINT
 THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER

James Thurber
 John Fante
 Rabelais
 de Maupassant

some didn't work for me:
 Shakespeare, G. B. Shaw,
 Tolstoy, Robert Frost, F. Scott
 Fitzgerald

Upton Sinclair worked better for
 me
 than Sinclair Lewis
 and I considered Gogol and
 Dreiser complete
 fools . . .

the old L. A. Public
 most probably kept me from
 becoming a
 suicide
 a bank robber
 a wife-beater . . .

this library was there
 when I was young
 and looking to
hold on to
 something
 when there seemed very
 little
 about.

and when I opened the
 newspaper
 and read of the fire
 which destroyed the
 library and most
 of its contents

I said to my
 wife: "I used to spend my
 time
 there . . ."

THE PRUSSIAN OFFICER
 THE DARING YOUNG MAN ON THE FLYING TRAPEZE
 TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT

YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN.
 (Septuagenarian Stew 42-48)

The poem offers many insights into Bukowski's theory of the training and making of a writer. Obviously, a huge part includes the notion that the aspiring writer must be a reader, reminiscent of Isocrates' advice to "read widely." We also get a sense once again of the madness the writer is afflicted by: the library is a place to go to ease the pain, as the act of writing offers us hope of an escape. In this poem we see Bukowski's early developments of style; he finds most writers tend to drag on, and he admires the brevity of the Chinese poets, resulting obviously in the development of his own terse style. Haskell says of Bukowski's style: "The clipped phrases and deadpan style recall the hard-boiled affections of literary drunkards such as Hemingway and Hammett" (11). He mocks the Imagistic movement by Eliot and Pound by explaining that Pound's Cantos did more to build up his arms from carrying the work than train him as a writer. Finally, we see the great influence of those writers he admires. From this and other poems, we see Bukowski much closer aligned with the Lost Generation writers (than with the Beat writers he is usually placed), most of whom he acknowledges as masters. Hemingway appears in a number

of poems as a great influence, as does the poet Robinson Jeffers.

In "the poets and the foreman," Bukowski openly admits that studying the great poets like Jeffers and Auden not only helped him train his mind as a writer, it also gave him the strength to face the outcast life of a renegade:

the best of Auden
the best of Jeffers
lines laid down
neatly
dried blood
crisp on the page
in that
cheap room of
peeling wallpaper
and the shadows of
drab men
who had died
there . . .

you could go back
to the bad
wine
and no woman
and not much of a
job in the
morning

the best of Auden
the best of Jeffers
they helped
immensely.

(Dangling in the Tournefortia 272-273)

The strength of the written word is enough helps us through the grueling hours of loneliness and the overbearing foremen who own our very souls.

Never one to rely too heavily upon academic learning, Bukowski takes a lighter look at those hours spent reading in the library in his address to Ezra Pound, "hey, Ezra,

listen to this":

I think I learned much about writing when
I read those issues of The Kenyon Review
over 40 years ago
the light of the starving library room
falling across my starving hands
holding fat pages full of
deliberate glorious
rancor

those critics

those spoiled fat gnats
bellicose

very fine energy
more fulfilling than my
park bench

I learned that words could
beat the hell out of
anything

they were
better than paint
better than music
better than clay
stone
or their
counterparts

yet
wasn't it strange
that all I wanted to do then was
lift the skirt of the librarian
and look at her legs and
grab her panties?

(War All the Time 211)

In the typical Bukowski stance, at the same time he acknowledges the importance of his early training as a writer, he scolds himself for taking it too seriously. Far better to daydream about the librarian's legs, he suggests. This poem also offers insight into his first objections of the writers such as Pound who take themselves

too seriously, the pedants and the false writers. At an early age, Bukowski recognizes the strength and power of the written word, while at the same time mocking it. Absorbing as much reading as possible, he came also to dislike pedantic scholars and false poets, which we will deal with in the next chapter.

We see Bukowski's disenchantment with the current state of literature in "nowhere," a poem which also cites some of those early writers he acknowledges as influential:

well, where are there?
 the Hemingways, the T. S. Eliots, the Pounds,
 the e. e. cummingses, the Jefferses, the
 William Carlos Williamses?
 where is Thomas Wolfe? William
 Saroyan? Henry
 Miller, Celine, Fante, Dos
 Passos?
 where are
 they? dead, I know
 but where are the re-
 placements, where are the new
 others?

to me, the present gang is a bunch of
 soft
 fakes?

where is Carson McCullers?

where is one?
 where are
 any? where are
 they?

what has occurred, what has failed to
 occur?

where is our Turgenev? our
 Gorky?

I don't ask for
 Dostoevski, there's no replacement

for
Feodor Mikhailovich.

but
these now, what are
they: making their tiny
splashes, what ineptness, what
boredom of
language, what a
crass bastardly trick
against print
against pages
against inhaling and
exhaling

there is
this loss of a natural and
beautiful force.

I look around and
I look
and
I say: where are the
writers?

(Septuagenarian Stew 160-61)

Obviously Bukowski takes a dim view of those contemporary writers about him. He is far more comfortable looking back to his influences of another time, that magical time in Paris on the Left Bank when the Lost Generation came together to hammer out the important works of literature of the twenties and thirties. We have already seen a number of similarities between Bukowski and Hemingway, which have prompted Norman Weinstein's study "South of No North: Bukowski in Deadly Ernest" and Julian Smith's "Charles Bukowski and the Avante-Garde." Equally as influential, argues Jimmie Cain in "Bukowski's Imagist Roots," is poet William Carlos Williams who also called for lean language and striking images. Kessler relates Bukowski to Henry

Miller "in their radical rejection of mainstream social values, their survival-oriented individualism, the buffoonery of their sexual obsessions" (63). Lois E. Nesbitt states Bukowski "shares company with William Burroughs" in the regard that he "loves to present himself as a crusty, arrogant old man, proud of his years spent as a heavy-drinking bum, living the low life and thumbing his nose at the literary world and bourgeois society in general" (19). Clearly, according to the critics, Bukowski belongs more to the Lost Generation than any other school. Bukowski himself respects the Lost Generation and denegrates the modern generation of writers, which he bitterly calls "the last generation":

it was much easier to be a genius in the twenties
there were only 3 or 4 literary magazines
and if you got into them 4 or 5 times
you could end up in Gertie's parlor
you could possibly meet Picasso for a glass
of wine, or maybe only Miro.

and yes, if you sent your stuff postmarked
from Paris chances of publication became much
better. most writers bottomed their manuscripts
with the word "Paris" and the date.

and with a patron there was time to
write, eat, drink and take drives to Italy and
sometimes Greece.
it was good to be photo'd with others of your
kind . . .

and yes, you write letters to the 15 or 20
others
bitching about this and that.

you might get a letter from Ezra or from Hem;
Ezra liked to give directions and Hem liked to
practice his writing in his letters . . .

it was a romantic grand game then, full of the
fury of discovery.

now

now there are so many of us, hundreds of
literary magazines, hundreds of presses,
thousands of titles.

who is to survive out of all this mulch?
it is almost improper to ask.

I go back, I read the books about the lives of
the boys and girls of the twenties.
if they were the Lost Generation, what would
you call us?

sitting here among the warheads with our electric-
touch typewriters?

the Last Generation?

I'd rather be Lost than Last but as I read
these books about
them

I feel a gentleness and a generosity . . .

now there are so many of us
but we should be grateful, for in a hundred years
if the world is not destroyed, think, how much
there will be left of all this:

nobody really able to fail or to succeed--just
relative merit, diminished further by
our numerical superiority.

we will all be catalogued and filed. . . .
(War All the Time 15-17).

In the same poem, Bukowski masses a long catalogue of those
Lost Generation writers he found influential. Harry Crosby
committing suicide in his hotel room with his whore, Joyce
"blind and prowling the bookstores like a tarantula," Dos
Passos using a pink typewriter ribbon, Lawrence "horny
and pissed-off," Shaw becoming a bore, Huxley arguing "that
it wasn't in the belly and the balls, / that the glory

was in the skull," Sinclair Lewis the hick coming slowly into fame. Bukowski concludes his poem with his most important influence by far:

but to me, the twenties centered mostly
on Hemingway

coming out of the war and beginning to type.

it was all so simple, all so deliciously clear
now

there are so many of us.

Ernie, you had no idea how good it had been
four decades later when you blew your brains
into the orange juice

although
I grant you
that was not your best work.

(War All the Time 17)

Like the preceding poem, "the last generation" shows us not only the strong influence of the Lost Generation writers upon the early training of Bukowski as a writer, but also his extreme dissatisfaction with the false writers around him currently. Perhaps, Bukowski seems to suggest that the false writers have not worked hard enough at an early age to become writers, or, as the cliché goes, they have not paid their dues. This theme of the writer first having to undergo extreme hardships in order to earn the right to be a writer appears in a number of poems, reminding us of Bukowski's own early training.

Exactly what sort of trails must the aspiring writer in training undergo? Again, if we look to Bukowski's highly autobiographical poems dealing specifically with that time in his life when he was trying to break into the literary magazines, we see that he holds some firmly established notions. Like an athlete preparing for a sporting event, the writer in training must not only be touched by a certain madness, but must also be willing to put in the long, grueling hours spent mastering his or her task. Literary success requires patience, the ability to withstand the blows of rejection slips, the inner knowledge that eventually some one will recognize our talents. Above all, endurance seems to be the key, as in the poem "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 mouldly.

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.

(You Get So Alone 141-42)

That night the mice come creeping in over his "immortal stories" and eat the green moldy bread, leaving Bukowski in his squalid conditions with nothing but rejection slips. We sense this to be an integral part in the training and making of a writer, learning the ability to survive the hardships of the life of a writer yet to make it. We see this notion again in "the difference between a bad poet and a good one is luck," a poem full of the Bukowski Myth of learning the craft by living on the road:

I was living in an attic in Philadelphia
 it became very hot in the summer
 and so I stayed in the bars.
 I didn't have any money and so with what was
 almost left I put a small ad in the paper
 and said I was a writer looking for work
 which was a god damned lie; I was a writer
 looking for a little time and a little food and
 some attic rent. . . .

and I had to finally sign on with a railroad
 track gang going West
 and they gave us cans of food but no openers
 and we broke the cans against the seats and sides
 of railroad cars a hundred years old with dust
 that food wasn't cooked and the water tasted
 like candlewick
 and I leaped off into a clump of brush somewhere
 in Texas
 I found a park
 slept all night
 and then they found me and put me in a cell
 . . .
 and they said
 oh, you're a writer, eh?
 and I said: well, some think so.
 and some still think so . . .
 others, of course, haven't quite wised up yet.
 two weeks later they
 ran me out
 of town.

(Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame 147-48)

The irreverent Bukowski continues to mock himself,
 suggesting that he is less than a writer, an artistic
 conman perhaps, destined to be exposed eventually. The
 years of drifting as a hobo seem to have left a lasting
 doubt in Bukowski's mind whether he is a bum or a writer:
 "You're a bum, he told me / and you'll always be a bum
 . . . and it's too bad he's been dead / so long / for now
 he can't see / how beautifully I've succeeded / at that"
 (You Get So Alone 35). But the drifting and the paying
 of dues train the aspiring writer better than much else.
 Monguel suggests that Bukowski knows this stage in the
 training of a writer is a natural progression from drifter
 to literary type, "once Captain Ahab and once Jay Gatsby
 and once Hemingway's big-game hunter" (65).

Even this notion of struggling in order to train as a writer does not exist etched in stone for Bukowski. As we have seen, there are no hard and fast rules. What if after years of struggling and paying dues, we still have not made it? Relax, Bukowski tells us: take a few years off and drink. We find this advice in the poem "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 I 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.

(You Get So Alone 94-95)

and the poem "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 world 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 . . . I just kept writing and not eating very much went down from 197 pounds to 137 but got very much practice typing and reading printing 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 free verse.

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

(You Get So Alone 277)

Bukowski suggests the early training of a writer is almost a giant con game; we should never take the rejections too seriously, because, after all, writing poetry is not that serious of a pursuit. In these two poems, we also see once again the importance of surviving on the streets as a full-time drunk, training far more appropriate for the aspiring writer than any fine arts degree in creative writing. In the back of his mind, however, Bukowski readily admits, "of course, I never really considered quitting

the writing game / I just wanted to give it a ten year rest." The extended time off gives the writer the opportunity to become "rested / and full of background music" preparing him or her "to give it another shot in the dark." We are reminded of Horace's advice to the creative writer to put away his or her finished product for many years before seeking public approval.

In case we think this "starving time" in the training of a writer is too difficult, too full of hardship and despair, Bukowski reminds us of the excitement, the good clean fun of the training, the camaraderie of struggling artists in his poem "two drunks":

I was trying to write.
I was barely existing.
mostly I typed dirty things
for the girly magazines.

Eddie was trying to paint.

. . .
Eddie and I were
drinking together.
we did our work
plenty of it but we
drank plenty too.

it was
an exciting time even though
we were hardly
making it
and the madhouse and/
or skid row were just
around the corner.

we fought and screamed and
drank with strangers
and the sun was always
up or
it was midnight
and either way

it was
raw shit energy.

(Dangling in the Tournefortia 53-54)

Bukowski reminds us that this stage in a writer's development, even with all the hardships, can be an exciting time, a time when the aspiring writer first begins to master his or her craft. We can think of Hemingway's own starving time captured so brilliantly in A Moveable Feast.

As for the earliest critics, not only must we be able to withstand the blows of the printed rejection slip, we must also be able to contend with our first literary critics, which for most young writers must be their parents. We have already seen the importance of the abusive father and the absent mother figures in the psychological training of a young writer (rather than a hindrance, this family setting makes us stronger much along the lines of Neitschze's theory on that which does not kill us only makes us stronger). Perhaps our first bit of advice might come from our parents, as is the case in Bukowski's "dear ma and pa":

my father liked Edgar Allan Poe
and my mother liked The
Saturday Evening Post

• • •

my father never liked
what I wrote: "people
don't want to read this
sort of thing."

"yes, Henry," said my
mother, "people like to
read things that make

them happy."

they were my earliest
literary critics
and
they both were
right.

(War All the Time 205)

And perhaps, sometimes if as aspiring writers we receive a positive comment, we can count ourselves fortunate.

In fact, we may actually undo some of the damage from other aspects of the father-son relationship, as Bukowski does in "my old man":

one evening he walked in
with the pages of
one of my short stories
(which I had never submitted
to him)
and he said, "this is
a great short story."

. . .
so I told him,
"o.k., old man, you can
have it."
and he took it
and walked out
and closed the door.
I guess that's
as close
as we ever got.

(Love is a Dog from Hell 292-94)

Finally, after the years of abuse and the violence at an early age, Bukowski can actually see his "old man" as a positive influence, as a critic who finally accepts his son's desires to be a writer and prepares him to withstand the blows of the literary critics. Bukowski has said, "The old man toughened me up, got me ready for the world" (Esterly 37).

A final statement which runs through the majority of Bukowski's work on the early training and making of a writer comes in the form of an analogy. Bukowski hints that the early training of a writer is akin to the training of an athlete, but more specifically in a number of poems, it is akin to the training of a professional boxer. Given the nature of Bukowski's violent world, perhaps this does not surprise us. Any number of writers--Hemingway, Robert Stone, Norman Mailer, Joyce Carol Oates--have been fascinated with the sport of boxing. It represents an adequate metaphor for the process of becoming a writer: the natural talent early on, honed and sharpened by years of training, coupled with dedication, finally leads to that moment when we stand alone in the ring, pitting our raw strength and learned prowess against all opponents that dare step toe-to-toe with us. Bukowski himself often refers to his typewriter as a machine which must be hammered on, hard, as if in a good fight. In his poem "the loser" the first act of boxing actually leads to the next act of writing. He writes:

and the next thing I remembered I'm on a table,
everybody's gone: the head of bravery
under light, scowling, flailing me down
and then some toad stood there, smoking a cigar:
"Kid you're no fighter," he told me,
and I got up and knocked him over a chair;
it was like a scene in a movie, and
he stayed there on his big rump and said
over and over: "Jesus, Jesus, whatsamatta wit
you?" and I got up and dressed,
the tape still on my hands, and when I got home

I tore the tape off my hands and
wrote my first poem,
and I've been fighting
ever since.

(The Roominghouse Madrigals 35)

After being K.O.'d, the young Bukowski goes home, tears
the tape off of his fingers, and begins pounding out a
poem on his typewriter. The craft of writing is always
a fight, although it is called, as this poem title suggests,
"an art":

all the way from Mexico
straight from the fields
to 14 wins
13 by k.o.
he was ranked #3
and in a tune-up fight
he was k.o.'d by an unranked
black fighter who hadn't fought
in 2 years.

all the way from Mexico
straight from the fields
the drink and the women had gotten
to him.

. . .

he came back for the rematch
and the fight was stopped in
the 3rd round because he
couldn't protect
himself.

and he went all the way back
to Mexico
straight to the fields.

it takes a damned good poet
like me
to handle drink and women
evade v.d.
write about failures
like him
and hold my ranking in the
top 10:
all the way from Germany

straight from the factories
among beerbottles
and the ringing of the
phone.

(Love is a Dog from Hell 274-75)

For Bukowski, then, the early days in the training of a writer in many ways resemble the training of a boxer or any other dedicated professional. Being touched by a certain madness, enduring the cruelties of childhood, immersing ourselves in the great writers before us, learning our craft not in the universities but rather the streets, being able to withstand the blows of the rejection slips and our opponents the literary critics, retiring from the ring for a well-needed rest when necessary--all these pieces of advice are in the poems of Bukowski, who functions once more as a rhetorician in giving us advice on this early stage of training in the development of a writer.

CHAPTER V

AGAINST THE PEDANTS AND FALSE WRITERS

In the preceding chapter, as we discovered Bukowski's views on the early training and making of a writer, we also found that at an early age, Bukowski came to despise those "fat, bellicose critics" and others who, for one reason or another, fail to fulfill their obligations as true writers. Much of Bukowski's rhetorical theory concerned with the making of a true writer stems from this attack on those who are bad writers: either the weak, simpering poets lacking the backbone and endurance we have already seen as crucial in Bukowski's theory; the cruel, harsh literary critics refusing to understand the blunt, often-violent style of Bukowski; or the pedantic, academic types seeking to clutch on to Bukowski's moderate literary fame and by doing so, earn a name for themselves. Bukowski deals harshly with all of these enemies, whether real or perceived, in literally hundreds of poems. As Rochelle Ratner points out, "this prolific poet loves . . . continually lashing out at other writers, the rich, and anyone who fails to appreciate his brilliance" (91). And more than a handful of critics have failed to appreciate

his brilliance. Ratner herself calls Bukowski's work "thematically stagnant" (83). Jim Crace is not so kind: "Bukowski (and his look-alike, talk-alike, live-alike hero, Hank Chinaski) is a chauvinist bull-shit artist of the Henry Miller school who suffers from the same genital migraine which made life such a drudge for Don Juan" (935). Nesbitt calls Bukowski "a lazy writer unwilling to push his language to produce something extraordinary" (19) while Jascha Kessler dismisses Bukowski's verse as "mere hypocrisy" (230). Perhaps most damning is the faint praise of an anonymous reviewer of in English Studies: "[Bukowski] is a poet who often gets adolescent boys interested in poetry" (71.63). And so, Bukowski does have his retractors to deal with. But more than just sink to the level of his enemies by attacking them in print, Bukowski acts as rhetorician once more. By showing us the types of false writers and by warning us of the dangers of becoming pedants, he in fact instructs us on how to be true writers.

Bukowski expresses his complete and utter contempt for these pedants and false writers in the poem, "dogfight":

he's a runt
 he snarls and scratches
 chases cars
 groans in his sleep
 and has a perfect star above each eyebrow

we hear it outside:
 he's ripping the shit out of something out there
 5 times his
 size

it's the professor's dog from across the street
 that educated expensive bluebook dog
 o, we're all in trouble

I pull them apart
 and we run inside with the runt
 bolt the door
 flick out the lights
 and see them crossing the street
 immaculate and concerned

it looks like 7 or 8 people
 coming to get their
 dog

that big bag of jelly with hair
 he ought to know better than to cross
 the railroad tracks.

(Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame 176)

Obviously, this poem represents the divisions he sees between himself and the rest of the literary world. Bukowski, the runt mongrel with no breeding, without hesitation, takes on the academic world with all of its superior breeding and education and registered papers. The professor's dog, representing the academic world of pedants, soon feels the fury of an unleashed Bukowski. Bukowski concludes that the pedants and false writers should know better than to cross the railroad tracks into the wrong side of town, the Bukowski world of slaughterhouses and drunks.

Bukowski simply does not belong to the established literary world; he wants no part of it. In his poem "the little girls," he describes the difference between his world and the world of the academic professors:

up in northern California

he stood in the pulpit
 and he had been reading for some time
 he had been reading poems about
 nature and the goodness
 of man.

he knew that everything was all
 right and you couldn't blame him:
 he was a professor and had never
 been in jail or in a whorehouse
 had never had a used car die
 in a traffic jam:
 he had never needed more than
 3 drinks during his wildest
 evening;
 had never been rolled, flogged,
 mugged,
 had never been bitten by a dog
 his face was kindly, unmarked and
 tender.
 his wife had never betrayed him,
 nor had his luck.

he said, "I'm just going to read
 3 more poems and then I'm going
 to step down and let
 Bukowski read."

"oh, no, William," said all the
 little girls in their pink and blue
 and white and orange and lavender
 dresses, "oh no, William,
 read some more, read some
 more!"

. . .
 but he was good to his word.
 he got the poem out and he climbed down and
 vanished. as I got up to read
 the little girls wiggled in
 their seats and some of them hissed
 . . .

two or three weeks later
 I got a letter from William
 saying that he did enjoy my reading.
 a true gentleman.
 I was in bed in my underwear with a
 3 day hangover. I lost the envelope
 but I took the letter and folded it
 into a paper airplane such as
 I had learned to make in grammar

school. it sailed about the room
before landing between an old Racing Form
and a pair of shit-stained shorts.

we have not corresponded since.


(Love is a Dog from Hell 260-61)

Bukowski wants no part of the literary scene which produces false writers and pedants such as William. The world of William, concerned with nature and the goodness of man, stands juxtapositioned with the dim hungover world of Bukowski, with its "old Racing Forms" and "shit-stained shorts."

Critic James R. Hepworth in his review of Love is a Dog from Hell entitled "Charles Bukowski as Parasite, Redskin Poet, and Sentimental Slob" writes extensively on the difference between the world of writers such as Bukowski and the world of intellectuals posing as artists. He calls Bukowski "a kind of standard bearer of common speech poetry" (57) in the tradition of Hemingway and Flaubert. "At his best, Bukowski gives expression to the vitality and the aspirations of the common man," notes Hepworth (57). It is for this reason the critics often deal harshly with Bukowski, who are little more than the intellectuals Bukowski attacks in his verse. The artistic decadence of Bukowski, Hepworth tells us, can be seen as a quite traditional school of American poetry:

Scholars commonly divide American poetry into two large camps called by various names: 'paleface and redskin,' 'genteel and uncouth,' 'patrician and plebian,' 'highbrow and lowbrow,' 'cooked



and raw,' to list but a few. On the one hand we have aesthetic ideals, allegory, and religious inclinations manifested by estrangements from reality as, say, represented in the drawing-room fictions of Henry James or the contemporary poetry of W. S. Merwin; on the other hand we have gross naturalism, reactions essentially spontaneous and emotional, and an acceptance of environment and reality as represented by the lusty, open-air poetry of Walt Whitman. (59)

Hepworth further reminds us for those critics of the second world opposed to Bukowski, "we should keep in mind that as far as the rest of the 19th century was concerned, Whitman came straight from the swamps" (59). Cherkovski  notes a similar point, calling Bukowski one of "Whitman's Wild Children."

Hepworth argues that no one is more aware of this division in American poetry than Bukowski, who takes advantage of it to lash out against those of the "paleface" world of pedants and false writers. And so, from the example of the preceding poem, "the little girls," we see the dichotomy between the two different schools: William the Civilized Sissy versus Bukowski the Primitive Bully in his "shit-stained shorts."

When these two worlds collide, the end result is usually crudely humorous, as in "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.

. . .

I came by, looked
about and
declaimed . . .
"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.

(You Get So Alone 241-43)

The image of the effeminate poet quivering and hiding in fear behind the door from the big, drunken Bukowski must please Bukowski himself as much as his fans. Though the intellectual in this poem recognizes Bukowski's talent (he eventually even helps Bukowski publish in the Penguin Collection of Modern Poets), most of the pedants we find in the poems are adamantly against Bukowski's brand of "redskin" poetry.

Bukowski himself has said as much in "the Rape of Holy Mother":

to expose your ass on paper
 terrifies some
 and
 it should:
 the more you put down
 the more you leave yourself
 open
 to those who label themselves
 "critics"

they are offended by the out-
 right antics of
 maddened.
 they prefer their poesy to be
 secretive
 soft and
 nearly
 indecipherable.
 their game has remained unmolested
 for centuries.
 it has been the temple of
 the snobs and the fakers.
 to disrupt this sanctuary
 is to them like
 the Rape of the Holy Mother.
 (Septuagenarian Stew 230)

Not only is their brand of poetry "nearly indecipherable,"
 the false writers might have very utilitarian reasons for
 attacking Bukowski's type of verse. He continues in the
 same poem:

besides that, it would also
 cost them
 their wives
 their automobiles
 their girlfriends
 their University
 jobs

 the Academics have much to fear
 and they will not die
 without
 a dirty fight

 but we
 have long been ready

 we have come from the alleys
 and the bars and the
 jails

 we don't care how they
 write a poem

 but we insist that there are
 other voices

other ways of creating
 other ways of creating
 other ways of living the
 life

and we intend to be
 heard and heard and
 heard

in this battle against the
 Centuries of the Inbred
 Dead

let it be known that
 we have arrived and
 intend to
 stay.

(231)

And so, quite obviously, Bukowski holds no patience for this brand of "snobs and fakers" who will be replaced in years to come by the true poets. John William Corrington in his foreword to Bukowski's It Catches My Heart in Its Hands speculates that

critics at the end of our century may well claim that Charles Bukowski's work was the watershed that divided 20th-century American poetry between the Pound-Eliot-Auden period and the new time in which the human voice speaking came into its own. He has replaced the formal, frequently stilted diction of the Pound-Eliot-Auden days with a language devoid of the affections, devices and mannerisms that have taken over academic verse and packed the university and commercial quarterlies with imitations of Pound and others. Without theorizing, without plans or schools or manifestos, Bukowski has begun the long awaited return to a poetic language free of literary pretense and supple enough to adapt itself to whatever matter he chooses to handle. (5)

As for the rhetorical making of a writer, Bukowski clearly warns us not to fall into the trap of becoming members of the second school of false writers. False

writers not only write poor, vaguely artsy verse, understood by few and enjoyed by even fewer, they also have a tendency to be bitter, ready to lash out against other writers, as in "a note to the boys in the back room":

I get more and more mimeo chapbooks in the mail
written by fellows who used to know me
in the good old days.

these fellows are all writers
and they write about me
and they seem to remember
what I said
what I did.

some of it is exaggerated
some of it is humorous
and a majority of it is
self-serving--

where I tend to look bad or
ridiculous
or even insane
they always describe themselves
as calm and dependable observers
instead of
(in many cases)
as the non-talented
boring
ass-sucking
pretentious and
time-consuming
little farts
that they were

I feel no rancor at what they
write.
it's only that I've already done a
better job
with that particular subject
matter

(War All the Time 152)

Bukowski unashamedly admits that he is a literary renegade; he merely wants the others to leave him alone. As for his exploits, he has done an ample job of describing them

in his autobiographical fiction and poetry. When we find these figures of the false writers and pedants, there always have a nasty side to them. If Bukowski or other true writers commit the sin of not catering to their every whim, the pedants strike back. Consider the particular viciousness of the academic type in "bad press":

years ago while I was living on DeLongpre Ave.
typing at that window facing the sidewalk
he came by
a college professor
he came by with beer and I drank most of the
beer.
I don't remember much about the conversation
but I do remember that I wasn't very excited
by his visit.

one afternoon he came by and I had the flu.

I met him at the door. "I can't see you,"
I told him.

then I took the 6-pack he was holding from
him and closed the door leaving him
standing there.

many years later now I receive literary magazines
to which I don't subscribe.

and in them are reviews by this professor of
the anthologies I am in.
the professor always praises many, damns
a few, and when it comes to me he simply
blows me off the page like
cigarette ash that has fallen there.

I really had the flu, you know.
it didn't kill me but it certainly did appear
to ravage my talents.

(Dangling in the Tournefortia 58)

The academic world of bitter reviewers is a nasty group of back-biters, eager to destroy literary reputations for the merest slight. Sometimes the attacks are completely

unprovoked, as in "an old buddy":

he writes to the editors
telling them that
I'm finished
and encloses masses
of his manuscripts
which
when returned
goads him into
vitriolic
response.

it's possible,
of course,
that I'm
finished
. . .

I think he's
a pretty good
writer
but I wish
he'd go about
submitting his work
without trumpeting
that I'm
dead and done.

class under duress
often creates a
strange and lucky kind
of nobility

as I used to
try to tell him
. . .

when
we were both
failed
writers.

(War All the Time 140-41)

This "old buddy" who has turned so viciously on Bukowski might be one of those writers that Kessler calls "a multitude of second-, third-, and fourth-rate poets" who have imitated Bukowski's style "to death" (61). Bukowski

is forever fearful of those "posers" who try to steal away his brisk, brutal style.

We get some sense of that multitude of false writers in "an unkind poem":

they go on writing
pumping out poems--
young boys and college professors
wives who drink all afternoon
while their husbands work.
they go on writing
the same names in the same magazines
everybody writing a little worse each year
getting out a poetry collection
and pumping out more poems
it's like a contest
it is a contest
but the prize is invisible.

they won't write short stories or articles
or novels
they just go on
pumping out poems
each sounding more and more like the others
and less and less like themselves,
and some of young boys weary and quit
but the professors never quit
and the wives who drink wine in the afternoon
never ever ever quit

and new young boys arrive with new magazines
and there is some correspondence with lady
or men poets
and some fucking
and everything is exaggerated and dull.

(Love is a Dog from Hell 212)

Poetry, which should be something holy and pure, has fallen into the hands of the dullards, just as Tennyson warned it would in "The Hesperides." Bukowski concludes this poem with the pedants and false writers churning out more poems on their word processors: "tap tap tap, tap tap tap, tap tap tap, tap tap" Bukowski has said it bluntly

in many places before: the true problem with these types of writers is they "lack balls." Above all others, Bukowski warns us if we wish to become a true writer, we should be on guard for the weak, simpering, complaining, cry-baby type of writer. We have seen earlier that the main ingredient for the early training of a writer is endurance. These weak writers, forever complaining that no one recognizes their talent and genius and that the little literary magazines reject their poems out of spite are not true writers at all. They live off the earnings of someone else like a parasite, proving they do not have the strength or endurance to make it on their own. In "the knifer" several of these weak writers attack Bukowski for various reasons:

you knifed me, he said, you told Pink Eagle
not to publish me.
oh hell, Manny, I said, get off it.

these poets are very sensitive
they have more sensitivity than talent,
I don't know what to do with them.

just tonight the phone rang and
it was Bagatelli and Bagatelli said
Clarsten phoned and Clarsten was pissed
because we hadn't mailed him the
anthology, and Clarsten blamed me
for not mailing the anthology
and furthermore Clarsten
claimed I was trying to do him
in, and he was very
angry . . .

you know, I'm really beginning to feel like
a literary power
I just lean back in my chair and roll cigarettes
and stare at the walls

and I am given credit for the life and death
 of poetic careers.
 at least I'm given credit for the
 death part.

actually these boys are dying off without
 my help . . .

(Play the Piano Drunk 55)

Bukowski ends this poem by going to the racetrack to ponder the type of writer who would call up whining about being "knifed." This group of false writers forever finds something to complain about; rather than put their energies into something positive (i.e. the actual act of composition), they become more involved in the politics behind writing.

In a similar poem, "5 dollars," Bukowski visits his literary friend Ronny who rambles on and on about the meaning of art, the artist's temperament, the need to create. Bukowski is quite straightforward about what he wants to talk about, but his arrogant friend will not stop rambling long enough to hear Bukowski's request:

I am dying of sadness and alcohol
 he said to me over the bottle
 on a soft Thursday afternoon
 in an old hotel room by the train depot
 . . .

meat is cut as roses are cut
 men die as dogs die
 love dies like dogs die,
 he said.

listen, Ronny, I said,
 lend me 5 dollars.

love needs too much help, he said.
 hate takes care of itself.

just 5 dollars, Ronny.

hate contains truth, beauty is facade.

I'll pay you back in a week.

stick with the thorn
stick with the bottle
stick with voices of old men in hotel rooms.

I ain't had a decent meal, Ronny, for a
couple of days.

stick with the laughter and horror of death
keep the butterfat out
get lean, get ready

something in my gut, Ronny, I'll be able
to face it.

(Play the Piano Drunk 63-64)

At this point, Ronny begins weeping openly. Puzzled, Bukowski asks him what is making him sob like a woman. Ronnie replies, "[M]y poems came back from the New York Quarterly." Bukowski replies in a classic tough-guy stance: "is that what all that noise is, I said / my god shit." Bukowski acts horrified by the embarrassing outburst of his literary friend, another weakling posing as a poet. In the poem we also return to another familiar Bukowski theme: it is difficult to be a literary genius and talk poetic theory when we have not eaten "for a couple of days."

Perhaps the worst fault of the weakling poet is his inability to face rejection. Just as Bukowski claims those early years he spent starving trying to break into the literary magazines was good for his training, the actual act of submitting to the editors increases a writer's

endurance. It toughens him or her up. One of the worst offenders who does not heed this advice can be found in "i can't stay in the same room with that woman for five minutes":

I went over the other day
to pick up my daughter.
her mother came out with workman's
overalls on.
I gave her the child support money
and she laid a sheaf of poems on me by one
Manfred Anderson.
I read them.
he's great, she said.
does he send this shit out? I asked.
oh no, she said, Manfred wouldn't do that.
why?
well, I don't know exactly.
listen, I said, you know all the poets who
don't send their shit out.
the magazines aren't ready for them, she said,
they're far too advanced for publication.
oh for christ's sake, I said, do you really
believe that?
yes, yes, I really believe that, she
answered.
. . .
Manfred never screams, said her mother.
OH HOLY JESUS CHRIST! I yelled.
Manfred did submit some poems once, she said,
but they sent them back and he was terribly
upset.

(Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame 210-11)

Later, disgusted and drunk in a local bar, Bukowski snarls to a bartender, "I submit my poems to literary magazines." This apparent case of professional jealousy gives way to the very real notion that Bukowski is genuinely against any poet, regardless of their talent, who refuses to enter the "arena" of publication. From this, we can glean that for Bukowski, the art of composition is truly a rhetorical

one: there must be an audience or else the composing act is useless. Bukowski cannot understand the writer who would compose for no one other than himself or herself.

Another aspect of the pedants and false writers that Bukowski cannot tolerate is the hustle and con-job that goes along with setting oneself up as a literary genius. Rather than whine about being a great undiscovered writer, "the genius" in this next poem should perhaps get a real job and stop leeching of others:

he
usually wore a vest and
a coat no matter
how hot it was
and his clothes were
always dirty
except for a colorful
clean scarf
. . .

and he'd drink
and he'd tell me
of his genius
recite
a few new poems
from memory
. . .

in a loud voice
while smoking cigarettes
that dangled,
he'd begin again
about his genius

"if I were a
fag or a black
I would make
it!"
. . .

at other poets'
poetry readings
he'd leap up on

stage
and read his
own things

he hustled so
hard
that people
hid
from him
"this panhandling
has got to be
wearing," I told
him, "why don't you
get a job and
write
on the side?"
"NO!" he screamed,
"I GOTTA BE RECOGNIZED!"
he was a very good
writer
but like the rest of
us
he wasn't as good
as he thought
he was

(Dangling in the Tournefortia 81-83)

An underlying fault with all of these pedants and false writers it seems is their incessant need to talk about writing, constantly. Small wonder that the tight-lipped Bukowski, literary protege of Hemingway and his code, is disgusted with these sorts of writers. If we have to talk about it, Bukowski suggests, we probably cannot do it. Consider the dramatic monologue in "nothing is as effective as defeat," in which the speaker (no doubt one of the false writers) advises his audience on the craft of writing, contradicting practically all advice Bukowski offers:

always carry a notebook with you
wherever you go, he said,
and don't drink too much, drinking dulls
the sensibilities,

attend readings, note breath pauses,
 and when you read
 always understate
 underplay, the crowd is smarter than you
 might think,
 and when you write something
 don't send it out right away,
 put it in a drawer for two weeks,
 then take it out and look
 at it, and revise, revise,
 REVISE again and again,
 tighten lines like bolts holding the span
 of a 5 mile bridge,
 and keep a notebook by your bed,
 you will get thoughts during the night
 and these thoughts will vanish and be wasted
 unless you notate them.
 and don't drink, any fool can
 drink, we are men of
 letters.
 for a guy who couldn't write at all
 he was about like the rest
 of them: he could sure
 talk about
 it.

(Play the Piano Drunk 82)

For the hard-drinking Bukowski hiding out at the racetrack,
 the notion of carrying a notebook (among all the other
 advice) must seem quite absurd. This apparent contradiction
 brings us to a point which must be addressed. If Bukowski
 finds fault with this type of writer, then the entire
 purpose of this dissertation comes into question. After
 all, the bulk of this study deals with just that, Bukowski
talking about writing. In his own defense, Bukowski would
 respond, yes, he does deal with these topics, but not at
 the expense of his other writings. He in no way makes
 a living teaching writing, as he believes, unlike John
 Gardner or Raymond Carver, that writing cannot be taught.

We find another one of these academic type "talkers" in the poem "after the reading":

" . . . I've seen people in front of their typewriters in such a bind that it would blow their intestines right out of their assholes if they were trying to shit."

"ah hahaha hahaha!"

" . . . it's a shame to work that hard to try to write."

"ah hahaha hahaha!"

"ambition rarely has anything do with talent. luck is best, and talent limps alone a little bit behind luck."

"ah haha."

he rose and left with an 18 year old virgin, the most beautiful co-ed of them all.

I closed my notebook
got up and limped a
little bit behind
them.

(Love is a Dog from Hell 299)

Bukowski obviously sees himself as the "talent" limping out behind the "luck"; ambition as we have seen from the proceeding chapter on the training of a writer does not, as this false writer suggests, rarely have anything to do with the making of a writer. Ambition is one of the most important ingredients of all.

In attacking this select group of pedants Bukowski even titles one of his anti-pedants poems "the talkers":

the boy walks with his muddy feet across my
soul

talking about recitals, virtuosi, conductors,
 the lesser known novels of Dostoevsky;
 talking about how he corrected a waitress,
a hasher who didn't know that French dressing
 was composed of so and so;
 he gabbles about the Arts until
 I hate the Arts,
 and there is nothing cleaner
 than getting back to a bar or
 back to the track and watching them run,
 watching things go without this
 clamor and chatter,
 talk, talk, talk,
 the small mouth going, the eyes blinking,
 a boy, a child, sick with the Arts,
 grabbing at it like him across the land
 on rainy nights
 on sunny mornings
 on evenings meant for peace
 in concert halls
 in cafes
 at poetry recitals
 talking, soiling, arguing.

it's like a pig going to bed
 with a good woman
 and you don't want
 the woman any more.

(Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame 38)

In a typical anti-intellectual poem, Bukowski attacks the
 sort of pompous ass who would correct a waitress on her
 knowledge of what the French dressing is composed of.
 The excessive talking usually masks more important things,
 as in "culture":

"now James Thurber," she said, "JAMES THURBER
 and Ross, I think his name was, he was the editor
 of the New Yorker, they used to sit around for
 hours arguing about the use of the comma."

"yes," I said, "while other people were starving
 to death."

(Love is a Dog from Hell 131)

The Marxist critic could easily identify with a majority

of Bukowski's poverty-versus-literature poems; while the masses starve, the literary critics sit around and debate the proper use of a punctuation mark.

At some point, the literary debates, the pedantic discussions, the con-job and hustle of literary geniuses, becomes too much for Bukowski to handle, as when he finally breaks down in "A LITERARY DISCUSSION":

it is not so bad, being old, he says,
a calmness sets in, but here's the catch:
to keep calmness and deadness
separate; never to look upon youth as
inferior because you are old,
never to look upon age as wisdom
because you have experience. a
man can be old and a fool--
many are, a man can be young
and wise -- few are. a --

for Christ's sake, I wailed,
shut up!

he walked over and got his cane and
walked out.

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

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

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

(The Days Run Away 39)

Again, other things (such as stealing his literary companion's wife!) are more important than talking.

By far the worst type of pedant or false writer, according to Bukowski, is that writer who once showed great

promise, but for various reasons, has lost it. In the Bukowski scheme, the "sell-out" is the absolute worst type of writer. We see this type of false writer in "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.

(You Get So Alone 299-300)

Again, we return to that earlier image of the writer-in-training touched by a certain madness, bestowed upon with a certain gift from the gods; in this instance, for various reasons, the writer does not stay "true" to himself or herself, and, subsequently, has the gift removed by the gods. Writing becomes once more the masturbatory act, producing nothing, creating nothing. In several poems, this theme appears, suggesting that Bukowski apparently lives in fear of losing his gift.

Gerald Locklin in "Setting Free the Buk" examines these fears but argues that Bukowski has never become a "sell-out" at any time, which in an age of commercial printing is rare indeed. He notes:

There is something decidedly American about his literary pragmatism. He is the engineer, the do-it-yourselfer. He is not concerned with the physics of the thing, just how to get it built. . . . It is apt to be a wet day on the moon before our society (pun intended) tosses up another writer as free as Bukowski. There is no one that he has to please. His freedom sets him apart from other writers. It is what America is supposed to be. It fascinates Europeans. It is a reproach to the less free, which is one of the reasons (another and overlapping one is the ease of his talent) that they wish they could ignore him out of existence. To those who do not fear freedom, however, he is an inspiration.
(30-31)

And so, true writers must live in fear of selling out, losing the gift from the gods, or, as in the next poem, "for my ivy league friends," simply becoming civilized:

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 digging weeds out of your garden
 . . .

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 someplace in between.
 most of the people in the world could care less
 and
 I often feel the same
 way.

(You Get So Alone 89-90)

We return again to the two literary worlds of difference.

Bukowski feels that once we sell out and become civilized,

we cross over to that other world of false writers and pedants, never to return.

As if we were still uncertain, we find Bukowski's opinion of this second world one last time in the poem "the famous writer":

when I was a mailman
 one of my routes was special:
 a famous writer lived in one of those
 houses,
 I recognized his name on the letters,
 he was a famous writer but not a very
 good one,
 and I never saw him
 until this one morning when I was
 hungover
 I walked up to his house
 and he was outside
 he was standing in an old bathrobe,
 he needed a shave and he looked ill
 about 3 years from death
 but he had this good-looking woman
 standing there with him
 she was much younger than he
 the sun shining through her full hair
 and her thin dress,
 I handed him his mail over the gate and
 said, "I've read your books,"
 but he didn't answer,
 he just looked down at the letters
 and I said, "I'm a writer too . . ."
 he turned and walked off
 and she looked at me
 with a face that said nothing
 then turned and followed
 him.

. . .
 halfway across the lawn
 a toy bulldog
 came charging out
 growling
 with his putrid little eyes
 seething
 I caught him under the belly with
 my left foot
 and flung him up against a

picture window
and then I felt much better
but not
entirely
so.

(War All the Time 166-67)

Perhaps something about the magical act of writing breeds snobbery. Bukowski vents his frustration on the putrid little bulldog, just as a large bulk of his poetry can be seen as an attack on the class of writers and academics who ruin the rhetorical act of writing for all others. Whether they are too weak, too sissified, too combative, too pedantic, this other world of "palefaces" must be identified and carefully watched, suggests Bukowski, so as to avoid becoming one. Again, the several poems we have examined here fit once more into a rhetorical theory in that the poems and warnings train us not only on the way to behave as a writer, but also on the way we should never behave as a writer.

CHAPTER VI

THE PAINS AND PLEASURES OF BEING A WRITER

Bearing in mind that the literary rhetorician must finally be concerned with the making of a writer, we can turn now to various aspects of the life of a writer, specifically, the pains and pleasures of being a writer. More than one rhetorician has instructed his or her students of the anguishes of rejection, the torment of writer's block, the danger of fame and fortune, and the ultimate pleasures of the composing process. Bukowski is no different. In several hundred poems he tackles these aforementioned subjects, and once again, instructs the aspiring writer.

For Bukowski, the act of writing as we have seen represents an escape of sorts. Jack Byrne notes in his article "Bukowski's Chinaski: Playing Post Office" that writing offered Bukowski an escape from the drudgery of civil service. Though the training may be hard and long and though we may find ourselves surrounded by pedants and false writers, the act of writing itself is pleasurable. And if we are rewarded for our efforts financially, this award is an added bonus. But what drawbacks to the craft

might the beginning writer encounter? Bukowski warns us, as we shall see, writing itself may be a painful experience, for instance, when we are unable to produce. Fame has a number of disadvantages as well, including a loss of freedom and the danger of becoming pedants ourselves. Perhaps all of these dangers are to be expected. After all, when we become writers we suddenly find ourselves in the midst of "tough company":

poems like gunslingers
sit around and
shoot holes in my windows
chew on my toilet paper
read the race results
take the phone off the
hook.

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

take it easy, I say,
the race is not to
the swift.

the poem sitting at the
south end of the couch
draws
says
balls off for that
one!

take it easy, pardner, I
have plans for
you.

plans, huh? what
plans?

The New Yorker,
pard.

he puts his iron
away.

the poem sitting in the
chair near the door
stretches
looks at me:
you know, fat boy, you
been pretty lazy
lately.

fuck off
I say
who's running this
game?

we're running this
game
say all the
gunslingers
drawing iron:
get
with it!

so
here you
are:

this poem
was the one
who was sitting
on top of the
refrigerator
flipping
beercaps.

and now
I've got him
out of the way

and all the others
are sitting around pointing
their weapons at me and
saying:

I'm next, I'm next, I'm next!

I suppose that when
I die
the leftovers

will jump some other
 poor
 son of a bitch.

(Play the Piano Drunk 13-15)

This silly, little, off-the-cuff poem in fact tells us much about the pains of being a writer. It is the poems, not the poet, in charge of the working relationship. The personified poems, in the form of a bunch of nasty outlaws, order and bully Bukowski about. They are the slavedrivers, the poet a hapless instrument of their creation. The notion of the writer as driven to create comes once more into play. We are back to the early training of the writer: the writer, that poor "son of a bitch," writes simply because he or she must. Another interesting idea revolves around the verse "I suppose that when / I die / the leftovers / will jump some other / poor / son of a bitch" as if to suggest that the poems exist outside the poet, merely waiting to be put down on paper or, more appropriately, leap on someone's paper. Bukowski teases with this notion often, trying to find that one "immortal poem" waiting to be written. It is as if Bukowski himself realizes that none of his poems, though some very good, will ever become immortalized as "Ode to the West Wind" or "Crossing the Bar" because he has yet to capture that one poem. This must cause him a certain amount of agony, striving forever night after night to establish himself as one of his idols we saw mentioned earlier. But he never

forgets that "the race is not to / the swift," but rather to those who have the endurance to overcome the pains of being a writer.

Bukowski deals with another agony often, the pain of rejection. We have already dealt with a number of the starving-artist poems, and now we can examine the poems dealing with the actual rejection slips themselves. Recalling that Bukowski amassed enough rejection slips to stuff an entire chest of drawers, we can assume he became quite familiar with them. What struggling writer has not dealt with cruel editors such as the speaker in "laugh literary"?

listen, man, don't tell me about the poems you
sent, we didn't receive them,
we are very careful with manuscripts
we bake them
burn them
laugh at them
vomit on them
pour beer over them
but generally we return
them
they are
so
inane.
ah, we believe in Art,
we need it
surely,
but, you know, there are many people
(most people)
playing and fornicating with the
Arts
who only crowd the stage
with their generous unforgiving
vigorous
mediocrity.

our subscription rates are \$4 a year.
please read our magazine before

submitting.

(Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame 195)

Though an obvious exaggeration, the rejection slip and the painfully mocking tone of the editor must seem to the young aspiring writer to be accurate. (Actually, as Laugh Literary was the name of Bukowski's own literary magazine, one must wonder if he sent this out as the rejection slip!). Even the surliness of the final line, "our subscription rates are \$4 a year. / please read our magazine before / submitting" is a stinging parting blow. Bukowski warns us that the life of the writer is full of constant rejections. Because the writer selects a life which must constantly be exposed to editors, he or she should not take rejections altogether too seriously, as in the poem, "a note on rejection slips":

it is not very good
to not get through
whether it's the
wall
the human mind
sleep
wakefulness
sex
excretion
or most anything
you can name
or
can't name.

it's like when you
send this poem
back
I'll just figure
it didn't get
through.

either there were
fatter worms
or the chicken
couldn't
see.

127

(Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame 111)

The overriding image in this poem, a huge, greedy chicken snatching up the little worms and consuming them, represents the editors who snatch up poems for their journals and poetry magazines. The process of marketing the writing is at best a painful process, in this poem, akin to being devoured. We must be able to take the pain, Bukowski suggests. Russell T. Harrison would agree, saying that the Bukowski protagonist is generally that of "the aggrieved male bearing it all with a stiff upper lip" (74). Bukowski mockingly concludes the poem, "the next time / I break an egg / I'll think of / you. / scramble with a fork."

At times the painfulness of it all might drive a writer to violence, at least metaphorically. Having received too many rejection slips, the writer in this next poem, in the guise of a garbageman, finally is driven to violence:

we do not accept unsolicited manuscripts
the garbage man said
dropping to one knee
and blowing the head away from the priest's
neck
and as the green bus stopped at the corner
a cripple got out and a witch and a little girl
with a flower.
we do not accept unsolicited manuscripts
the garbageman said
and he shot the cripple and the witch
but he did not fire at the little girl,
then he ran down an alley
and climbed up on the roof of a garage,

reloaded
 as the Goodyear Blimp sailed overhead
 he pumped 6 shots, saying,
 here are some unsolicited manuscripts,
 and the blimp wavered, paused,
 then began to nose down as 2 men parachuted
 out
 saying Hail Marys.
 8 squad cars entered the area
 and began to surround the garage
 and the garbageman said,
 we do not accept unsolicited manuscripts
 and he got one cop,
 and then they really began firing.
 the garbageman stood up in the center of the
 sky
 threw his loaded rifle at them
 and all the shells
 and he said,
 we do not accept unsolicited manuscripts,
 and the first bullet got him in the chest,
 spun him,
 another in the back, one in the neck, and
 he fell on top of the garage roof,
 his blood rolling out on the tarpaper,
 blood like syrup blood like honey blood like
 blood
 he said,
 Holy Mary, we do not accept . . .
 (Mockingbird Wish Me Luck 16)

We can view this poem as a sort of extended fantasy: the
 torments of receiving one too many rejection slips might
 be enough to drive us to the rooftops, armed and bent on
 revenge. We do not want to shot the heads off priests,
 but our failings as writers might justify such extreme
 actions. And if by chance we gain acceptance? Sometimes
 even an acceptance letter from a literary journal seems
 mundane in the midst of all the other torments around us,
 as in "FROM THE DEPT. OF ENGLISH":

100 million Chinese bugs on the stairway to
 hell,

come drink with me
 rub my back with me;
 this filth-pitched room,
 floor covered with yellow newspapers
 3 weeks old; bottle caps, a red
 pencil, a rip of
 toilet paper, these odd bits of
 broken things;
 the flies worry me as icecream ladies
 walk past my window;
 at night I sleep, try to sleep
 between mounds of stinking laundry;
 ghosts come out,
 play dirty games, evil games, games of horror
 with my mind;
 in the morning there is blood on the sheet
 from a broken sore upon my
 back.

putting on a shirt that rips across my
 back, rotten rag of a thing,
 and putting on pants with a rip in the
 crotch, I find in the mailbox
 (along with other threats):

"Dear Mr. Bukowski:

Would like to see more of your poems for
 possible inclusion in
 -----Poetry Review.

How's it going?"

(Days Run Away 146)

And thus we come to the next great torment of the writer.
 Rather than being completely rejected, in this poem
 Bukowski's work is accepted, with the final note, "How's
 it going?", as if to say, "Where are the poems you promised
 us?" Nothing equals the pains of being pressured into
 composing. Commonly known as writer's block, this
 phenomenon has been dealt with several times by Bukowski.
 For such a prolific poet, Bukowski would seem to have
 escaped the anguish of being unable to write, but many
 of his poems indicate otherwise. Recalling that in

Bukowski's rhetorical theory, first a writer must write simply because he or she cannot chose to do otherwise, this writer's block must be even more painful and one of the greatest challenges to the Bukowski writer. We can sense the pain of the blocked writer in the poem "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 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 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.

(You Get So Alone 104)

This failed writer is reduced to squeezing pimples and to thinking thoughts of suicide. There can be no greater pain for the writer than being unable to produce, being turned into an "empty man" with an "empty head," reduced to watching hours of meaningless television (the "glass

people") and writing nothing.

What causes this sort of writer's block? Freshman composition textbooks tell us many things might produce it, lack of prewriting, poor choice of topic, pressure to succeed, and the like. For Bukowski, sometimes the fact that his writing environments change drastically causes the inability to write, as in "metamorphosis":

a girlfriend came in
built me a bed.
scrubbed and waxed the kitchen floor
scrubbed the walls
vacuumed
cleaned the toilet
the bathtub
scrubbed the bathroom floor
and cut my toenails and
my hair.

then
all on the same day
the plumber came and fixed the kitchen faucet
and the toilet
and the gas man fixed the heater
and the phone man fixed the phone.
now I sit here in all this perfection.
it is quiet.
I have broken off with all 3 of my girlfriends.

I felt better when everything was in
disorder.
it will take me some months to get back to
normal:
I can't even find a roach to commune with.
I have lost my rhythm.
I can't sleep.
I can't eat.

I've been robbed of
my filth.

(Play the Piano Drunk 118)

and as in "order":

I've cleaned this room up
entirely
everything is up off the
floor
I even washed the top of this
desk

all is in order
now

paper clips
there
dictionary
here

stapler over to the
left
radio against the
wall
ashtray cleaned
out

stamps and international coupons in
cigar box
proper month showing on
calendar

unanswered letters in middle
drawer

3 corkscrews in a
dish

all is in order
now

the garbage in this room filled an
entire trash can

I look about
all this space
this cleanliness

it's nice
here

but I can't
write
I can't
write
I CAN'T

WRITE

(Dangling in the Tournefortia 257)

Obviously for a writer such as Bukowski, one who favors a constant state of dishevel and mess, the end results of "order" are deadly. We easily hear the anguished cries of the blocked writer in the closing stanza of this last poem, so painful that the words bear repetition and increased tone: I CAN'T WRITE. Interestingly enough, in designing the "perfect" studio, Bukowski also creates a useless studio.

Bukowski suggests that regardless of how difficult the task, we must never give in to the Writer's Block; we must in his words "put up the good fight" as in the poem "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.

(You Get So Alone 42-43)

The defiance of the final two words hints that Bukowski knows that he will produce again. The writer must always remain firmly fixed upon that notion: no matter how bad it gets, there must be this defiance. A number of writers have examined this dilemma of being unable to create but relying on the knowledge that of course they will, chief among them Philip Roth in Reading Myself and Others, Mailer in Advertisements for Myself, Fitzgerald in Afternoon of An Author, and Henry Miller in practically all of his works, but the poem is most reminiscent of Hemingway's treatment of the same problem in A Moveable Feast:

. . . sometimes when I was starting a new story and I could not get it going, I would sit in front of the fire and squeeze the peel of the little oranges into the edge of the flame and watch the sputter of blue that they made. I would stand and look out over the roofs of Paris and think, 'Do not worry. You have always written before and you will write now. All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence you know.' So finally I would write one true sentence and go from there. (12)

We hear the same determination in the Hemingway passage as the preceding poem. In fact, the death imagery in Bukowski's poem could come straight from "The Snows of Killamanshoro," suggesting that when the writer gives up, stops writing, he literary dies, as he ceases to be a writer. Lawrence Rungren has pointed out that in a number of poems, Bukowski worries about his "literary death" and "artistic decline" (113). The conversation in the poem could easily be taking place in the funeral parlor, not the tavern. And so, the writer must remain stubborn and defiant to the end, knowing that he or she will write once more, as in "slump":

my editor-publisher
never complains
when I'm in a
slump.
he knows that I
will
break out of
it,
that the crack of the bat
will sound like a
rifle shot again
as
line-drive
singles, doubles,
triples, also

prodigious
 homers
 will
 follow,
 and I will
 be
 Di Mag
 I will
 be
 Cobb,
 I will
 be
 Paul Waner,
 I will
 be
 Ted Williams

I will
 be
 the Babe,
 dead-panned,
 circling the
 bases
 with
 little mincing
 strides

once
 again.

(Septuagenarian Stew 358-59)

Returning to his favorite analogy, the writer as athlete, Bukowski teaches the aspiring writer to remain sure of his or her own ability and prowess. Sooner or later, that good pitch will come again.

When that instant comes, when we finally write once again, of course great relief and great pleasure, even a sort of smugness, may creep in, as with the poem "the 2nd novel":

they'd come around and
 they'd ask
 "you finished your
 2nd novel yet?"

"no."

"whatsamatta? whatsamatta
that you can't
finish it?"

"hemmorhoids and
insomnia."

"maybe you've lost
it?"

"lost what?"

"you know."

now when they come
around I tell them
"yeh. I finished
it. be out in Sept."

"you finished it?"

"yeh."

"well, listen, I gotta
go."

even the cat
here in the courtyard
won't come to my door
anymore.

it's nice.

(Love is a Dog from Hell 99-100)

Being able to write once more in Bukowski's theory is by far one of the most pleasurable experiences in a writer's life. Though at first he flippantly offers the reasons for his writer's block--"hemmorhoids and insomnia"--as with most Bukowski, we sense there is something more beneath the surface. And Bukowski seems moderately amused by the concerned fan's worries that "maybe you've lost

it." Bukowski merely replies "lost what?" as if to say there is no it, only hard work and determination. And of course when he is successful, when he has finished the "2nd novel" due out next fall, the concerned fan is incredulous ("you finished it?") and quickly disappears to go pester someone else. We are left with the image of a smug Bukowski, content in the knowledge that he has acted accordingly. He has created more fiction, and "even the cat/ here in the courtyard / won't come to my door / anymore." Bukowski knows that the act of creating is quite "nice."

These people who disturb his peace in this poem, those hangers-on who pester him about his progress on the second novel, represent an entirely different problem to Bukowski. In Bukowski's theories on the making of a writer, we as aspiring writers should always be wary of those leeches who try to correct our writing practices, encourage us to write on their favorite topics, worry about our declining skills, and try to attach themselves to our careers--in short, those people who drain us and take from us the time required to write. Bukowski notes in several poems that part of the agony of being a writer is an onslaught of fans and hangers-on. Above all else, these people are to be avoided.

Of course this avoidance of people is not an entirely new theme in the works of Bukowski, as we have seen from

his total rejection of the status quo. As a reminder of his disdain for people, we need go no further than "the magic curse":

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.

(You Get So Alone 231)

We return again to that crucial notion of the artist as insane, and needless to say, when the crowd pushes in on Bukowski who is busy trying to write, he becomes more than annoyed; he often in fact becomes outraged. For someone who so greatly values his freedom, Bukowski can react harshly when disturbed. Consider the poem "yawn . . ." in which Bukowski notes ironically that the only reason he became a writer was to be able to sleep whenever he wanted to, and so:

should the phone ring
say at 10:30 a.m.

I go into a mad rage

don't even ask who the caller
is

scream into the
phone: "WHAT ARE YOU
CALLING ME FOR AT THIS
HOUR!"

hang up . . .
(Septuagenarian Stew 115-16).

And the response the leeches who seek out Bukowski for
advice and friendship receive in "the vampires" is typical:

I am hungover and in bed and the doorbell rings.
it is eleven a.m.

"what the shit?" I ask.

she goes to the door and I hear her talking.

she enters the bedroom and tells me,

"it's a Mr. Sanderson," she says, "he says you
know him and he wants to talk to you."

. . .
"never heard of the son of a bitch. tell him
to get the hell out of here."

. . .
"he looked like a very nice boy, he looked very
sad when you sent him off."

"I don't want to talk to any son of a bitch,"
I tell her.

"well, I would have talked to him," she says.

that night I am on my 4th or 5th beer when
there is a brutal knocking upon the door.

I figure murder, emergency, anything . . .
somebody needs help . . .

I open the door.

it is a fat son of a bitch and
behind him are 5 or 6 other people
male and female.

"HEY!" screams the fat man, "I'M BO SEAVERS AND
WE'VE COME TO
SAY HELLO!"

I swing the door shut but he sticks a big shoe
in there holding it open.

"hold it," he says, "we're a lot alike, you'll
really dig me. many people mistake me for you."

"get your god damned foot out of the jamb," I
say.

I sit down and open a new beer.
 "ever since I was about 16," I tell her,
 "people have been after me and it has never
 stopped: 44 years worth of that.
 I don't know what they want with me because,
 you see, I most certainly dislike them."

"maybe if you'd just give them a chance,"
 she says, "you'll find that everybody is an
 individual if you'll just search them
 out."

I drain my beer on that one,
 then look at her:
 "how the fuck did you get in here?"

I walk into the kitchen and find the
 scotch, unpeel it and pour a hit as
 the phone rings.
 I hear her answer:
 "who? I'll ask him. . ."

I hear her walking toward me
 in the kitchen
 and I wonder why she doesn't already
 know the answer
 as I stand holding the drink
 watching the faucet leak
 the way they do.

(Dangling in the Tournefortia 216-18)

The people such as BO SEAVERS who charge in and interrupt
 our writing process are vampires, pure and simple, drinking
 not just our blood, but our creative juices as well. Even
 Bukowski's wife is suspect of being one of them. The end
 result of such torment can lead to actual physical pain
 as well as mental anguish, such as in the poem "426-0614,"
 which we can assume was Bukowski's home number for a time:

I get many phonecalls now.
 They are all alike.
 "are you Charles Bukowski,
 the writer?"
 "yes," I tell them.
 and they tell me

that they understand my
 writing,
 and some of them are writers
 or want to be writers
 and they have dull and
 horrible jobs
 and they can't face the room
 the apartment
 the walls
 that night--
 they want somebody to talk
 to,
 and they can't believe
 that I can't help them
 that I don't know the words.
 they can't believe
 that often now
 I double up in my room
 grab my gut
 and say
 "Jesus Jesus Jesus, not
again!"
 they can't believe
 that the loveless people
 the streets
 the loneliness
 the walls
 are mine too.
 and when I hang up the phone
 they think I have held back my
 secret.

I don't write out of
 knowledge.
 when the phone rings
 I too would like to hear words
 that might ease
 some of this.

that's why my number's
 listed.

(Love is a Dog from Hell 111-12)

The price of fame, even the moderate fame Bukowski knows,
 extracts a heavy price. When we as aspiring writers
 suddenly succeed and gain some literary fame, we must be
 ready for the drunken calls in the middle of the night

from the sad, lonely people looking for some sort of answer.

In addition, once we gain that moderate success, suddenly, we no longer can be our own writers. That is to say, once we have a "following," those followers feel as though they have earned the right to correct us, advise us, batter us on matters of composition. That becomes apparent in Bukowski's "soul":

oh, how they are worried about my
soul!

I get letters

the phone calls . . .

"are you going to be all right?"

they ask.

"I'll be all right," I tell them.

"I've seen so many go down the drain,"

they tell me.

"don't worry about me," I say.

yet, they make me nervous.

I go in and take a shower

come out . . .

then I go into the kitchen and make

a salami and ham sandwich.

I used to live on candy bars.

now I have imported German mustard

for my sandwich. I might be in danger

at that.

the phone keeps ringing and the letters keep
arriving.

if you live in a closet with rats and

eat dry bread

they like you.

you're a genius

then.

or if you're in the madhouse or

the drunktank

they call you a genius.

or if you're drunk and shouting

obscenities and

vomiting your life-guts on

the floor
you're a genius.

but get the rent paid up a month in
advance
put on a new pair of stockings
go to the dentist
make love to a healthy clean girl
instead of a whore
and you've lost your
soul.

I'm not interested enough to ask about
their souls.
I suppose I
should.

(Love is a Dog from Hell 241-42)

We have in this poem a hint of Bukowski's worst fear, that of going soft, becoming one of those false writers he has already warned us of, losing what Tony Moore calls "Bukowski's authenticity" (877). But we should recall that those fears are brought on by those "concerned" followers. Ultimately, Bukowski cares very little for those types, not even enough to "ask about / their souls." In "a non-urgent poem" we hear the same message:

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 damnded 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.

(You Get So Alone 76-77)

The very notion of writing a favorite author to explain how they have failed seems absurd to Bukowski. Ironically, here of course Bukowski does exactly what he recommends we should not do: he takes the time to answer the concerned fellow's charges about the lack of urgency in his current poems, rather than stick with his own work. And so, he warns us, those vampires do in fact take away from our work, by either questioning our earnestness, as in the preceding poem, or by questioning our choice of subject matter, as in "thank you," when Bukowski notes, "some want me to go on writing about whores / and puking. / others say that type of thing disgusts / them" (You Get So Alone 229).

One of the pains of being a writer is that on occasion

it seems everybody thinks he or she has a right to bother
and talk to us anytime they please, even when we are engaged
in activities having nothing at all to do with writing,
as in "I like your books":

in the betting line the other
day
man behind me asked,
"are you Henry
Chinaski?"

"uh huh," I answered.

"I like your books," he went
on.

"thanks," I answered.

"who do you like in this
race?" he asked.

"uh uh," I answered.

"I like the 4 horse," he told
me.

. . .

"listen," I said, not looking
around, "it's the kiss of death to
talk about horses at the track . . ."

"what kind of rule is that?"
he asked. "God doesn't make
rules . . ."

I turned and looked at him:
"maybe not, but I
do."

after the next race
I got in line, glanced behind
me:
he was not there:

lost another reader.

I lose 2 or 3 each
week.

fine.

let 'em go back to
Kafka.

(Septuagenarian Stew 158-59)

The harsh impact of the final line, a parting gesture almost, reinforces the idea of Bukowski's total disdain for most people, even his devoted fans. Bukowski warns us as writers not to become too caught up in the fame, so much so that we begin pandering to people such as this rude fan who disturbs Bukowski at his second passion. In a similar poem, Bukowski names these types of fans straight out: they are nothing more than "suckerfish," attaching themselves to the writer and draining him or her. In this same-named poem, Bukowski once more at the track is accosted by a book reviewer and fellow poet, Winthrop:

"hi, Buck!" he says.

"Jesus!" I say.

Winthrop always startles me, when I see him
it's like a death ray being pointed
at me.

(Dangling in the Tournefortia 186)

Without an invitation, Winthrop joins Bukowski and begins pestering him about fellow literary figures, the horses, the latest book of poetry, all the while calling him "Buck," which Bukowski hates: "people who call me 'Buck' piss me," Bukowski writes; "I'm Buke, like in puke" (187). Next Winthrop tells Bukowski he should have never gotten

rid of his Volkswagon, that he just does not look natural in the new BMW, to which Bukowski thinks:

people like Winthrop have been worrying about my soul for decades -- I'm constantly informed that I'm losing it or that I have lost it. when a man loses his soul you don't tell him about it, you stay away from him.

(188)

Next Winthrop attacks Bukowski's publisher, Barton (obviously John Martin of Black Sparrow Press), for not giving Bukowski enough exposure. Winthrop wants to get Bukowski "an agent / and a New York publisher," (188) to which Bukowski ponders:

Barton is my American editor and all the poets he refuses to publish tell me that he is a shit. that shit Barton published me when the New York publishers were busy playing piss-in-the-hat with the dilettantes.

(188-89)

Finally, after many hours of such abuse, Bukowski sums up his feelings for people such as Winthrop:

o.k., so well, to hell with details, it is a long afternoon, hot, with Winthrop interjecting literary bits and losing his tiny bets and I get to thinking less of death rays and more of suckerfish and I wonder why I can't just tell him to get away from me, to leave me some god damnded solitude? but I am a coward: I know he won't understand, can't understand: each one thinks they are special, that they are different. yet I drop enough hints, I try to nudge him off humanely.

(189)

Finally, Bukowski shakes himself free of that suckerfish,

and "feels good / for the first time / in hours" (191).

The poem simply reinforces this need for solitude so crucial to the writer. Bukowski warns us that if we wish to continue to succeed at our craft, we must ignore the masses and avoid the suckerfish.

Of course being recognized does have its certain advantages as well. Much less painful, Bukowski tells us half mockingly, half seriously, is recognition by the opposite sex. Consider the poem "how come you're not unlisted?":

the men phone and ask me that.

are you really Charles Bukowski
the writer? they ask.

I'm a sometimes writer, I say,
most often I don't do anything.

listen, they ask, I like your
stuff -- do you mind if I come
over and bring a couple of 6
packs?

you can bring them, I say
if you don't come in . . .

when the women phone, I say,
o yes, I write, I'm a writer
only I'm not writing right now.

I feel foolish phoning you,
they say, and I was surprised
to find you listed in the phone book.

I have reasons, I say,
by the way why don't you come over
for a beer?

you wouldn't mind?

and they arrive

handsome women
good of mind and body and eye.

often there isn't sex
but I'm used to that
yet it's good
very good just to look at them--
and some rare times
I have unexpected good luck
otherwise.

. . .
of course, I'll have to keep
writing immortal poems
but the inspiration is there.
(Love is a Dog from Hell 152-53)

For Bukowski then the admiration of the female is by far one of the greatest pleasures of being a writer, which is of course reminiscent of the famous line of Freud's, that all men seek "wealth, fame, power, and the love of women." In fact, from this poem we can glean it is one of the main reasons we become writers at all. This is certainly the case in "on being recognized":

the young girl found me at the track,
told me how much she liked my poems, stories,
novels.

when such moments occur
(and they do, at times)
I find it difficult to respond
because one does not walk about thinking,
I am a writer.
in fact, when you're not writing
you're not a writer.
one forgets.
and so,
one is never quite ready when
reminded.

so there she was, "glad you like my stuff,"
I responded without any originality, then
I became worldly and added, "when you see
my books be sure to buy them . . ."

"oh sure, sure," she said
her beautiful eyes very close, her body
very close.

. . .
I walked off thinking about how possibly
thousands of young girls might be reading my
books in their beds.

then as I walked along
I happened to look down
I had been in a hurry to make the first
race: I had on one black shoe and one
brown shoe.

original at last, I thought, I hope it lasts
until the next time I see a
typewriter.

I made my bet and then went downstairs where
the young girl wouldn't see
the black shoe and the brown shoe
on the famous
writer.

(War All the Time 256-57)

In his typical, self-effacing fashion, Bukowski reminds us not to take the admiration of the crowd too seriously. Underneath it all, the facade of being the literary genius, he is still just a silly old man in mismatched shoes. A key line, "original at last, I thought, I hope it lasts / until the next time I see a / typewriter," offers us insight into the writing process for Bukowski. Rather than carry a notebook around to note ideas, Bukowski hopes the inspiration of the girl will be there when it is time to write again. He does not seem to care if he gets every possible idea down on paper, unlike, say, a Joyce Carol Oates. Further, the lines "in fact, when you're not writing

/ you're not a writer" are quite important in Bukowski's rhetorical theory. Ultimately, we must derive the most pleasure from the act of writing itself. Nothing else matters, not even the admiration of the female, as in the poem "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,
 . . .
 or wherever

being drunk at this typer beats being with any
 woman I've ever seen or
 known.

(You Get So Alone 280)

Ironically, one of the first things that makes Bukowski want to be a writer is his desire to win over the elusive female, but in the process, he discovers that the act of writing is far more satisfying than any other experience. In his Rolling Stone interview, he says, "Writing, after all, is more important than any woman" (36). Most importantly, as writers we gain the greatest pleasure from giving in to our overwhelming impulses to create. We easily see the image of the satisfied writer in the poem "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 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 of this
 luck
 this absolute shot of
 grace

my death will at most seem
 an
 afterthought.

(You Get So Alone 107-08)

This poem is a particularly good one to conclude this
 chapter with, as it shows both the pains and the extremely
 pleasurable sensations of being a writer. For Bukowski,
 the act of writing is always a gamble, sometimes pleasing,
 sometimes painful. He tells us he never dreamed he would
 be quite so lucky, a theme which appears frequently in

Bukowski's work. David Glover in "A Day at the Races: Gambling and Luck in Bukowski's Fiction" notes the relationship between luck and gambling and the act of writing for Bukowski. Glover points out, "Some of Bukowski's most trenchant remarks on the art of writing refer us back to the track" (32-33). Like gambling for Bukowski, above all else, writing is so very pleasurable that even death "will at most seem / an / afterthought."

Even through the rejection slips, the writer's block, the hoards of leeches and suckerfish, this final image of the writer, solitary, content, banging away at the keys of the typewriter, grinning foolishly, shows more the pure enjoyment of the composing process than anything else.

CHAPTER VII

THE WORKING LIFE OF A WRITER

The working life of the writer, Bukowski suggests in much of his poetry, is filled with many adventures and misadventures--traveling on the poetry-reading circuit, meeting other famous writers, and further establishing (or ruining!) literary reputations. Though these things may seem secondary to the rhetorical making of a writer, they are in fact an integral part of preparing the writer for the life he or she has selected. In a number of poems, Bukowski carefully and frankly examines the working life of the writer, including the good, the bad, and the embarrassing moments, all of those times and experiences which further propel the novice writer into the world of the seasoned, polished writer.

To start, we should note that most of the time that Bukowski is not writing, he does not truly feel like a writer. Much of the working life of the writer verges on being a giant put-on, a con-game, a time to dress up like writers in our smoking jackets and pipes and try to look like literary giants. Bukowski is extremely frank about the phony nature of the working life of the writer, as in "photographs," when the photographers come to take

his picture for various articles and book covers:

they photograph you on your porch
and on your couch
and standing in the courtyard
or leaning against your car

these photographers
women with big asses
which look better to you
than do their eyes or their souls

--this playing at author
it's real Hemingway
James Joyce
stageshit

but look--
there are the books
you've written them
you haven't been to Paris
but you've written all those books
there behind you
(and others not there,
lost or stolen)

all you've got to do
is look like Bukowski
for the cameras
but

you keep watching
those
astonishingly big asses
and thinking--
somebody else is getting
it

"look into my eyes,"
they say and click their cameras
and flash their cameras
and fondle their cameras

Hemingway used to box or go
fishing or to the bullfights
but after they leave
you jerk-off into the sheets
and take a hot bath

they never send the photos
like they promised to send the photos

. . .
 and you've been a fine literary fellow--
 now alive
 dead soon enough
 looking into and at their eyes and souls
 and more.

(Love is a Dog from Hell 113-14)

In a typical Bukowski fashion, he has trouble concentrating on the task at hand as he finds himself fantasizing about the female photographers. When they are finished, Bukowski sarcastically acknowledges that he has behaved as "a fine literary fellow." So the working life of a writer is at times little more than dressing up and "playing author," acting the part of a Hemingway or a Faulkner. This is certainly what Bukowski has in mind in the poem "the American writer":

gone abroad
 I sit under the tv lights
 and am interviewed again
 I am asked questions
 I give answers
 I make no attempt to be
 brilliant.
 to be truthful
 I feel bored
 and I almost never feel
 bored.
 "do you? . . ." they ask.
 "oh, yeah, well I. . ."
 "and what do you think of. . ."
 "I don't think of it much. I
 don't think too much. . ."
 somehow it ends.

that evening somebody tells me
 I'm on the news
 we turn the set on.
 there I am. I looked pissed.
 I wave people off.
 I am bored.

how marvelous to be me without
trying.
it looks on tv
as if I knew exactly what I
was doing.

fooled them
again.

(Dangling in the Tournefortia 202)

And so for Bukowski, much of the making of a writer includes teaching the writer how to "play" at being a writer. Mailer would tend to agree, admitting that when he went to war he did it as a writer in a soldier-suit, but it resulted in The Naked and the Dead. A typical evening for the Bukowski-type playing "writer" we find in the poem "at Vegas you have to put up two to get one":

typing in a room full of smoke
getting up
opening the door
going to the bathroom
coming back
filling the glass
lighting a cigarette
typing again
poem number 6
poem number 7
getting drunker
what a floor show

. . .
sitting in my shorts
balls hanging out of shorts,
finding wristwatch face-down in ashtray,
turning it,
looking:
only one-thirty a.m.,
time for another run
this time to blow away the whores of
rhyming poets,
first gotta piss once more
change the radio station
holler down the stairway to the woman:
"hey, baby, you all right?"

(Dangling in the Tournefortia 207)

Again, we have the image of the Primitive, the Bully of American Letters, sitting with "balls hanging out of shorts" and at war with the "whores of / rhyming poets." We should note that these are the ideal working conditions for the writer, according to Bukowski, hidden securely away in solitude. But at some point, whether he or she wants to or not, the writer must come out from behind the typewriter and be interviewed and photographed, and meet with other literary types, as in "the cats too":

it's all very literary.

the movie people come by, the
interviewers, the translators, the
editors, the publishers, the
suckerfish; we get them all drunk
we get much drunker than they and
we talk for hours, smoking our cigars,
swallowing their pills, smoking their
stuff, we talk until sunrise,
into the morning, pouring more drinks,

. . .
I wear them down. I make them hate. I give them
more than they want. they want to suck blood,
I give them pus.

. . .
it's all very literary.

(Dangling in the Tournefortia 229-30)

In this poem Bukowski simply wears the literary types down, gives them "more than they want," which is an interesting way to deal with the vampires and leeches. Even worse than entertaining the photographers and interviewers and other suckerfish, as working writers our financial situation might force us to go out on the poetry-reading circuit.

As the chapter dealing with the biography of Bukowski

shows, Bukowski is no great fan of the poetry-reading circuit. He has often quipped about reading poetry at gatherings, "This is what killed Dylan Thomas, isn't it?" But Bukowski at one time in his life did give several readings a year, recognizing it as an important aspect of the writer's working life. In order to be free from the common labor market so as to have the precious time to write, Bukowski knew he had to take up the offers of the local colleges that invited him to read. As poetry-readings are an important part of the working life of the writer (and in fact deal extensively with that fourth office of rhetoric, delivery), we should devote a large portion of this chapter to that activity.

To begin, we sense a rather mercenary and rather cavalier attitude Bukowski takes on the topic of poetry-readings. While most writers would be thrilled to receive an invitation to read, Bukowski sees it merely as a quick and easy buck. His reckless attitude often leads to disaster, as in "this poet":

 this poet he'd
 been drinking
 2 or 3 days
 and he walked
 out on the stage
 and looked at the
 audience and he just
 knew he was going
 to do it.
 there was a
 grand piano on stage
 and he walked over
 and lifted the lid and

vomited inside the piano.
 then he closed the lid
 and gave his reading.

they had to remove
 the strings from the piano
 and wash out the insides
 and restring it.

I can understand why
 they never invited him back.
 but to pass the word on to
 other universities that he
 was a poet who liked to vomit
 in grand pianos was unfair.

they never considered
 the quality of his reading.
 I know this poet:
 he's just like the rest of us:
 he'll vomit anywhere
 for
 money.

(Love is a Dog From Hell 79-80)

The public reading of poetry, putting oneself on a stage in front of an audience to be worshipped and admired, is almost something filthy, such as vomiting in public. And those types of writers who would thrive on the attention are close to carnival geeks, vomiting "anywhere / for money" in public. Apparently this type of behavior by Bukowski is typical. In his essay, "Some Tough Acts to Follow," Keith Abbott recalls when Bukowski "puked out the window of the car on the way down [leaving] a big smear of barf on the university car" (26). The point is clear: these public readings of poetry are not only mercenary, but they are also very much along the lines of a public blood-letting. Even a casual poetry-reading starts Bukowski's

guts churning, as in "the professors":

sitting with the professors
 we talk about Allen Tate
 and John Crowe Ransom
 the rugs are clean and
 the coffee tables shine
 and there is talk of
 budgets and works in
 progress
 and there is a
 fireplace.
 the kitchen floor is
 well-waxed
 and I have just eaten
 dinner
 after drinking until
 3 a.m.
 after reading
 the night before

now I'm to read again
 at a nearby college.
 I'm in Arkansas in
 January
 somebody even mentions
 Faulkner
 I go to the bathroom
 and vomit up the
 dinner
 when I come out
 they are all in their
 coats and overcoats
 waiting in the
 kitchen.
 I'm to read in
 15 minutes.
 there'll be a
 good crowd
 they tell me.

(Love is a Dog from Hell 88-89)

Once again we get the contrast between Bukowski and the clean, well-fed professors. We get the impression that just the physical traveling is enough to wear the writer down, let alone the de-humanization of night after night of getting up on stage and reading the same poems. Esterly

devotes the entire introduction of his Rolling Stone article "The Pock-Marked Poetry of Charles Bukowski" to explaining the Bukowski-poetry-reading-phenomenon:

In preparation for tonight's poetry reading, Charles Bukowski is out in the parking lot, vomiting. He always vomits before readings; crowds give him the jitters. And tonight there's a big crowd. Some 400 noisy students--many of whom have come directly from nearby 49rs taverns--are packed into an antiseptic auditorium at California State University at Long Beach on this fourth night of something called Poetry Week. Bukowski always attracts a good crowd. He has a reputation here--for his performances as well as his poetry. Last time he was here, he had both an afternoon and evening reading. In between, he got a hold of a bottle and slipped over the edge. Too drunk to read at the evening performance, he decided to entertain the students by exchanging insults with them. It developed into quite a show. (35)

Aside from the rowdy drunkenness, much of the work is boring repetition. Of course, as in "my groupie," occasionally the monotony is broken:

I read last Saturday in the
redwoods outside of Santa Cruz
and I was about 3/4's finished
when I heard a long high scream
and a quite attractive
young girl came running toward me
long gown & divine eyes of fire
and she leaped up on the stage
and screamed: "I WANT YOU!
I WANT YOU! TAKE ME! TAKE
ME!"
I told her, "look, get the hell
away from me."
but she kept tearing at my
clothing and throwing herself
at me.
"where were you," I
asked her, "when I was living
on one candy bar a day and
sending short stories to the

Atlantic Monthly?"
 she grabbed my balls and almost
 twisted them off. her kisses
 tasted like shitsoup.
 2 women jumped up on the stage
 and
 carried her off into the
 woods.
 I could still hear her screams
 as I began the next poem.

maybe, I thought, I should have
 taken her on the stage in front
 of all those eyes
 but one can never be sure
 whether it's good poetry or
 bad acid.

(Love is a Dog from Hell 231-32)

But mostly, the routine represents very much the same,
 pure drudgery and what Bukowski calls a "free meal with
 other literary hustlers" (Kessler 60). We feel the
 hollowness of the process in "on and off the road":

flying into a strange town, being met at the
 airport by a student, then demanding to know
 where is the nearest bar

getting the drinks down while waiting for the
 luggage
 then

being driven to the hotel, first demanding to
 be let off at the nearest liquor store

later in the hotel room, switching on the tv,
 getting into bed with the bottle, thinking, I
 don't have to read until tomorrow night
 then

drinking that night away . . .

on stage with another bottle, insulting them
 between poems, they look as though they need
 the artistry of the insult,
 anyhow

you're going to get your check whether you're

good or bad
and there's always the chance you might end up
in bed with a coed . . .

flying out of town, back to L.A., your woman
meeting you at the airport, driving you in--
you're a traveling salesman: you sell
poems.

back at the place you try to sober up
get in an argument with your woman
. . .

she just doesn't understand: it's the only job
you have

it's the only thing you can do.
(War All the Time 73-74)

and in "the hustle":

the readings in those college towns were hell
of course, but I liked the flying in and out,
drinking on the planes, and I liked the hotels,
the impersonal rooms.

the nights before the readings were best,
stretched out on the bed in a strange town,
the fifth of whiskey on the night stand,
and, you know, those hotels were quiet . . .
those southern hotels
and especially those midwestern hotels.

it was a stupid hustle but it beat the factories,
I knew that, but it humorous to me
and ridiculous that
I was accepted as a POET
but after I examined the work of my compatriots
I no longer minded taking the money
and after hearing some of them read
I hardly felt the imposture at all
although I knew I was a bit crazy
especially after drinking
. . .

some of the profs must have guessed
for after I accepted an invitation to read
most wrote back to me:
"i hope you won't cost me my job. . ."

. . .

all those hotel rooms the nights before the
 readings
 me sitting up in bed, smoking, sucking
 on the fifth, sick of looking at the poems,
 thinking, if I can fool them it's all right,
 worse have, many more will . . .
 no wonder this world isn't very
 much

then I'd go for a big gulp from the fifth,
 say, at 2:30 a.m.--
 it was just like being back
 home.

(War All the Time 259-60)

And so, from these two poems, we learn that Bukowski feels much of the writer's work is a great big hustle. But the readings are not totally without their moments of pleasure, and being a writer on the circuit certainly beats the mindless work in the factories. Bukowski compares the difference between being a working stiff and a POET in the poem "attack and retreat":

read to them
 read to them and drink wine, let the young girls
 dream of sucking your soul
 . . .
 read to them
 read to them and drink your wine, get paid in
 cash,
 leave and let somebody else drive the car.
 . . .
 read to them
 read them the new ones so you
 won't be bored
 and when the applause comes
 and the young girls look at you
 with their hot bright eyes
 remember when you were starving in small
 rooms
 remember the only time anybody wanted your
 autograph was when you signed in
 at the drunk tank
 remember when other young girls thought you
 were a roach.

read to them
 read to them and drink your wine, and remember
 all the poets who think that reading is
 an important and a holy thing;
 these are the poets who hate you,

. . .
 these are the poets who write of
 love and honesty and courage
 or believe that they do.
 leave the young girls to them, they need
 the young girls for they have nothing
 else.

take the cash and jam it
 into your side pocket and get out and get away,
 get back to your place, lock in.

you will be contacted: they'll want to issue
 a phonograph
 record of the reading.

give the contract to your lawyer.

start in on novel #
 4.

(Dangling in the Tournefortia 166-67)

The mechanical nature of the refrain ("read to them") suggests that like all the rest, the readings are a part of the working life of a writer, something to be gotten on with. Again we see the reference to the false writers, the "poets who think that reading is / an important and holy thing." But for the Bukowski-writer, the readings come close to misery.

One fine portrayal of a false writer at a poetry-reading we find in the poem "beauti-ful." In the poem Bukowski sits in an audience listening to a poet reading, a poet who is accompanied by a beautiful blonde:

one poet used to take

this stringy-haired blonde around
 with him to poetry readings
 and
 she'd sit out in the audience
 and now and then
 just as he concluded a
 poem
 the blonde would
 breathlessly say:
 "beauti-ful. . ."

(War All the Time 173)

Bukowski admits that he is a little jealous of the other
 poet, as the admiration from the girl makes the other poet
 look good. "Nobody had ever said that / about / one of
 my poems," Bukowski complains. Each time the blonde says
 "beauti-ful," the crowd breaks into applause. Bukowski
 further describes the poet, whom we can assume is the sort
 of writer who loves poetry-readings:

he had her planted at
 all his readings
 this poet who was so good
 with the ladies
 he had a
 gentle smile and
 these artistic
 dangling
 hands
 and he dangled
 very well
 elsewhere
 it was
 told.

(173)

Obviously, Bukowski dislikes the poet for the way he dangles
 his effeminate hands. Bukowski follows the poet's career
 for several months, the poet and the blonde always doing
 the same routine and receiving the same applause, until
 one night:

he had a new girl planted
in the audience
a tinted redhead

. . .
she was as good as the
other:
at certain poems
she too would utter the
word:
"beauti-ful"

and the applause would
follow . . .

(174)

And then, of course, the false writer finally gets his
come-uppance:

an hour later he was still
tirelessly going
on, and then he finished
one
and his new plant said it
again:
"beauti-ful. . ."

and then it came
from the rear
from one of the back
seats:
"No, it wasn't, it was a
piece of shit!"

it was the stringy-blonde
standing up on
one of the seats
holding her paper cup
full of
Thunderbird

and then the applause came
it came and it
rose and it
rumbled
it was perfect and endearing
and unashamed
he had never heard applause
like
that . . .

(175)

Bukowski concludes that later he comes across a short notice in a tabloid "that a certain poet / had left for / New York City / to see his fame / and fortune / there" (176). Perfect, reflects Bukowski as he crumples up the paper, a "beauti-ful city" for a "beauti-ful guy" (176).

Interestingly enough, Haskell has suggested that perhaps there is not that much of a difference between Bukowski and the other poet: "Of course, the image of himself as a drunk who sleeps till noon and practices craft, not art, is itself a theatrical feint, the hipster's mask for his softness" (11).

Nonetheless, one difference is clear: while the false writers might prefer this sort of working life, hustling from reading to reading, Bukowski remains unimpressed. He concludes his feelings about the readings in a final poem on poetry-readings, entitled simply, "a poetry reading":

look at them.
this place like a bar or nightclub.
sold out: poet and audience both
drunk.

now and then a flashblub
goes off.

the mike still doesn't work.
the poet sits.
a chance to drink some more.

a little girl comes up
sweet, sexy, psychotic
holds one of the poet's
books open to

autograph.
he writes. "I could rip you
apart. . ."
forgets to sign his name.
calls for another drink.

the mike works.

now the poet reads
feeling put-upon
forgetting he has agreed
to read for money.

after several poems
the poet stands up
announces:

"you god damn
shits,
you think this is
easy. . .
it's nothing but a
motherfucking
blood-letting. . ."

"GIVE US MORE BLOOD!"
screams a young boy
from the back.
it's the best poem
of the night.

sometimes they laugh
sometimes they applaud.
they confuse him
but most things do.

he drinks his way
to the finish.

there is applause
of relief.

(Dangling in the Tournefortia 171-72)

A very real part of the working life of a writer, the "slave work" as Hemingway used to call it, the readings may not be enjoyable, but Bukowski seems to be telling us that they are a necessary evil, as are writer's seminars.

Whenever a group of writers get together to discuss the craft of writing, we can find many theories and notions on what writing should be, what the role of the writer is in society, what proper topics should be written on, and so forth. No stranger to these writing seminars, Bukowski has written several poems on them, but we shall examine just one, "THE SEMINAR," which is full of comments on the making of a writer and the working life of a writer. The poem itself reads like a journal Bukowski might have kept during the three-day seminar, starting first with a discussion of work habits: we must, say the participants of the seminar, keep large notebooks, writing everything down, "ingesting / ingesting / ingesting" all around us. Other topics include the notion that the poet is a recorder of history, that feeling is by far the most important thing a writer can record, and that teaching poetry and creative writing is the writer's primary goal. Bukowski concludes the poem rather sarcastically:

I have tried to take notes and hope you have
 APPRECIATED THEM.
 next summer I am sure we will be
 INVITED BACK
 and I look forward
 EAGERLY
 to these great American poets
 and their DISCUSSION of what makes
 POETRY GO
 what it IS!!
 and to have them read their
 own works once again.

(Days Run Away 124-29)

Again, we have a sense that Bukowski forever looks mockingly

at anything as academic and scholarly as theories behind the composing process. Nonetheless, he does offer advice, starting as far back as his introduction to the collection Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame, when he recalls his early days in New Orleans "beating the typer" and feeding his poems into Jon Webb's waiting press as fast as he could complete them (i-ii). As we move now from the working life of a writer to the next chapter, we will find that Bukowski in many other places does offer a great deal of practical advice to the aspiring writer.

CHAPTER VIII
PRACTICAL ADVICE TO THE ASPIRING WRITER

If we have had any difficulties up until now, it must be Bukowski's insistence on not being placed in with the same class of theorists such as other literary critics, scholars, and rhetoricians. After all, according to Bukowski, it is all "dumb / literary bullshit." Perhaps Bukowski is showing an almost superstitious reluctance to talk about writing, fearful that saying too much might inhibit his muse. For this reason we have had to deal with some abstract rhetorical theories in some places up until now. But we should find and heed Bukowski's advice for a number of reasons, not the least of which, suggests Hugh Fox, is that Bukowski is "an authentic, the real thing, because he talks from the vantage point of the pavement, the dog biscuit factory, the whore house, the park bench, the rundown room with the shabby shade" (95). In this chapter we will examine a number of poems dealing specifically with straightforward advice to the aspiring writer, all in the shape of a rhetorical theory on the making of a writer.

Before we press on in this pursuit, we must recall

Bukowski's typical rhetorical stance, that of the drunken outsider, quite reluctant ever to give advice, as in the poem "A DIVISION":

I do not like you to see that
 I have eyes in my head
 and can walk
 and
 I do not want to
 answer your questions
 I do not want to
 amuse you
 . . .
 or talk about
 anything

(Days Run Away 55)

The main problem is that Bukowski does not want to be considered a theorist, let alone even a writer at times. He simply does not want to "answer your questions." Perhaps his hesitance stems mainly from his belief that writing seems to Bukowski to be a soft profession, a touch unmanly; it is far better to be considered something else, as he asks to be in "some suggestions":

in addition to the envy and the rancor of some
 of my peers
 there is this 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.

(You Get So Alone 155-56)

And so, Bukowski feels that even the very term "writer" can be tiresome at times, more than a bit effeminate, Perhaps, as Kessler suggests, the act of writing shows too much of his "compassionate tenderness" and "softness which absorbs his brutality and gives his work a deep and humane resonance" (60). Far better to be considered the "world's greatest fucker" or the "world's greatest horseplayer," Bukowski says. Perhaps another reason Bukowski wants to give no advice is that he himself is a bit baffled by the whole process of writing and being a writer. In "kaakaa & other immolations" he ponders, "what's poetry? nobody knows. it changes. it works by itself." The closest he comes to explaining poetry we find in the form of extended metaphors in "A POEM IS A CITY":

a poem is a city filled with streets and sewers
 filled with saints, heroes, beggars, madmen,
 filled with banality and booze,
 filled with rain and thunder and periods of
 drought, a poem is a city at war,
 a poem is a city asking a clock why,
 a poem is a city burning,
 a poem is a city under guns
 its barbershops filled with cynical drunks,
 a poem is a city where God rides naked
 through the streets like Lady Godiva,
 where dogs bark at the night, and chase away
 the flag; a poem is a city of poets,
 most of them quite similar
 and envious and bitter
 a poem is this city now,
 50 miles from nowhere,
 9:09 in the morning,
 . . .
 a poem is a city, a poem is a nation,
 a poem is the world . . .

(Days Run Away 44)

A poem is obviously many things, but not something to be easily explained. Showing the difficulties in describing the process of being a writer, Bukowski resembles once more his main influence, Hemingway, who describes this inability to talk about writing as damaging to "whatever butterflies have on their wings and the arrangement of hawk's feathers if you show it or talk about it" (qtd. in Phillips 123).

In addition, Bukowski reasons that there are just too many people already talking about writing instead of doing it. We have already seen how he feels about the "talkers" in literary theory. Everybody thinks he or she is a writer and thus has earned the right to teach composition theory, as in "my comrades":

this one teaches
 that one lives with his mother.
 and that one is supported by a red-faced
 alcoholic father
 with the brain of a gnat.
 this one takes speed and has been supported by
 the same woman for 14 years.
 that one writes a novel every ten days
 but at least pays his own rent.
 this one goes from place to place
 sleeping on couches, drinking and making his
 spiel.
 this one prints his own books on a duplicating
 machine.
 that one lives in an abandoned shower room
 in a Hollywood hotel.
 this one seems to know how to get grant after
 grant,
 his life is a filling-out of forms.
 this one is simply rich and lives in the best
 places while knocking on the best doors.
 that one had breakfast with William Carlos
 Williams.
 and this one teaches.
 and that one teaches.
 and this one puts out textbooks on how to do
 it and speaks in a cruel and dominating voice.

they are everywhere.
 everybody is a writer.
 and almost every writer is a poet.
 poets poets poets poets poets poets
 poets poets poets poets poets poets

the next time the phone rings
 it will be a poet.
 the next person at the door
 will be a poet.
 this one teaches
 and that one lives with his mother
 and that one is writing the story of
 Ezra Pound.
 oh, brothers, we are the sickest and the
 lowest of the breed.

(Love is a Dog from Hell 239-40)

There are simply too many of us, Bukowski suggests, and
 if we all are talking about writing then we are failing
 at our primary purpose. Bukowski simply calls them "the

lowest of the breed," but at the same time acknowledges them as "brothers." Writer's seminars, college educations, creative writing classes--none of this is very helpful the writer. Bukowski probably only half jokes in his poem, "now, if you were teaching creative writing," he asked, what would you tell them?":

I'd tell them to have an unhappy love
 affair, hemorrhoids, bad teeth
 and to drink cheap wine,
 avoid opera and golf and chess,
 to keep switching the head of their
 bed from wall to wall
 and then I'd tell them to have
 another unhappy love affair
 and never to use a silk typewriter
 ribbon,
 avoid family picnics
 or being photographed in a rose
 garden;
 read Hemingway once
 skip Faulkner
 ignore Gogol
 stare at photos of Gertrude Stein
 and read Sherwood Anderson in bed
 while eating Ritz crackers,
 realize that people who keep
 talking about sexual liberation
 are more frightened than you are.
 listen to E. Power Biggs work the
 organ on your radio while you're
 rolling Bull Durham in the dark
 in a strange town
 with one day left on the rent
 after having given up
 friends, relatives and jobs.
 never consider yourself superior and/
 or fair
 and never try to be.
 have another unhappy love affair.
 watch a fly on a summer curtain.
 never try to succeed.
 don't shoot pool.
 be righteously angry when you
 find your car has a flat tire.
 take vitamins but don't lift weights or jog.

then after all this
 reverse the procedure.
 have a good love affair.
 and the thing
 you might learn
 is that nobody knows anything--
 not the State, nor the mice
 the garden hose or the North Star.
 and if you ever catch me
 teaching a creative writing class
 and you read this back to me
 I'll give you a straight A
 right up the pickle
 barrel.

(Love is a Dog from Hell 233-34)

Bukowski clearly wants no part of the academic scene, as Thomas McGonigle points out in his article, "A Bottle Stain": "There is no way out and no university is going to save this guy with a chair in creative writing like they did for Raymond Carver, the academy's favorite rewrite man of low-life experiences" (37). When Bukowski does get around to answering questions, he can become rude, sometimes even downright hostile. But it is not as though Bukowski does not want to help aspiring writers. Jack Byrne writes, "The mature Bukowski/Chinaski never begs the question, why do I write?" (35) and so he is baffled by anyone else who would. We simply get the sense that he himself is baffled by the process. To cover up his embarrassment at being unable to explain the art or perhaps in his deep reverence for the power of the act of composing, Bukowski retreats to a tight-lipped, wise-cracking tough-guy stance he seems to favor when put on the spot, as in "on

the hustle":

I suppose
one of the worst times was
when
after a drunken reading and
an all night party
I promised to appear at
an eleven o'clock English
class
and there they sat
nicely dressed
terribly young
awfully comfortable.

I only wanted to sleep
and I kept the wastebasket
close
in case I
puked.

. . .
"why do you write?"
a young man asked.

"next question,"
I responded.

a sweet birdie with blue eyes
asked, "who are your 3
favorite contemporary
writers?"

I answered, "Henry Chinaski,
Henry Chinaski and Henry. . ."

somebody asked,
"what do you think about Norman
Mailer?"

I told them that I didn't think
about Norman Mailer and then I
asked, "doesn't anybody have a
beer?"

there was this silence, this
continuing silence and the class
and the prof looked at me and I
looked at them.

then the sweet birdie with

the blue eyes
asked,
"won't you read us
one of your poems?"

and that's when I
got up and walked
out

I left them in there
with their prof
and I walked down
through the campus
looking at the
young girls
their hair
their legs
their eyes
their behinds. . . .

they all look so good,
I thought, but
they're going to grow up
into nothing but
trouble. . .

suddenly I braced myself
against a tree and began
puking. . .

"look at that old
man," a sweet birdie with
brown eyes said to a sweet
birdie with pale green eyes,
"he's really
fucked-up. . ."

the truth, at
last.

(Dangling in the Tournefortia 163-64)

We see Bukowski as hesitant to answer questions, often flippant and cavalier about the whole process. Bukowski suggests that ultimately he is just a "fucked-up" old man; though of course, we suspect there is much more to Bukowski than this. Interestingly enough, all the while as he

pretends not to answer the aspiring writer's questions, of course he is. We know exactly what advice he would give to various poets, even poets of differing ethnic background, as in "the white poets":

the white poets usually knock quite early
and keep knocking and ringing
ringing and knocking
even though all the shades are down;

· · ·
"hello?"
"you Bukowski?"
"yeh. come in."

we sit and look at each other--
he very vigorous and young--
latest blooming clothes--
all colors and silk--
face like a weasel--
"you don't remember me?" he asks.
"no."
"I was here before. you were rather short. you didn't like my poems."
"there are plenty of reasons for not liking poems."
"try these."
he put them on me. they were flatter than the paper they were typed upon. there wasn't a tick or a flare. not a sound. I'd never read less.

"uh," I said, "uh-uh."

"you mean you don't LIKE them?"

"there's nothing there -- it's like a pot of evaporated piss."

he took the papers, stood up and walked around. "look, Bukowski, I'll put some broads from Malibu on you, broads like you've never seen."

he said
and ran out the
door.

his Malibu broads were like his poems:
 they
 never arrived.

(Mockingbird Wish Me Luck 50-51)

and "the black poets":

the black poets
 young
 come to my door--
 "you Bukowski?"
 "yeh. come in."

. . .
 they hand me their poems.
 I read
 them.

"no," I say and hand them
 back.

"you don't like them?"

"no."

"'roi Jones came down to see us at our
 workshop . . ."

"I hate," I say,
 "workshops."

". . . Leroi Jones, Ray Bradbury, lots of big
 boys . . . they said this stuff was
 good . . ."

"it's bad poetry, man. they are powdering your
 ass."

"there's this big film-writer too. he started
 the whole idea: Watts Writers' Workshop."

"ah, god, don't you see? they are tickling your
 assholes! you should have burned the whole town
 down! I'm sick of it!"

"you just don't understand
 the poems . . ."

"I do, they are rhymers, full of
 platitudes. you write bad
 poetry."

"o.k., muthafucka, you ain't see the last of me!"

I suppose I haven't. and it's useless to tell
you that I am not
anti-black
because
somehow
that's when
the whole subject becomes
sickening.

(Mockingbird Wish Me Luck 52-53)

The truth of the matter is that Bukowski does not hesitate to give advice, even if that advice is something we might not want to hear. From these two poems we find quite a bit of advice to the aspiring writer. We learn that Bukowski opposes "flat" writing, writing that just lies on the page without a "tick or a flare." We can assume Bukowski encourages the beginning writer to develop a strong, passionate voice, an invigorated style, a style which Gerald Locklin says "deserves credit for leading us in a new direction in American poetry with its direct, spontaneous, and conversational free-form" (qtd. in Esterly 35) and Moore hails as "raw, teasing" (877). We also see he stands firmly against the "rhymers," which in this case we can assume to mean those writers who are full of trite cliches. Originality is the key to success, suggests Bukowski. Also we must avoid platitudes, the dull, banal comments which weaken our writing.

To be original and to avoid the mundane means to be

extremely unusual. Bukowski suggests we find company such as the collection in "what they want," a poem which explains to the aspiring writer that he or she must be so different so as to satisfy the needs and curiosities of the crowd:

Vallejo writing about
loneliness while starving to
death;
Van Gogh's ear rejected by a
whore;
Rimbaud running off to Africa
to look for gold and finding
an incurable case of syphilis;
Beethoven gone deaf;
Pound dragged through the streets
in a cage;
Chatterton taking rat poison;
Hemingway's brains dropping into
the orange juice;
Pascal cutting his wrists
in the bathtub;
Artaud locked up with the mad;
Dostoevsky stood up against a wall;
Crane jumping into a boat propeller;
Lorca shot in the road by Spanish
troops;
Berryman jumping off a bridge;
Burroughs shooting his wife;
Mailer knifing his.
--that's what they want:
a God damned show
a lit billboard
in the middle of hell.
that bunch of
dull
inarticulate
safe
dreary
admirers of
carnivals.

(Love is a Dog from Hell 82)

We come back to that important first prerequisite for the writer, that touch of madness which separates him or her from the rest of the "safe / dreary / admirers of /

carnivals." The practical advice to be found here is quite clear: we as writers must never give in either to dry, ordinary style or dry, ordinary lives. We must give our readers what they want, "a God damned show / a lit billboard / in the middle of hell."

Another piece of practical advice for the aspiring writer we find in the poem "cooperation," when Bukowski writes:

she means well.
she says
it's not good for you
not to write.

. . .
I sit at the window
with her electric typewriter
it's not good for me not to
write
she's in a boat now, a
sightseeing tour
and she's thinking, looking
at the waves--
"it's 2:30 p.m.
he must be writing
it's not good for him not to write.
. . ."

(Play the Piano Drunk 65-66)

The emphasis on the refrain, "it's not good for him not to write," indicates the importance of the actual act itself. As we have seen, it is far too easy to sit around and talk about writing rather than doing it. In Bukowski's rhetorical theory concerning the making of a writer, one can never put enough emphasis upon hard work and discipline, the discipline required to sit down and write every single day, whether we feel like it or not. Only by being

disciplined in our work habits are we able to survive as writers. The discipline offers other benefits as well. In "celebrating this" Bukowski explains that the act of writing eases the pain of everyday life, another theme we have seen repeated throughout his work:

you're never going to kid me because you see
I've had too many jobs, lousy ones, so I know
that writing is one of the best jobs

. . .
and the best part is that
most of the time
you don't even think about being a
writer
you just blank out and zombie around
and
that's what life is
for: avoiding as much strain as
possible before your
death (I prefer moments of calm to the occasional
gift of happiness).

of course, what one prefers doesn't always arrive
and even though writing is one of the luckiest
professions,
you will find that
even when you have some success with
it
that the pain and the confusion and the horror
of life
will not stop then
but continue,
lavishly

giving your electric IBM more and
more
to chew
and ponder
as you hold off the IRS, women, drink, drugs,
gambling . . . suicidal mornings and so forth
always with
that
last year of your life rushing toward you like
-a rifle shot . . .

yes, writing's the best way
to go:

I prefer to be found
 dead
 upon this machine
 . . .

no matter:
 I need nothing but my typing
 fingers

and a minimal
 amount of
 pain.

(Septuagenerain Stew 356-57)

Ultimately writing helps alleviate some of life's torments, and so by all means as writers we should have the discipline to write often. For Bukowski, the best way to die would be hard at work at the typer, because "writing's the best way / to go." Writing also offers an escape from another malady: boredom. Cain argues in "Women: The Siren Calls of Boredom" that all of Bukowski's work, but especially the novel Women, is not only concerned with the "aesthetic development" of a writer, but also the attempts of the writer to escape boredom.

Writers should not only constantly practice their craft, they should also begin this practice at an early age, much as Bukowski himself did. In his poem "a literary romance," he writes of a woman who begins sending him "very sexy poems" through the mail. When he finally drives to see her, she confesses that she is still a virgin at thirty-five years old. He writes:

and she got out a notebook, ten or twelve poems:
 a life's work and I had to read them

and I tried to be kind
but they were very bad.

(Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame 21)

Bukowski eventually turns down the woman's sexual advances
and tells her the truth about her awful poetry:

but when I left her
she was still a virgin
and a very bad poetess
I think that when a woman has kept her legs closed
for 35 years
it's too late
either for love
or for
poetry.

(21-22)

We find a rather serious message behind this somewhat sexist poem: in order to be true writers we must experience life fully. This notion reflects Bukowski's insistence that we live a wild life. The writer who leads a sheltered life, as the poetess in the preceding poem, has little chance of becoming a talented writer. If nothing else, the sheltered writer's range of topics to select from will be slighter than his or her fully-living counterparts.

One of the drawbacks of opening up our experienced lifestyle to significant others comes in the sudden demands made on our time and the intrusions upon our privacy. The practical advice we find in "writing is a state of trance" is that the practicing writer must have utmost quiet and be able to concentrate:

she walks in while
I'm typing.

"listen," she says, "I . . ."

as I scream and leap out of
my chair.

"sorry," she says, "I wanted to
ask you about something . . ."

"yes, what is it?"

she leaves and I rip the paper
from the typer and throw it
into the trash.
there's no way of
getting it back.

then I forget about her
start again
am three or four pages
into it when she
walks in,

"listen, I . . ."

"HOLY SHIT!" I leap out of
my chair.

I answer her question and
she leaves.

I sit staring at the page
trying to pick up the flow. it's
gone.
I rip it from the machine,
trash it.

I sit looking at a
cigar box.
White Owl, it says.
over in a corner
I see a dirty bottle.
HYDROGEN PEROXIDE,
it says.

there's nothing like
bitching about
bad luck: I do it
very well.

(War All the Time 91-92)

The slightest disturbances can send the writer into a rage;

once the writing process is interrupted, we sense, it is gone if not forever, then at least for that writing session. The writer must be alone and in great depths of solitude in order to create. This theme follows most of Bukowski's work and much of his life, as he prefers to lock himself away in the tiny roominghouses and not be bothered. Even after coming into moderate success and moving out of the slums and into the suburbs, Bukowski knows he must have solitude in order to write, as in "fear and madness":

barricaded here on the 2nd floor
 chair against the door
 butcher knife on table
 I type my first poem here
 switchblade in pocket
 I type this
 for my tax accountant
 for the girls in Ohio
 for my tax accountant
 I am broke again
 I own $\frac{1}{4}$ of this house
 I have a pear tree
 I have a lemon tree
 I have a fig tree
 everybody is worried about my soul now
 I am worried about my soul now
 . . .

this is good no matter what they say
 I have written east Hollywood to death
 now I am going to write about San Pedro
 I have fallen into a new arena.

"tell Chinaski welcome to suburbia,"
 some body told my girlfriend
 and I said, "my suburbia tells her suburbia to
 go to hell."

. . .
 the plumbing is of copper
 and the typer is of me
 and there's enough ground out front to live off
 of, that is, if I can get my ass out of this

chair.

barricaded here on the 2nd floor
I am in a small room again.

(Dangling in the Tournefortia 194-95)

Wherever writers go, they must carry with them their own
"small rooms," that is, their own sense of solitude and
privacy necessary for the completion of the task.

After being touched by a bit of madness, after
realizing we cannot live ordinary boring lives, after
barricading ourselves away to write, we next should develop
that all-important thick-skin that all writers should have.
Exposing ourselves repeatedly on paper takes courage,
and when we receive the blows of rejection, we must be
able to pick ourselves up, start up again. Bukowski advises
as much to a friend in "for Al--":

don't worry about rejections, pard,
I've been rejected
before.

sometimes you make a mistake, taking
the wrong poem
more often I make the mistake, writing
it.

but I like a mount in every race
even though the man
who puts up in the morning line

tabs it 30 to one.

I get to thinking about death more and
more

senility

crutches

armchairs

writing purple poetry with a
dripping pen

when the young girls with mouths
like barracudas
bodies like lemon trees
bodies like clouds
bodies like flashes of lightning
stop knocking on my door.

don't worry about rejections, pard.

I have smoked 25 cigarettes tonight
and you know about the beer.

the phone has only rung once:
wrong number.

(Love is a Dog from Hell 90-91)

As we have seen in an earlier chapter, the rejections are difficult to deal with but must be survived in order to be a writer. Even if all we are able to create is "purple poetry with a / dripping pen," the practical advice here is clear: develop a thick-skin, be able to take criticism and rejections concerning your writing, be able to start up with the writing again.

Along with the development of our writing prowess, we should also develop our character. Perhaps the best way to develop character is by acquiring a taste for what William Gargan calls Bukowski's "penchant for booze, women, and horse racing" (87). Another way to develop character is to avoid the trap of becoming pedants and false writers. Bukowski seems to be suggesting that the writer must be a "real person," not one of those whining, simpering false writers he detests. In the poem "termites of the page"

Bukowski attacks most of the writers working alongside him:

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 know
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.

(You Get So Alone 48-49)

These "termites" lack the qualities of the true writer, Bukowski tells us, so much so that they are nothing but a bunch of soft dullards. Bukowski has told Pamela

Cytrynbaum of the New York Times Book Review that writers who reach success early in their lives, "live as writers, they don't live as creatures of the street, and soon they miss the point of what's going on in the factories and with people working 16-hour days" (11). Bukowski says he feels lucky that he is "a late bloomer [because] it allowed me to live with all those bad ladies, have all these horrible jobs and all these nightmarish adventures" (11). In the poem he continues:

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 belong
in the
audience.

(49-50)

Aside from the practical advice early in the poem, the taking on of an "8 hour job" which we suspect means much more than just that (i.e. the writer must be self-reliant, independent, unsupported by mothers and girlfriends), the rest of this poem warns that we do not become involved in all the bitter in-fighting amongst the academics and pedants. Bukowski tells Chris Holdenfield in the article "Gin-Soaked Boy" that "the 'poetic impulse' is a misused word. Too many fakes have trod up and down the path using that word" (58). Rather than hide behind false words, it is far better to return once more to our primary function of actually writing.

Some of Bukowski's advice can be seen almost as superstitions. Little things such as whether to write with pen or pencil, whether or not to keep a notebook, whether to write in longhand or on the typewriter, these are the sort of nagging little questions all writers face at one time or another. For Bukowski there are few strongly fixed superstitions. But he does prefer a certain working environment. He prefers to work alone, as we have seen, with his glass of wine and cigars close at hand, the classical music playing from the old radio, and a stack of clean fresh paper near his typer. As for cardinal rules never to be broken, he deals with one in "working it out":

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 . . .

(You Get So Alone 19-20)

Behind this seemingly silly superstition there is good reason. If we read our manuscripts to others before we are done with them, there exists the possibility that we will lose the original intent. Outsiders might destroy what we have in mind. The practical advice to the aspiring writer might here be trust your own instincts until the work is complete. We must never "talk away" or show away the writing before it is done.

Stan Theis in his article "Bukowski's Hollywood" examines the dilemma of the writer doing just this, showing away his work before it is completed. The entire article deals with the struggle Bukowski sees himself facing with his newly found literary fame and monetary success, and how suddenly, as with the screenplay Barfly, Bukowski was forced to seek approval of agents, filmmakers, and editors. Theis writes, "Bukowski feels pressured into becoming that other kind of writer/artist, the one with a desk, agent, assignment, front money" (90). Theis argues that Bukowski suspects that "the 'good stuff' is created under conditions of maximum deprivation and adversity, the less-than-good stuff produced on the downside of recognition" (90).

We can assume Bukowski's practical advice here would

be simply to stay eager, to stay somewhat desperate, to stay away from too much luxury and fame. Of course this might not be realistic, as all writers in some way or another wish to be rewarded for their efforts. Perhaps Bukowski would be content if we as writers never forgot where we started or our early, hard training.

Along with these superstitions and the need to stay true to oneself, the key ingredient to Bukowski's success and the crux which all other advice is built upon must be that found in "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 ability to
improve.

these old dogs
living in smoky rooms
pouring the
bottle . . .

they lash against the
typer ribbons: they came
to fight.

(You Get So Alone 279)

Above all else, the writer must possess endurance, the endurance necessary to hammer away at the typewriter constantly. Bukowski tells Hodenfield:

As Erza said, 'Do your W-O-R-K.' That's where the vigor comes from, the creative fucking process. If I don't write for a week, I get sick. I can't walk, I get dizzy, I lay in bed, I puke. Get up in the morning and gag. I've got to type. If you chopped my hands off, I'd type with my feet. So I've never written for money; I've written just because of an imbecilic urge. (59)

Returning once more to his favorite analogy of boxing, Bukowski advises the aspiring writer to come to this profession ready to fight.

Though at times the profession may resemble a good brawl, in other poems Bukowski advises us that if we are not enjoying the fight, perhaps we should be doing something else, something we enjoy more. We hear this advice in the poem "for the lady who hates it":

the typewriter is like another head
with a lucky brain
inside:
I hit the keys and things come
out.
the machine does all the
dirty work.

I phoned somebody the other
night
but he wasn't
in, his girlfriend
answered.
I noted a certain unhappiness
in her voice
so I asked her
if she was all
right.

"no," she answered, "I just hate
being a writer!"

what she needs is another
typewriter, one that is like
another head
with a lucky brain
inside . . .

then

nothing is easier than
writing
it becomes ridiculously
easy

and
as you continue to do
it
critical articles will be
written
on how you do
it
and
what it
means.

and,
of course, you
won't know
what the hell
they are talking
about.

because
the typewriter
does it

all you
do
is sit down
in front of
it.

it will take care
of
damn near
everything
except
death and
bad

women.

(Septuagenarian Stew 241-42)

The poem not only points out the pleasures of writing (provided we have, Bukowski quips, the right typer), it also returns to the mystery of the writing process.

Bukowski has said as much to Cytynbaum: "The hardest part about writing is sitting down in that chair in front of the typer. Once you do that, the movie begins, the show starts. Once I sit there, there's no planning, there's no effort, there's no labor. It's almost like the typer does it by itself" (11). As the critical articles are written about how it is done, Bukowski sits backs, baffled himself but happily typing away. He might not be sure exactly how it is done, but he does know it should not be a painful experience. He repeats this idea in "about pain," extending his rhetorical theory to include art:

my first and only wife
painted
and she talked to me
about it:
"it's all so painful
for me, each stroke is
pain . . .
one mistake and
the whole painting is
ruined . . .
you will never under-
stand the
pain . . ."
(War All the Time 272)

The obvious question here is if something causes that much pain, why on earth do it? Bukowski advises us here never to strain so hard as to destroy the absolute joy that should

go along with creating art, whether it be writing or painting. If we are unable to come up with the "immortal poem" in one sitting, perhaps that is all right, as in "ah . . .":

drinking German beer
and trying to come up with
the immortal poem at
5 p.m. in the afternoon.
but, ah, I've told the
students that the thing
to do is not to try.

but when the women aren't
around and the horses aren't
running
what else is there to do?

I've had a couple of
sexual fantasies
had lunch out
mailed three letters
been to the grocery store.
nothing on tv.
the telephone is quiet.
I've run dental floss
between my teeth.

it won't rain and I listen
to the early arrivals from the
8 hour day as they
drive in and park their cars
behind the apartment
next door.

I sit drinking German beer
and trying to come up with the
big one
and I'm not going to make it.
I'm just going to keep drinking
more and more German beer
and rolling smokes
and by 11 p.m.
I'll be spread out
on the unmade bed
face up
asleep under the electric
light

still waiting on the immortal
poem.

(Love is a Dog from Hell 218-19)

Bukowski seems to be stressing the idea that once the mind is ready, the writing will flow extensively. Along with endurance, this notion of abundance in writing is the next most important advice we find in Bukowski's poetry. We have already seen Bukowski as an extremely prolific writer, and this advice to the aspiring writer seems to be of utmost importance in his rhetorical theory. Produce a great quantity of work and eventually you will be successful, he tells us. This advice comes straight from an important rhetorical notion, the Renaissance idea of copia.

We find Bukowski's copia in several poems, including "Jon Edgar Webb," a tribute from Bukowski to his first editor and publisher:

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 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.

(You Get So Alone 227-28)

Describing the important notion of copia, Bukowski suggests
 that one of the most important factors which train the
 aspiring writer is the ability to be abundant, to produce
 a great number of pages. Bukowski takes a shotgun approach
 to writing as opposed to the marksman's approach. This
 abundance in Bukowski's work apparently began at an early
 age, as he describes in "the lisp":

I had her for 3 units
 and at mid-term
 she'd read off how many assignments
 stories
 had been turned in:
 "Gilbert: 2. . .
 Ginsing: 5. . .
 McNulty: 4. . .
 Frijoles: none. . .
 Lansford: 2. . .
 Bukowski: 38. . ."

the class laughed
 and she lisped
 that not only

did Bukowski
write many stories
but that they were all of
high quality.

she flashed her golden legs
in 1940 and there was something
sexy about her lisp
sexy as hornet
as a rattler
that lisp.

(Dangling in the Tournefortia 15)

Clearly, the ability to turn out a great number of stories, poems, essays, and so on is quite important to the writer following Bukowski's advice. Kessler writes of Bukowski's copia:

If he is a model for other writers, it has less to do with his style than with his ability, day after day, to sit down at the machine facing a blank page and to patiently put one word after another. This patience and perseverance in composition has not only tightened and clarified his language over the years, it has cultivated an increasingly persuasive truthfulness, a sense of honest simplicity which makes his books easy to read, offensive to some, sad and funny-- in short, lifelike. (61)

Of course the danger of producing too much remains a threat. By producing too much, Bukowski means going on and on past the point of talent, until we are babbling idiots with nothing to write about. Bukowski himself seems to fear this eventuality, and returning once more to his mentor Hemingway in the poem "final story," he warns us that we must know when to quit:

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
 wars
 talking about brave
 fish
 the bullfight
 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.

(You Get So Alone 137-38)

The message of being wary of the masses is a familiar one by now. If we give in to the whims of the leeches and suckerfish, they will suck us dry.

As for some more straightout advice to the aspiring writer, it is hard to find any more straight forward than "talking to my mailbox," in which Bukowski addresses the

complaints of a young fan, also a writer:

boy, don't come around here telling me you
can't cut it, that
they're pitching you low and inside, that
they are conspiring against you,
that all you want is a chance but they won't
give you a
chance.

boy, the problem is that you're not doing
what you want to do, or
if you're doing what you want to do, you're
just not doing it
well.

boy, I agree:
there's not much opportunity, and there are
some at the top who are
not doing much better than you
are
but
you're wasting energy haranguing and
bitching.

boy, I'm not advising, just suggesting that
instead of sending your poems to me
along with your letters of
complaint
you should enter the
arena--
send your work to the editors and
publishers, it will
buck up your backbone and your
versatility.

boy, I wish to thank you for the
praise for some of my
published works
but that
has nothing to do with
anything and won't help a
purple shit,
you've just got to
learn to hit that low, hard
inside pitch.

this is a form letter
I send to almost everybody, but
I hope you take it

personally,
man.

(War All the Time 13-14)

In his typical slightly mocking tone, Bukowski advises (though he hates the idea of being an advisor so much that he uses the term "suggesting") this young writer in a number of regards: once again, the true writer should not sit around complaining that he or she cannot get published, but rather get out into the "arena" of publishing; the true writer should not run the risk of becoming a false or pedantic writer by affixing himself or herself to an established writer rather than write his or her own fiction; and the true writer cannot simply wait around to become a seasoned, talented writer but rather practice the craft and learn how "to hit that low, hard / inside pitch."

Obviously, we should practice the craft of writing until we become very good at it, but do we ever run the risk of becoming too good? In a beautiful, moving tribute to another of his main influences, John Fante, Bukowski warns us that this gift of writing from the gods may suddenly merit punishment, as seen in "suggestion for an arrangement":

it would be nice to die at the typer instead
of with my
ass stuck into some hard bed pan.

I visited a writer friend who was dying
inch by inch
in the most terrible way
possible.
yet during each visit

(when conscious) he continued to
talk to me
about his
writing (not as an accomplishment but
as a magic obsession)
and he didn't mind my
visits because
he knew I understood exactly what he was
saying

at his funeral
I expected him to rise from his
coffin and say, "Chinaski,
it was a good run, well
worth it."

he never knew what I looked like
because before I met him
he had become blind
but he knew I
understood
his slow and terrible
death.

I told him one time that
the gods were punishing him because
he wrote so
well.

I hope that I never write that
well, I want to die with my head down on
this machine
3 lines from the bottom of the
page
burnt-out cigarette in my
fingers, radio still
playing

I just want to write
just well enough to
end like
that.

(War All the Time 158-59)

The obvious admiration for the older writer rings clear
in the poem. Bukowski is impressed by Fante's ability
to continue thinking of the craft even on his deathbed,
an attribute Bukowski undoubtedly understands and shares.

We see once again this notion of writing being more of an obsession than a talent or learned skill. In Bukowski's own words, Fante seems to be a survivor, a true writer, and the aspiring writer can learn much from this sort of writer.

Often the critics and beginning writers are baffled by Bukowski's inability to put the act of writing into words. Moore notes, "Bukowski eschews all analysis" (877). Clearly Bukowski admires Fante because he is the classic "tough-guy" writer, and in the poem "the history of a tough motherfucker," when words fail Bukowski, he tries to advise the aspiring writers in another way:

he came to the door one night wet thin beaten
and terrorized
a white cross-eyed tailless cat
I took him in and fed him and he stayed
grew to trust me until a friend drove up the
driveway and ran him over
I took what was left to a vet who said, "not
much chance . . . give him these pills . . .
his backbone is crushed, but it was crushed before
and somehow mended, if he lives he'll never walk,
look at these x-rays, he's been shot, look here,
the pellets are still there . . . also he once
had a tail, somebody cut it off . . ."

I took the cat back, it was a hot summer, one
of the hottest in decades, I put him on the
bathroom floor, gave him water and pills,
he wouldn't eat, he wouldn't touch the water,
I dipped my finger into it
and wet his mouth and I talked to him, I didn't
go anywhere, I put in a lot of bathroom time
and talked to him and gently touched him
and he looked back at me with those pale blue
crossed eyes and as the days went by
he made his first move
dragging himself forward by his front legs
(the rear ones wouldn't work)

he made it to the litter box
 crawled over and in,
 I related to that cat -- I'd had it bad, not
 that bad but bad enough . . .

one morning he got up, stood up, fell back down
 and just looked at me.

"you can make it," I said to him.

he kept trying, getting up and falling down,
 finally he walked a few steps, he was like a
 drunk, the rear legs just didn't want to do it
 and he fell again, rested, then got up.

you know the rest: now he's better than ever,
 cross-eyed, almost toothless, but the grace
 is back, and that look in his eyes never left.

and now sometimes I'm interviewed, they want
 to hear about life and literature and I get
 drunk and hold up my cross-eyed, shot,
 runover de-tailed cat and I say, "look, look
 at this!"

but they don't understand, they say something
 like,
 "you say you've been influenced by Celine?"

"no," I hold the cat up, "by what happens, by
 things like this, by this, by this!"

I shake the cat, hold him up in
 the smoky and drunken light, he's relaxed
 he knows . . .

it's then that the interviews end
 although I am proud sometimes when I see the
 pictures later and there I am and there is the
 cat and we are photographed together.

he too knows it's bullshit but somehow
 it all helps.

(War All the Time 130-31)

The battered cat obviously represents once more the Bukowski
 type of writer, one who has suffered the pains and trials
 of a long evolution as a writer.

But if rhetorical theories concerning the making of a writer and literary theories on the act of composing is all "bullshit," do any of Bukowski's poems directly explain how to be a great writer? In a long piece of advice, Bukowski (once again, somewhat mockingly) spells out his formula for success in the appropriately named, "how to be a great writer":

you've got to fuck a great many women
beautiful women
and write a few decent love poems

and don't worry about age
and/or freshly-arrived talents.

just drink more beer
more and more beer

and attend the racetrack at least once a
week

and win
if possible.

learning to win is hard--
any slob can be a good loser.

and don't forget your Brahms
and your Bach and your
beer.

don't overexercise.

sleep until noon.

avoid credit cards
or paying for anything on
time.

remember that there isn't a piece of ass
in this world worth over \$50

and if you have the ability to love
love yourself first
but always be aware of the possibility of

total defeat
 whether the reason for that defeat
 seems right or wrong--

an early taste of death is not necessarily
 a bad thing.

stay out of churches and bars and museums,
 and like the spider be
 patient--
 time is everybody's cross,
 plus
 exile
 defeat
 treachery

all that dross.

stay with the beer.

beer is continuous blood.

a continuous lover.

get a large typewriter
 and as the footsteps go up and down
 outside your window

hit that thing
 hit it hard

make it a heavyweight fight

make it the bull when he first charges in

and remember the old dogs
 who fought so well:
 Hemingway, Celine, Dostoevsky, Hamsun.

if you think they didn't go crazy
 in tiny rooms
 just like you're doing now

without women
 without food
 without hope

then you're not ready.

drink more beer.
 there's time.

and if there's not
that's all right
too.

(Love is a Dog from Hell 92-94)

This poem, a fine summation of all of Bukowski's theories concerning the making of a writer, offers advice which we find in a number of other places as well, primarily interviews.

In his most extensive interview with The New York Quarterly, Bukowski echoes much of the advice found in this chapter. When asked how the aspiring writer should actually compose (i.e. in longhand, on the typewriter, and so on), Bukowski responds:

I write right off the typer. I call it my 'machinegun.' I hit it hard, usually late at night while drinking wine and listening to classical music on the radio and smoking. I revise but not much. The next day I retype the poem and automatically make a change or two, drop out a line, or make two lines into one or one line into two, that sort of thing -- to make the poem have more balls, more balance. Yes, the poems come off the top of my head. I seldom know what I'm going to write when I sit down. There isn't much agony and sweat of the human spirit involved in doing it. The writing's easy, it's the living that is sometimes difficult.

(21)

Perhaps the most important question from the New York Quarterly interview for our purposes deals with the training and making of a young writer. When asked "What do you think a young writer starting out today needs to learn the most?" Bukowski responds:

He should realize that if he writes something and it bores him it's going to bore other people

also. There is nothing wrong with a poetry that is entertaining and easy to understand. Genius could be the ability to say a profound thing in a simple way. He should stay the hell out of writing classes and find out what's happening around the corner. And bad luck for the young writer would be a rich father, an early marriage, an early success or the ability to do anything very well. (22)

This brief quote acts as a perfect summation of everything we have noted up until this point. Within it we find all of the practical advice necessary for the writer, clarity, brevity in style, early training, correct living, and so forth. And with all of this practical advice to the aspiring writer, what then of practical advice on the writer's style? Quite simply, Bukowski tells us in "The Writers," which appears in Septuagenarian Stew: the "simple uncluttered line and realistic dialogue" (240). He explains his staccato style as "pace, rhythm, dance, and quickness" (Cytrynbaum 11).

And so, armed with all of the practical advice found in this chapter, we can move to our final task of extending Bukowski's rhetorical theory concerning the making of a writer to the college writing class.

CHAPTER IX
BUKOWSKI'S RHETORICAL THEORY AND THE
COLLEGE COMPOSITION COURSE

Up until this final chapter, the purpose of this dissertation has been to identify through close examination of Bukowski's poetry any rhetorical theories Bukowski has developed concerning that most primary aspect of rhetoric, the making of a writer. We have seen that Bukowski writes at great length on several topics concerning the making of a writer, including the early training necessary for the writer; the proper lifestyle for the avante garde writer; the dangers of becoming false writers; the pains the writer might face which come in the various forms of early rejections and writer's block; the pleasures of composing which any true writer will ultimately experience; the practical aspects of the working life of the writer; and finally, the straightforward advice concerning writing techniques that the writer should follow. In this chapter I hope to review this rather eclectic barrage of rhetorical theory concerning the making of a writer and to work it into a paradigm of sorts so as to apply Bukowski's theory to the modern composition class

Admittedly, two problems immediately present

themselves: first, Bukowski has told us repeatedly that he wants no part of rhetorical theories, composition courses, or even higher education. Nonetheless, as I believe I have already shown, the tidbits of advice, the off-the-cuff comments, the interviews, all of this, whether Bukowski wants it to or not, does in fact constitute a rhetorical theory of composition. Secondly, another problem that occurs deals with the question of where exactly these theories belong in a college composition class. Obviously, most of this model of composition favored by Bukowski could fit in easily with the creative writing course, but can we truly assume that the drunken scrawlings of Bukowski have any place in the freshman English class? Surely most of his anti-establishment, anti-academics theory flies in the face of advice from the average freshman English textbook. And yet, by carefully examining key elements of his rhetorical theory concerning the making of a writer, I believe his rhetoric can enhance the rhetoric of the college composition course.

this
is
good

But to start, perhaps we should not be too quick to condemn a rhetorical theory which leans toward an expressive, personal writing stance. Though Elbow's Writing Without Teachers and other rhetorics which place emphasis upon expressive writing have for the most part passed out of vogue, many of the problems found in student writing today could be corrected by re-emphasizing a more "personal"

Bukowski-like style. William E. Coles, Jr., argues in The Plural I: The Teaching of Writing that students produce "themewriting," that is technically correct but meaningless prose (7). Ken Macrorie in Telling Writing calls the same dull, impersonal prose "Engfish," suggesting that students will write better and learn more if they inject more of their own personal voice in their writing (12). Clearly, as the selections of prose and poetry have shown, Bukowski's voice rings clear throughout his work. Critics may charge he is obnoxious, drunken, obscene, but never dull. Though his model of composition leans toward an expressive-based writing course, in a time when students adopt a language of jargon, shoptalk, and computerspeak in order to sound sophisticated perhaps the expressive mode is not to be dismissed.

Bukowski's theories, however, are not limited to the expressive-based writing course. It is interesting to note that this model of composition will actually work in with any type of composition course, not only an expressive-based writing course, but also the current-traditional writing course, the problem-solving writing course, the ethically based writing course, and so on. The advice from Bukowski places more emphasis on the writer obviously than on the topic or the audience, and though on the surface this process would seem to hamper the beginning writer and be clearly anti-rhetorical, it

in fact readies the writer for any type of writing he or she may face, again, expressive, persuasive, or academic. Wayne Booth in "The Rhetorical Stance" notes that far too much emphasis in the past has been placed upon subject rather than writer, resulting in what he calls the "pedant's stance," producing dry, obscure writing (140). Bukowski seems to be telling us if the writer is truly trained and prepared for the act of writing (if the writer by following Bukowski's advice has already been "made"), any writing situation which presents itself will be no great threat.

It is crucial to note, however, that the Bukowski Theory while complete in and of itself should be used in conjunction with a number of more traditional composition paradigms. We get the impression that the freshman following only Bukowski's advice might not even complete a fourteen-week composition course. But if we identify those particular aspects which will further aid our students in becoming writers, Bukowski's advice proves quite useful.

Clearly the first crux of Bukowski's theory must be the need for early inspiration and training, as we dealt with extensively in Chapter Four. For Bukowski, the writer must first be touched with a certain need, a certain urgency to create. Can we instill this in our freshman writers? Probably not, or at least not those students who are not already "touched" by this madness to create, but by understanding this need we can help develop those writers

who otherwise would be slow in starting the writing process. And by understanding that some sort of training is necessary before the writer actually begins writing, we can help our students know that they must train for the long and often difficult task of becoming seasoned writers. This relatively simple idea has for the most part been overlooked by most composition textbooks to date. Most current texts professing to teach writing have little or nothing to say about the early training of a writer. The reason for this is obvious enough: our current system of teaching writing is based upon the assumption that anyone can walk into a writing course and learn to be a writer. Both seasoned writers and instructors of composition know this premise to be false. We as instructors of the course cannot voice this harsh reality; we must buy into the notion that we will be able to train all of our students to some degree. But the simple truth is that in an average class of thirty students, at least ten have come to us completely unprepared for a standard college composition course. They lack what Bukowski calls for in the form of early inspiration and training. Perhaps by following Bukowski's advice and admitting that a certain early inspiration and training in the form of exposure to a great deal of reading is necessary, we are better able to prepare those students.

This knowledge does little to help the beginning freshman English teacher. In other words, we as instructors

can only hope that our students have had some exposure to what Bukowski calls "the heavy hitters," the classics, or at the very least some form of written discourse, but as our students come from an oral-based culture, that assumption is not realistic. It is no longer surprising to hear our students admit that they simply have never read a complete novel, let alone popular culture magazines or newspapers. Perhaps by acknowledging this lack of exposure to the printed word on the part of our students, we can first tackle that initial tenet of Bukowski's theory and begin the process of encouraging our students to read and thus become better writers. It has been clearly documented by a number of theorists (Weaver, D'Angelo, Moffett) that students who read inevitably make better writers, and so within the structure of our standard composition course, certainly we must place more emphasis on reading. By simply incorporating more of a reader-based textbook we fulfill the first requirement put forth by Bukowski. Of course realistically we cannot expect in a fourteen-week course to turn non-reading students into completely developed readers, and we should never lose sight of the fact that the course must maintain its emphasis on writing, but we can do much to help students gain exposure to good, polished writing. David Bartholomae would agree. In his article "Inventing the University" he argues that students must learn to sound like experts

when they write and thus should be exposed to sophisticated discourse. He notes that writer, audience, and subject are found in polished discourse which exists outside the individual student (135). We can only hope to direct our students toward that polished discourse.

We also find in the poetry of Bukowski an emphasis upon practice. Several times in his work he mentions the need for constant work, for constant practice, for constant exposure, though he places little emphasis upon revision. We find the image of him as a young writer working furiously to improve his craft, sending out his work often, amassing huge stacks of rejection slips before breaking into the literary journals. This too can be applied to the college composition course. We must instruct our students not to fear early condemnation--becoming a seasoned polished writer may take years of work. Too often students are extremely timid, hesitant to put down a single word on paper for fear of the slashing red pen. By encouraging students to overcome these initial hesitations and to commit something, anything, on paper, we are doing them a great service. We should be wary of students who take the wrong path and become the whiny, hesitant, false writers Bukowski writes so adamantly against. Only by allowing our students to make those mistakes early on without heavily punishing them (i.e. three misspelled words instantly results in a failing grade regardless of the content of the paper)

will they build up what Bukowski terms the "endurance" to go on to be good writers. Much has been written on what Muriel Harris calls "The Overgraded Paper," but perhaps the best summation of this common error on the part of composition instructors is found in Joseph M. Williams' "The Phenomenology of Error." Williams argues that as instructors of writing we are too eager to find errors in student papers while gladly overlooking the same mistakes in highly respected essays by professional writers (168).

Endurance is of course the greatest asset to Bukowski's credit. Even those less than impressed with his writing ability must admire his fortitude and his ability to produce so many successful collections of poetry, short stories, novels, and screenplays. We must admire his copia. If we can instill into students this love of abundance, this need to produce more and more, we are likely to produce some good writers. Again, too often beginning writers simply cannot write a 350-word essay because they have never written more than a paragraph in one sitting. By acknowledging this important idea in Bukowski's theory, this love of abundance, we can begin encouraging students to build up the ability to write longer assignments and become better writers.

We should also recall the importance of Bukowski's message concerning "the ability to say a profound thing in a simple way." Again and again Bukowski calls for a

clear, direct style, and as we encourage students to read more and write more, we must also encourage them to write clearly. Though Richard Ohmann in "Use Definite, Specific, Concrete Language," notes that students need to practice the rational thinking made possible by abstractions and generalizations (396), Bukowski suggests we should never be ashamed to teach our students to sound less pedantic and more concrete. Clearly, the emphasis in a Bukowski-based writing class must be on what Kenneth Rexroth has termed of Bukowski's own style: "simple, casual, honest, uncooked" (5).

The obvious weakness in Bukowski's theory is his complete and utter rejection of the idea of writing as a process. Within the hundreds of pages of theory on writing pulled from his fiction and poetry, we find little or no mention of prewriting techniques or revision, two issues which simply must be addressed in a college composition course. Too often our students have no notion of writing as an ongoing process, one filled with prewriting and editing and revising, and unfortunately, if they look to Bukowski as a model, they will be left with the idea that writing is not work.

But at the same time, perhaps this sense of joy is the greatest strength in Bukowski's theory. As for the rest of the Bukowski Myth--the booze, the broads, the thoroughbreds--realistically how much of this can be applied

to a composition course? Of course, if we stick to Bukowski's direct advice concerning these things, not much. We may find ourselves on shaky ground indeed with our administrators if we heed Bukowski's advice and take our composition class to the racetrack every day instead of keep them in the classroom. But behind the good-natured ribbing against academic surroundings, there does exist a serious message we can apply to our teaching circumstances. If we look to the spirit of Bukowski's message, the "deep structure" as Chomsky would say, the message is that writing must ultimately be an enjoyable experience. Those of us in the profession know this joy only too well, the thrill of finishing the large writing assignment, the enjoyment of publication or presentation, the feeling of self-worth when we know we have done what we are supposed to do, that is, when we have acted as writers. For Bukowski, there is always a playfulness in the act of writing. If we can encourage our students to have (dare we say it?) a bit of fun during the process of writing, perhaps English 101 would no longer be the most hated course on campus. Too often those dreaded enemies of Bukowski, the abusive academic types who would rather be teaching the History of Restoration Theater, bully and belittle aspiring writers and convince them that the act of writing must be agony. Most of us in the profession simply know this view is not true. If we look

to the spirit of Bukowski, that wise old drunken happy-go-lucky mentor who would sooner be writing than anything else, we can see a more relaxed and good-spirited model for our beginning writers. Rather than beat our students down with outdated models of rhetorical theory which emphasize the agony and torment of composing, we can instill in our students Bukowski's easy-going and enjoyable love of writing.

Of course there will be those who object. Writing is hard work, they will protest, and besides, our students are already too "easy-going" to begin with. These same critics, I suspect, are the ones of the earlier mentioned "paleface" school who will not acknowledge Bukowski as a true literary giant. But my point is valid: too many of our students are failing as writers because they are fearful. It seems that Bukowski's theory concerning the making of a writer offers exactly what the typical Freshman writer needs, with its emphasis on training, practice, endurance, its call for a clear, direct style appropriate for any writing occasion, and lastly, its call for the emergence of enjoyment in the writing process. By examining the rhetorical theory concerning the making of a writer in the poetry of Charles Bukowski, we do in fact find many tenets which can be useful in the college composition course.

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