

Bukowski's letters to Douglas Goodwin

edited and with an introduction by Jay Dougherty

This whole section came to us as a surprise, when our friend Jay Dougherty offered us the opportunity to print facsimiles of Bukowski's letters to the poet Douglas Goodwin. Not only did he provide the letters, but also an introduction and comments by the recipient of the letters, who he'd asked about several aspects. Since these letters haven't been published before in their entirety, we take this as a beautiful chance to add to scholarship and research worldwide.

Charles Bukowski wrote the following letters to poet Douglas Goodwin from 1982–1992. Only three of these letters have seen publication up to this time, so far as I know (in *Reach for the Sun: Selected Letters 1978–1994*, Volume 3, edited by Seamus Cooney).

The letters reveal a side of Bukowski that we rarely see in the collections of letters that have been published thus far: the mentor.

Bukowski thought enough of Goodwin to take the time to revise some of Goodwin's work in order to help the young poet along. Bukowski saw verve in Goodwin's work, but he also saw verbosity that he attempted to steer him away from.

Yet it was also the degree to which Goodwin was conveying anger and pushing the boundaries of poetic expression that concerned Bukowski, who conveyed his discomfort in a letter of January 9, 1986: *"Your rage,"* says Bukowski, *"is not as close to humor as I'd prefer it but you're often right on the mark and when you hit target, it don't matter too much how you get there as long as it hits."*

Despite any flaws that Bukowski might have detected, however, he thought enough of Goodwin's promise as a writer to exert some energy (see the letter dated "5-?-86") in an attempt to persuade Goodwin to stay the course.

I asked Goodwin to provide some background on his and Bukowski's correspondence, and here's what he wrote:

I started writing to Bukowski in late 1982, shortly after we moved to Los Angeles from New York (Queens). I wrote to Bukowski at

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Black Sparrow Press and John Martin must have forwarded my letter. Then Bukowski wrote back.

By 1982 I was fully immersed in Bukowski discovery. I'd first read Bukowski in 1976, in college in Minnesota. I saw a guy reading a copy of *Erections, Ejaculations, Exhibitions, and General Tales of Ordinary Madness* with that original *City Lights* cover, and I was intrigued. So I got a copy and read it and then I decided that everything else (everything in literature that was not Bukowski) was basically bullshit. I don't feel that way anymore, but I did feel that way for a long time – starting with that book.

I felt compelled to write to Mr. Bukowski ... to contact him ... to tell him how great I thought he was, and what a giant I thought he was, and how important I thought he was. I had no idea that other people also felt the same way, and that they were also writing to him, etc. I was kind of embarrassed when I realized that I was just one of many Bukowski fans. I had never really thought about it in those terms until I did.

His writing is so intimate and powerful that I was drawn into a kind of Bukowski-zone. And the fact that he was such a kind and generous and responsive human being made it easy to stay in that zone for a long time.

To me, the image in his letter from 1-9-86 is what I think of when I think about those Bukowski letters. It's so Bukowski: a little dog yelling at him that he's an old fart while Bukowski sits there drunk. It reminds me of "The Little Dog Laughed", which was the short story that Arturo Bandini had published during his ordeal in *Ask The Dust* (by John Fante). It all fits together for me.

In fact, during the course of their epistolary relationship, Bukowski was enthusiastic enough about Goodwin's work to pen a foreword to Goodwin's 1987 collection *Half Memory of a Distant Life*, which I published in 1987 under the Clock Radio Press moniker.

In the mid 80s, I was publishing Douglas Goodwin's work regularly in my little magazine *Clock Radio*. Bukowski was also a regular contributor. Then I started publishing chapbooks and Goodwin's *Half Memory* was one of the first.

[here's the facsimile of Bukowski's foreword along with a personal note.]

FOREWORD

There is a curious thing about good and original and fresh poetry: it makes you laugh a little bit inside, it connects the edges, it eases off the meanness of some of the living, it helps you to continue flushing toilets, opening doors, sleeping, eating, breathing, looking, walking, it helps you continue all the sundry acts on your way through your life and towards your death.

Brothers and sisters, good and original and fresh poetry helps much; the trouble being, there is so little of it.

When I first read the poetry of Douglas Goodwin, I was immediately taken. The stuff boiled with the agony of life, and the daring to go on with it anyhow. Courage is infective. So is wild, raging humor. Goodwin has these things. And he lays the lines down clear and clean; there is no posing, no posturing, no poetic gimmickry.

That's all. And that's enough. Plenty enough.

Welcome to a new voice. The ranks have been thin for some long time.

It's better now. We can laugh, again, a little bit, inside.

Charles Bukowski
7-2-87

SAM DOUGLAS —
THIS IS STILL A
FINE COLLECTION.
DON'T EVER LET THEM
CON YOU INTO NOT
WRITING ANYMORE.
WORDS MAY NOT
SOLVE SITUATIONS BUT
THEY HELP, A BIT, IN
GRAPPLING WITH
IMPOSSIBILITIES.
CONTINUE,
HAVE FUN!
Charles Bukowski

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U S A

Editor: Jay Dougherty

At some point around the time that I was preparing Goodwin's chapbook, Doug sent me a photocopied sheath of letters that Bukowski had written to him.

I've had those letters in my files ever since, and I figured it was high time that they were released, given that Bukowski is now a subject of interest to scholars around the world.

I also [recently] asked Doug to answer a few questions about them. You'll see his responses at the bottom of each letter, starting June 8, 1988. I wish I had asked more or had the time to put each letter into the larger context of what was happening in Bukowski's life at the time the letters were written. But alas, that just means I have another interesting goal for the future.

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[this following undated, handwritten letter is the first one in our batch. It might be from around Dec 1982]

LATE JAN

Hi Doug;

I DON'T REMEMBER
S. S'S NAME ANYMORE IN
HAM BUT I'M NOT GOING
TO REPEAT IT.

LET OLD PEEB
BE HAPPY.

HE'S TIRED AND
HE'S GOOD AND THE
DREAM HELPS.

Bob



This one is about Shalom
Stodolsky who has a little book
store in Hollywood and whose name
appears in HAM ON RYE.

Doug

2-23-83

Hello Goodwin:

Same thing, your longer pome should be broken into segments and presented as single pomes. Much more force this way. People like to be shot down, explicitly. LOVE CRAWLED ALONG THE FLOOR is a very good poem.... Your spelling is lousy but that doesn't mean anything unless the editor is a dog #### and most of them are...

Thanks for the ADORATION LETTER. It made me laugh a little. All that stuff doesn't help. Because each time I stick a new sheet of paper into the typer, it's blank. There's no way of resting on the past. The only way to stay alive is to have it NOW and we never know about that, and I like that, it makes it interesting and keeps the war going...

I get too much mail... Not like Mailer... but enough, maybe at the moment, 25 letters a ## week and I just can't answer them all and you can't expect me to keep answering yours, even if you write better than most who send their things. I just can't spread far enough--fights with the female are a drain and also the horses and the drinking, but, #### of course none of that is as bad as the 8 hour job, but, nevertheless, I just can't keep answering.

I don't know what to tell you. Stay away from the race track. And if you drink, try to stay off the hard stuff, stick to beer and wine, it will be easier on your wife, and try to be kind to your wife--there will be arguments, but only because she cares, not because she doesn't. L. A.'s a good town to live in, it's the town of NOW, and it's good for your typewriter ribbon. Writing as an end to itself, as a means of propogating or gathering money is not worth a shit, but if it makes you feel good to make sounds on the machine, to see the lines form, to give you that special dash and lick in your own brain, then good.

And that's enough of that crap.

Poor Fante, it's so ugly what the forces can do to one man while all the others go along doing their dull things. ASK THE DUST.

Listen, Goodwin, luck with it... I gotta go...

Y-uptext 1 HANBY-7
SINCE 1970
LHMS

Bukowski's letters to Douglas Goodwin

5X-25-83

Hello Douglas Goodwin:

Yes, Fante died, I was at his funeral, sparse crowd, family members and a couple ~~##~~old screenwriters. But John had been blind, both legs amputated. It was more than a miserable way to live, and now he's out of it. I'll never forget when I first read ASK THE DUST. Some writing. And his other things too, of course. The gods weren't kind to him at all.

No, I don't have any grass connections. You tell your wife I'm just a wino.

Yeah, I always feared the 8 hour job then ended up in the post office for 14 years. Besides the simple mean dullness of the job, what hurt plenty was looking about and seeing all those who really enjoyed it.

Serkin, yeah, some movie. This contented bland fellow, smooth-faced, liked by the neighbors, a real good old guy who just happened to dabble in poesy. Yeah, they read the stories but what they put up there on celluloid I didn't recognize.

The real Serkin was far more insane, confused, suicidal; fights with women; drunktanks; hospitals; trudging automatic misery. A guy who would lock himself in a room for 3 or 4 days, go to bed. Fucked. And when he drank he drank until he was like a corpse on the floor.

Well, you don't expect much of the movie-makers.

What you do with poems is pop them to the littles. Many editors read the littles looking for talent. They prefer to pick you up. When you land on them with a large manu it tends to put them off. I think.

I liked your poems, The Mad Women of Unemployment and Morning Sickness.

You should send them to The~~#~~ Wormwood Review.

o.k.,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Bob Kaufman'. The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat abstract style with loops and flourishes.

8 -20-83

Hello Douglas Goodwin:

It's a good poem, but I enclose it so you can note your typing error.

Tired tonight, and many rote things to do.

Keep the ribbon spinning.

yrs,



3-15-84

Hello Douglas Goodwin:

I don't know why they sometimes compare me to Henry Miller. I always had trouble reading him. He'd go on all right for a while and then he'd get astral or fluffily literary and I'd get discouraged. ^{But} Comparisons will happen and I suppose it's better to be compared than ignored.

on Hemingway, I suppose it's the simple line but the man had no humour. As simple lines went, I preferred Saroyan's to Hemingway's. The early Saroyan, I mean. But Saroyan was too sweet, too optimistic; it worked well in his stories of the depression but when things got better it really sounded out of key. Then he changed too, for the worse. The paragraphs fattened and it made hard reading.

You're right on Fante and Celine and James M. Cain, each had something that helped me. There was also a Russian, Turgenev, who wasn't bad. And Sherwood Anderson, he exulted and exalted in the short and simple line, maybe a little too much so.

As for the attackers, I have been accused of "slipping" ever since my first chapbook came out when I was 40 years old. Many of the professors don't like it that I don't consort with them, and they don't like where I came from. It bothers them. For centuries these literary slickers have been fooling the people and they just pass the palm on down. They don't want anything to upset their doll's house. The best way a fake can cover is to call somebody else a fake. Their attacks on me are an affirmation that I'm doing things right. I just go on with what I'm doing.

Thanks for the story. Not bad. Bot somehow I expected your character to blow his brains out. Maybe it's just as well he didn't. Too obvious, I suppose.

Luck with your work,



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I-9-86



Hello Douglas Goodwin:

Regret ~~del~~ delay in answering... for've typing... drunk a bit here...
~~del~~ lots of bad action on the ~~del~~ homefront... my troubles seldom come from
myself... other~~del~~ drag their weak self-pity wills across my life...

Anyhow, on your book, HUNG LIKE. well, as you know, when you get good you're
real good, very good. Your rage is not as close to humor as I'd prefer it but
you're often right on the mark and when you hit target, it don't matter too much
how you get there as long as it hits.

Your probably realize that you ~~del~~ write well, only if by comparing yourself
to the others. There's not much around.

~~del~~ Richmond has a good eye for the line and the word. It doesn't
~~del~~ surprise me that he ~~del~~ has published you.

It was good to read you. I can't read most poetry books straight through.
No problem with yours. I'd say you have a future in this fucking game if life
keeps kicking you in the ass. And it probably will. Right?

Anyhow, thank you for letting me read some lively poesy. You are
climbing ~~del~~ toward the bloody horizon. Hope when they come ~~del~~ nibbling
at you, you don't over-do the poetry reading ~~del~~ circuit. But if you do,
I'll understand. All that free young dumb pussy is hard to turn away.
and some of those coe-ed's give ~~del~~ blow jobs that would put top grade prosties
to shame.

Keep typing. You've got the edge. Let them feel it ~~del~~ against the
throat.

sure,

Handwritten signature: "Harb Dark"



2-8-86



Hello Goodwin.

WELL, YES, IT IS A SLOW PAIN GRIND BECAUSE WE GOTTA DEAL WITH A TRIBE THAT IS STEADILY VICIOUS AND VACANT, RELENTLESSLY SO, NO PLACE TO HIDE AND WE ALL RUB TOGETHER AND IT IS NO PLUSH DREAM.

IT'S NICE WHEN YOU'RE IN A ROOM STARING AT THE CEILING, KNOWING DEATH IS GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT. YOU JUST GET SMOOTHED OUT AND THE PHONE RINGS OR THE DOOR KNOCKS AND SOMEBODY WANTS TO LAY THEIR BLANK VIBES ON YOU. ALL MY PROBLEMS COME FROM THE OUTSIDE. SOMEBODY ALWAYS WANTS A BITE.

I COULD STAY IN BED FOR A MONTH BUT THEY'D COME AND GET ME.

THE WRITING HAS HELPED ME DUMP SOME THINGS - EASED IT OFF TEMPORARILY - BUT IT CLOSES IN AGAIN.

THE POETS? HOLY CRIST, MAN, WHAT THIN WHITE DULL CONTENTED LITTLE FART-SUCKERS.

KEEP TYPING. YOU HAVE A SPLENDID AND JUSTIFIED RAGE GOING (MOST OF THE TIME.). WHAT THE HELL. WE SOCK SHAG UNTIL WE DROP... Rob



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4-22-86



hello Goodwin:

Just got your letter dated 4-10-86. Maybe you forgot to mail it... at the time or maybe the tax man screwed over your thought-processes as he did mine. Sometimes I feel like I pay more than I earn.

On ALL'S NORMAL HERE... not too well done. Most of the writers just talking about themselves--which is all right if it's interesting, but too much vanity and opportunity grabbing here. Writers, man, you can have them. Almost all the wrong people are writing. Souls of snails, they have, scabby souls of snails...

On HUNG LIKE A HEWBREW NATIONAL, COULD you send me a copy of the letter ya want to print? Probably be o.k., just want to have a look at it... All right?

Hope you're still feeding the keys. It's always the next line that counts, if anything counts. Like you didn't know...

hold,

P.S. - COME TO THINK OF IT, HAVEN'T BEEN TO P.O. BOX IN A WEEK OR SO... HENCE, ALL COINCIDES WITH DATE ON YOUR LETTER... YAH...



5-7-86

hello Goodwin:

I think maybe the letter isn't so good.... Let's not use it. uh/? o.k.

About what you're doing, we're doing, this typing... something has us by the throat and it's not death, that would be o.k. ###And it's # not life that has us there... ### Death in life, maybe. But mostly it's the people, close or far, they are a hard by. And the closer they get the worse it gets. I thought that maybe as the decades rolled by I might adjust a bit. It's worse than ever.

The typing is a need, a balm, good luck, but it doesn't cure shit. ### At its best it might keep us from the madhouse; at its worse it gives us something to do while drinking.

oh, yes....



Bukowski's letters to Douglas Goodwin

5-?-86



Hello Goodwin:

What is this you hand me? You're not going to quit writing, you know that. It's the only counter-balance against the impossible odds...

The dog is not man's best friend... it's this fucking machine in front of us which keeps us from climbing the madhouse walls...

Friend, you write very well, much better than many of the falsely famous. There's really no competition out there, there only appears to be... It's all a mirage, like Buczkowski trying to type or Bukowski running a pass pattern...

The editors of the mags here, they all read together, gossip together, plan together. You should feel honored that they have put you down.

You know, anybody can put out a little magazine. Some kid, 19 years old, living with his mother can have a mimeo in the garage and send out rejects like I've gotten:

"What the fuck is this?"

"This is truly disgusting..."

So forth...

Of course, what's worse, say, is some jerk-stink being made lit editor of say a mag like the Atlantic Monthly because he went to college with somebody who knew somebody else and all that crap. Almost all those in control are totally incompetent. There and everywhere.

The more energy and originality you have, the more hate you are going to engender. They don't want anybody stirring up their little fixed game.

Maybe you need a few years off until your writing can catch up with your thinking and your living--or not living.

I took ten years off myself. And drank enough for the whole world. It felt all right. Didn't consider it wasted. Burned something up and away, mostly myself. But this is a different Age. Each day may be our last day, all at once and all together.... Ya, ya, ay... ay...

Just to say, discouraging to hear you're going to lay it down when so many half-ass talents just keep going on and on and on... believing in their greatness when there is none.

We don't even want greatness. A good bottle of wine and a good night's sleep and no argument from the spouse....

sure,



yearbook of the Charles-Bukowski-Society 2015/16

July ending, 1987

Hello Douglas Goodwin:

My pleasure to say some good words on your works.

I wouldn't worry too much about not being accepted by the local poetry reading groups. It's just a small batch of people who read over and over to each other. They will not allow it to enter their minds that they are 4th rate, and by cajoling each other and huddling together in self-congratulation they just get worse and worse--rub a fool against a fool and each will get more foolish. But feel you not too bad: it doesn't only happen in Los Angeles.

Lately these have even gotten the idea that if they call what they are doing Word Performances instead of Poetry Readings that something might happen. No go. Wrap a ribbon around shit, it still stinks.

Yeah, I know about the job. Between our system of education, the job and the female, most men are dead by the time they are 24.

Richmond is better than most but tends to brood on the tiniest of affronts and writes too many poems about writing poetry. Also, never having had to scuffle for existence, there's a world out there that he's entirely unaware of. Yet, I am hooked on his writing. He has stuck with it down in his little house and the total overall result is solid.

And you're no schmuck, Goodwin, you type a line of energy and exploration and gamble. Don't lay it down yet. o.k.?

Beck



near end of
Augie 1987

Hello Douglas:

Yes, finally the work is done alone and it's done to hold one from jumping off the bridge or to hold back from that little voice that is always there when one shaves. You write it for yourself, then comes the 2nd stage: what to do with it? So you send it out. That's the political stage and it lacks something. The worst send it out and then get up and read it to people: 2 people, 6 people, 7 people. Year after year after year. Without shame. Pure dumb vanity. The sharing of shit with shit-tasters.

Work it out, man. Shake the room with your typer. It's our last goodbye to nothing. Why not?

sure,

Beck



Bukowski's letters to Douglas Goodwin

early Jan. 1988



###

Hello Doug Goodwin:

Yes, there was some luck on the movie, I think it was fairly well put together and they allowed some of the humor to stay in there. I don't mean I wrote a comedy but on the other hand there is something funny about being trapped within an agony--not while you are trapped there, but later on, when you look back while you are trapped with something new.

And you know and I know that Hollywood is death, even if now and then they manage to turn out a fair product, all in all it is deathly, shitty deathly. The so-called beautiful women are death-heads and death-souls and really they are not beautiful at all. And the male-egos are just as bad. The self-love is astonishing. The leading roles in BARFLY lucked it through, I think, because the director knew exactly how to milk their good parts and allow their horrible parts to remain in the background. One hell of a magic trick, but I believe he did it. BARFLY will vanish quickly enough from the commercial market but I believe it will be there, off and on, for a certain person or two to view now and then. It could have been better but I feel it dances pretty well.

But it feels good to be back to normal, sitting here now playing with the poem and working on a novel that I should complete eventually. My life, as always, remains fairly fucked up. The gods seem to arrange it that way. This way. No matter how old you get there just seems to be no place of peace. You pull out of one fucking quicksand and step right into another. Or something with 6 green heads and razor-blade teeth suddenly rushes you. (Sorry forgive the drinking typing...just over the flu, almost forget forgot how to work this machine.... oh oh...)

Good that Steve is thinking of putting something together. I will get my next batch of madness off to him, for better or worse. Steve is basically a good soul but like the rest of us he is open to the weathers of pain and change and I've seen him hot for a project one night and dead cold on the next morning. That's his right. All in all, I think he's held his ground well. He's still there, after all these decades, he hasn't run up the white flag. And he felt the honesty and power of your work right off. He's got a good eye.

Man, I know. The good damn job situation. It hurts because it's such a goddamned waste. But the masses just toss in. They give up their lives for the 8 hour job. But it isn't 8 hours. You take in travel, lunch, preparation, all the trivial attendencies, the average person has only one or two hours a day to call their own and then they sit that down in front of a game show or two on tv. "Bukowski harps too much against the 8 hour job," the critics say. Man, it can't be harped too much against, it's the killer of everybody. All through my working days I could feel each wasted minute ripping through me like a knife. And there's no escape. They just pay you enough to stay alive and come back for more. And when I quit all that and went down to skidrow I found out that all those fuckers wanted was the 8 hour job. They weren't rebels, they were discards. Fooled by the system and fooled by the female.

[... continued from previous page]

Well, after a week off, I am learning to type again ~~#####~~ at your expense.

There's not much I can tell you or want t^o tell you. What you find out day by day, woman by woman, will be for you.

The traps are ~~#####~~ everywhere ~~#####~~ and things aren't good, maybe ~~#####~~ they aren't meant t^o be.

But I want to thank you for the poems of yours that I have read so far.

Cream down those ~~##~~bloody walls, Goodwin.

yrs.,

The image contains a handwritten signature that reads "Frank" in a cursive style, with a long horizontal line extending to the right. To the right of the signature is a simple line drawing of a man's face. The drawing is minimalist, showing the outline of the head, a beard, and a mustache. The man's eyes are closed or looking down, and there is a small mark above the right side of the head.

Bukowski's letters to Douglas Goodwin

2-14-88

Hello Doug:

I suppose it's pretty simple (?): if a man writes for fame chances are it's going to be garbage. If the writing comes because it's roaring in the head and has to get out, maybe it will be more like a paring knife, a hand grenade or laughter from the madhouse. Your writing is of the latter, no doubt. I'm glad you're there and I hope the roaring continues.

I think the happiest, wildest time of my life was when I was doing the starving writer bit. I typed and I typed, sheets and sheets and sheets of paper and even though it came back, that only edged me more into it. Any return was a sound in my life. I welcomed rejects, anything in the mail. The only thing that terrorized me were the footsteps of my landlady. But just a sheet of paper in the machine and I was functioning again. It was ace-high drama, I was nuts and I loved it. Of course, the bottle helped too--it filled the spaces when I wasn't typing. What a game! What a go! And now and then, a crazy woman, a barroom fight. Who the hell could ask for anything more?

Welcome to the war, Goodwin.

We're not stopping until they pull that sheet over our head.

indeed,

Pub


[starting with the following letter we're providing questions and answers that Jay Dougherty had asked Douglas Goodwin about the material and it's background.]

6-8-88

Hello Douglas Goodwin:

1)

Glad you and your wife went for ROOMINGHOUSE. Those poems were written at the edge of hell but hell has never quite vanished.

Actually, any poem I write last is usually the one I prefer--for a ##### little while, usually after I have concluded writing it. A couple of days later it's like nothing ever happened.

I'd have to guess that too many poets write poems to be poets, instead of the poems writing them.

Richmond is a strange one with his mag STANCE and his demons. And, as an editor, he has a damned good eye for what is a piece of writing and what isn't.

You know, almost all the roominghouses are gone now. They were strange places but you could get a room for almost nothing. It kept you off the streets and you could close the door and you were alone. Most of the landladies husbands were dead and they had paintings of Christ on the stairway wells but they didn't bother me too much. Some, of course, I terrorized and they asked me to leave. But I felt good in most of those tiny rooms--there was a place for the typer and it felt good to go to bed in the dark and drink wine there right out of the bottle. The poems came through that and if they give you a good read now, fine.

all right,



Dougherty: Can you explain what happened prior to this letter? Why did he send you Roominghouse?

Goodwin: I don't think this is a reference to Bukowski sending me The Roominghouse Madrigals. I think this is a response to my praise for The Roominghouse Madrigals. I remember absolutely loving that book.

Q: What prompted Bukowski's comment regarding Steve Richmond?

A: I don't remember. I think Richmond was working on Stance 5 at the time, which turned out to be kind of a strange issue. I have it here in front of me now. I haven't looked at it in years. Maybe I should read it again.

Bukowski's letters to Douglas Goodwin

II-18-88

Hello Douglas Goodwin:

Listen, I don't think Kindred Spirit is holding any poems of mine and as for photographs, or a photo, I'd rather not. I'm no snob but there are so many people in that rag who really write bad poetry, 18th century copy material, that I just don't want my photo in there along with these jack-off souls from Kansas City and Duluth.

I know that you have nothing to do with this and they shouldn't have approached you to get to me. I would have just told them, no photo.

Shit, man, I've come down with 2 seperate cases of high fever, 104 degrees, 7 day stretch one time, 6 days the next. Docs didn't know what the hell, as usual. But I did come down from 227 to 190 and am trying to keep it at 190. Easier to walk around. All my shorts fall off my ass and I had to get a tighter belt. I'm all right now but there was a lot of mail I couldn't answer, including yours.

Finished the novel Hollywood and I think it will be a good one. Out in the ~~##~~##Spring, via the Sparrow.

Seattle? Jesus, Jesus, don't it, doesn't it SNOW there? What do you do when it SNOWS? Us Calif. boys fear that white cold....

HOpe you're making out....



Q: What's the story behind this letter? Why is Buk responding about Kindred Spirit?

A: I forget his name, but the guy who published Kindred Spirit sent me a letter asking me to contact Bukowski and ask Bukowski to send him a photo for the magazine. I did that and this is Bukowski's response. There was obviously some weirdness between them. I don't know the details. I remember having a problem with the Kindred Spirit guy about something else way after this, but I don't remember what it was about. I used to have problems with a lot of people about a lot of stupid things. People are just not worth the effort for the most part. Or maybe it was me. Probably both, all. I just found a copy of Chiron Review. I think the guy's name was Michael Hathaway. Didn't he change the name of his magazine from Kindred Spirit to Chiron Review (or something like that)?

Q: Regarding the Seattle comment: Can you tell me what he was responding to? Give me the story of your move there?

A: We had just moved from Los Angeles to Seattle in May of 1988 for a variety of reasons. Mostly we were just sick of Los Angeles. I was 31.

late nov. 1988

hello Douglas Goodwin:

You run a pretty good machine yourself. I'd suggest that you stay with it. Typing, I think, keeps us from the madhouse. And allows us to create one of our own.

stay,



2-10-89

Hello Goodwin:

No, I haven't given up drinking. I've been in and out of the local hospital, being put through various sorts of machinery. Hemoglobin count went down to 9.6. Some weakness, lack of energy. Passed through various doctor's offices. Nothing can be found. Take 2 aspirin and drink lots of juices. The more and more I deal with the medics, the more I realize that they know very little. They're in for the dollar. Pack the waiting room and let them wait. Then rush them through. Weigh them. Take blood pressure. Temperature, maybe. Pulse. Jab them with your fingers. Tell them to come back next week.

Most things cure themselves. If you don't fall into the cure, you fall into the grave.

Your interview for Kindred Spirit was a good one. To tackle the masses and to describe them as you did, that takes a bit of guts. Even those who

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know are careful not to mention this "sheepishness". Too dangerous to their fucking careers. The real thing is hardly ever said. Also, on child-bearing, you are right on the mark. It's a fine interview, don't worry about it. It could be that somebody near you took offense?

I'm still on a low-energy level, so am fading out on this letter.

you keep doing it also,



Q: Do you remember the interview that Buk mentions? Was this the one I did with you? Care to elaborate?

A: I don't remember. I might have that Kindred Spirit around somewhere. I'll look for it now. Yes, I found it! This is in fact a reference to the interview that you did. That's the only interview I've ever done, so it's obviously that one. Man, these old publications are dusty. I need to clean this fucking room. Newsprint doesn't age well.

4-14-89

Hello Douglas Goodwin:

I've got to duck your antho, I just don't have anything at hand and am not writing. Still battling this illness. The docs and the hospital machinery can't solve it so they say ###it isn't there. But I know it is.

Hope you understand.



Q: Which "antho" is Buk referring to here?

A: This is an early attempt to solicit a poetry submission from Bukowski for what turned out to be Sisyphus Leaves. Steve Richmond and I liked the idea of a Richmond - Bukowski - Goodwin thing as a little anthology (we would like that idea, of course). It was up to me to convince Mr. Bukowski. Steve and Bukowski were in one of the hate arcs of their love/hate thing at the time.

8-9-89

Hello Douglas Goodwin:

Thanks for the happy birthday and the good word on my past performance chart (via the typer).

Yes, TB. I think it all began last Novemeber, great loss of weight and a feeling of weakness, extreme weakness. I had two doctors but they just didn't know. I was run through all kinds of hospital machinery and they couldn't find anything. I began to cough, worse and worse. Then both docs just dropped me off their appointment lists. Well, one of them turned me over to another doctpr, a lady who tried acupuncture and herbs on me. No go.

I finally phoned a girl at one of the doc's offices and had her set me up a chest x-ray at this place. The x-ray came up with some spots on the lungs. so then these to another doctor, he ran me through a machine that entered the lungs with these tubes with lights and little clippers on them. They came up with something and sent it to the lab.

"Not cancer," they told me, "but you've got TB."

Through the months the fuckers had done everything but x-ray my lungs.

So I was put on anti-biotics and it's been a long climb back, gaining strength a little by little. The coughing has stopped, almost. And my strength is slowly coming back. But the writing, the typing, has almost stopped. The anti-biotics make one feel as if one had been slugged. Got off 4 pomes the other night, 5 poems and they seemed all right. So, I'm not dead yet. I am supposed to be cured by Novemember 14th. We'll see. No drinking. Ow ow.

It's not so much the writing as writing--to get famous, to be a writer, all that. It's more the entertainment, the saving grace in the fire, the last door out, the cure, the fix. I miss it. It will be back.

You keep pounding the keys. It's the best music ever made.

sure,



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Q: This is an interesting letter because Buk recounts a well-documented illness (TB) that preceded his cancer diagnosis by a couple/few years. If you have any comments, please provide.

A: Well, I don't really have much to say about this. It was almost like having your father start on his death descent. Even though I'd never actually met Bukowski, it was strangely, weirdly similar to my relationship with my father (in certain ways) at this stage. My father and Bukowski were about the same age and they died around the same time.

10-26?-89

Hello Douglas Goodwin:

Forget the critics. What would really be funny is to read the stuff they create, then you'd feel much better.

Bad reviews have always, in a sense, made me feel good. I like the fight. Star and Sunset poets are always going to be outraged by anything that comes out and says it.

On me: people who prefer WOMEN to HOLLYWOOD just dig the sex bit more. Each is a different type of novel. ~~###~~I prefer HOLLYWOOD because the style is leaner, neater and I am not trying to prove anything. HOLLYWOOD was more fun to write and I think that shows through. People also like to say that my old poems are better than my new ones. It isn't true. What people don't like to admit is that a writer is better at the moment than he has ever been. Most writers are better in the beginning and then just fade away. It galls people to see a man holding his ground, especially at a late age. Too bad. Let them be galled. And let them be damned.

20 more days on the anti-biotics and my mind will be cleared for the action.

You keep going. You know best what you need to do. Do it.

sure, yes,



Q: When he says "forget the critics," what is he referring to (in your life or what you wrote to him)? I agree with him, btw, regarding the old/new poems. I think he got better, much better, in his old age as a writer. He clearly liked you as a writer. How did that make you feel?

A: Oh, I was always complaining about the various assholes in my world: bosses, poetry editors who sent snotty rejections, flakes, etc. I love all of Bukowski's writing. I have a slight preference for the early bombastic poetry and prose, but I can see both points of view about that. Praise for my writing from Bukowski was the highest, undeserved blessing I have ever experienced. I have reached so few people with my pathetic little creative efforts that to have actually reached a literary genius like Bukowski (to any extent) is just a pure blessing. It sounds corny, I know. Maybe it is.

1/13/92 11:41 PM

Hello Goodwin:

As usual, what one says gets a bit twisted. What I had said is that the magazines that I liked were overstocked with me and that I really had a problem sending to the others, you know, those who print poems like:

Winter's haven bursts my star,
the little feet of heaven thunder past,
where are you, Dulcia?
etc.

or:

I stock of myself. you. blitz.
the butcher's button.
hold the take.
the onion floors fallward.
etc.

The N.Y.Q has accepted 66 of my poems. How many more can I send them?

Actually, I don't worry about getting into magazines. It's just that after writing poems I like to get them the hell out of here. A habit.

Neeli's biography fell pretty flat. I gave him hours of tapes about days and years of madness, near finishes, etc. Starvation, jail, hospitals, crazy women. He left it all out.

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I suppose because his life had none of that he couldn't see it happening to anybody. It's like he tried to make things dull. And did a damned good job of that. I should have known.

Well, yes, next batch of poems off of typer I'll try you with. I sometimes write some pretty bad shit. If you don't care for what I send, holler, and I'll give it another try.

Listening to Schubert's 9th now, real bad reading, guy conducts like he's afraid a carrot will fall out of his ass. Fucking shame. The 9th properly played is a mighty work.

Don't let your fellow workers get at you too much. What I did was develop such a sharp lip that they steered clear. I put it all in the form of humor but I sliced them to ribbons so that they were just as glad when the final minute arrived as I was.



Q: What's the background of this letter? What had you written to him to prompt the initial bit? Had you commented upon Neeli's biography? When he says he'll "try you" with the next batch of poems, what was he referring to? Had you solicited some work? Regarding the "fellow workers" comment, what had you conveyed/said to him? Good letter. These are important because they're close to his death.

A: I think I had relayed a comment I got in a letter from the editor of the New York Quarterly (about Bukowski) to Bukowski, and it annoyed him. I have a vague memory of that. I would often get snotty responses when I approached editors who published Bukowski. Maybe it was the way I approached them, or maybe it was something about them. In any case, I encountered a lot of push-back from some of the people who seemed to be aligned with Bukowski. Maybe they thought I was a "bounder" or something. An intruder. There was a lot of rudeness. Fuck it and fuck them. I thought Neeli Cherkovski was a total idiot and I thought his Bukowski book was an utter failure. I told Bukowski my opinion. Leading up to (and immediately after) Bukowski's death, a lot of self-serving crap appeared by a lot of creepy people. It totally disgusted me. I do not want to be part of any of that, and I hope I'm not. "Try you with the next batch," refers to my asking Bukowski (yet again) for a poetry submission for Sisyphus Leaves.

1/29/92 11:03 PM

Hello Douglas Goodwin:

Well, I'm glad you liked all ten poems, that's a lot of poems but I liked them too--beginning with hail the burning yellow flag. Still, that's a great many poems and I'm honored but should space considerations come up finally and you run out of pages then feel free to return some of the poems. I don't want you to feel that you're carrying a literary rock on your back.

I checked the poems out on the computer and I think they hold. The Henry Miller bit is something I've been wanting to say for some time but never have.

On Steve Richmond, I don't worry about him too much. He'll take an odd twist and turn now and then but he'll always come out of it. He and the demons control a vast part of the Pacific out there.

o.k., hold,



Q: Fill me in on the poems you received from him. How many did you get? What for? Did you get any flak from Martin about publishing Buk? What is the back story on his comment regarding Richmond?

A: I got ten poems from Mr. Bukowski and I published ten poems by Mr. Bukowski. There's no way I was going to reject a Bukowski poem. I still have them all (and the envelope he sent them in, and the return envelope he also sent - with stamps attached). I didn't see Bukowski as some normal guy who I was going to pretend was a peer and an equal. Bukowski was a giant who was dying. And I loved him (even though I'd never met him). We were not equals. I knew my place. Steve Richmond and I were equals. That's why we're on either side and Bukowski is in the middle. I think, at times, Richmond wanted to be Bukowski's equal. Hence the friction. I didn't even tell Martin about Sisyphus Leaves until way later. Why risk interference? But he liked it.

Bukowski's letters to Douglas Goodwin

3/9/92 10:41 PM

Hello Douglas Goodwin:

I have noted your new address. Of course, no matter where you move the people are going to be there. The faces are the worst. Sometimes when I look at tv and see all those faces on all those channels, I begin to feel as if I had eaten a bucket of shit.

Anyway, I look forward to Sisyphus 2. I know I won't find the flowery and the fake within. And certainly nothing by Mark Strand our new Librarian of Congress. I think that any son of a bitch with any sense at all would turn down that post. But those guys all suck each others nipples and I say let them go ahead.

Feeling crappy tonight but it will pass, I hope.

I believe THE LAST NIGHT poems will be good ones, some of them anyhow.

Thanks the gods for our keyboards, Doug, or we'd do something much worse, I'm sure.

yeah,



Q: Where had you moved? Can you give me the back story on Sisyphus 2?

A: We moved from Upper Queen Anne (in Seattle) to Lynnwood (a northern suburb). I'm not sure what else I can say about Sisyphus Leaves (Sisyphus 2). It was a collaborative effort among Steve Richmond (prodding, poetry, and nagging), John Papajani (a Bukowski fan who did the layout and the "desktop publishing" in Frame Maker), my wife (who did the cover art), my brother (who did the cartoon illustrations), Beryl Gorbman (my boss who owned a placement agency for technical writers - she let us use a laser printer), and me. I think it cost me about 500 bucks. At the time I thought it was an expensive and stupidly vain thing to do. Now, I'm totally glad I did it. I have a fondness for that little book.

4/22/92 12:16 AM

Hello Doug:

I'm glad you found LAST NIGHT POEMS all right. That shit came hot off the computer in 1991, went on a wild roll. I wrote ten pounds of poetry that year and I think that John Martin culled out most of the good stuff for the book. There's nothing like staying in the game, continuing to punch. I write the poems for myself, first off, to keep from going under or mad, then afterwards, some of it gets published, which is about all the luck a man can ask in this frigging world.

I liked the poems I sent you. They arrived off the machine in a bunch and I was hesitant about sending them all and was surprised and delighted that you took them all. I think they'll hold up. Get Sisyphus out when you can. Life gets in the way of everything. I know. Yeah.

Great you can see some trees. Trees are great. Cats too. Anything but the human race. That race is lost.

hold,



Q: Do you have a list of the poems that you accepted? Did you get Sisyphus out? What does the "see some trees" comment mean?

A: I accepted all that he sent. The list is the contents of Sisyphus Leaves (Sisyphus 2), which you have. When we moved to Lynnwood, there was an empty lot with trees out one of the windows. Later, they cut them down and built a condo.

Bukowski's letters to Douglas Goodwin

7/22/92 11:11 PM

Hello Doug:

Thanks for the copies of "sisyphus leaves". A good, strong gathering, I think. Of the 3 sets, I believe yours was the strongest. Your honesty is delightful. "i stupidly pulled", "failure" and "the bridge" are truly excellent. Good show.

On signing copies, I don't mind--as long as you send the S.A.E. But you better check with all parties first.

Particularly burned out by the last few days, various drains... But wanted to get this off to let you know that I think you did fine.

hang on,



Q: He's right about your best work in that volume (from my recollection). Did you agree with him? Can you give me the back story on "signing copies"? Did he sign any? Where are they? Can you give me the back story on Sisyphus? How long did you plan to keep that going?

A: No, I did not agree. Bukowski is always best. Steve and I are tied for last (then and now). The three of us signed a number of copies. I forget the exact number. Something divisible by three. I think it might have been 27 or 30. I forget exactly how we did it. I signed them and sent them to Steve or Bukowski, who sent them to the next signer, who kept a third of them and sent the rest back to me. I then sent half of what was left to whoever didn't have his cut yet. I paid for all of the postage (of course). So there were something like 30 copies signed by all three of us. I gave one to John Papajani and one to my brother. I probably gave one to Beryl Gorbman too. In any case, I have 7 left (signed by all three of us). Steve's are probably in a landfill. Martin probably has Bukowski's. Who knows? Sisyphus Lives (volume one) was a one-off project. Then I did Sisyphus Leaves (volume two), which was also a one-off project. I had no plans to keep it going, and I didn't.

11/18/92 12:03 AM

Hello Doug Goodwin:

No, I haven't been ill but did come in totally drunk about 2 weeks ago and fell, cracking my head against the porch steps. Real bloody mess but I'm fine now, I think. Reminds me of the old barroom days...

On other matters, I am working on a novel, an odd one, called PULP, "dedicated to bad writing." A detective story. There goes whatever rep I may have.... It moves slowly, though, up to page 150.... god damned poems keep springing off this machine, demanding priority. Martin working on a book of letters... yes... but I don't know when they are coming out... Also, Harper-Collins to bring out a BUKOWSKI READER next year. It's Black Sparrow stuff of the past. They paid us for the right to publish and we said all right. So, life continues here... still go to the racetrack... also, for me, as for everybody else Roadblocks sometimes loom up... but we fight our way through and over... so far...+

hold,



Q: Any comments/memories about this one? His cracked head is well documented in other works.

A: Nope.

Bukowski's letters to Douglas Goodwin

12/4/92 12:15 AM

Hello Doug Goodwin:

Thanks for the good words on the POEMS AND JOURNALS section of the new ONTHEBUS. I haven't received my copy yet. The old story: the writer is the last. Same thing with a preceding issue. My copy arrived about 6 months after the fact. Editor wrote me, "It was stuck under some papers." Grapes is good to honor me with a section but he has a mental block on other matters with me. I suppose he wants me to write and ask for a copy. Not sure I'll do that. That's my mental block.

ONTHEBUS fills a lot of pages each issue but I'm with you: there doesn't seem much there. Grapes describes the stuff as "good writers on their way to greatness." Hardly seems close to that.

Christmas and New Year's move toward us again. The old sickening duet. The masses coming out of their tv caves. The family gatherings. The gross dull nothingness, the fake drunks, the fake smiles, the fake people. May we live through this somehow, one more time.

yeah,



Q: What's he referring to regarding Poems and Journals? What's On the Bus?

A: I have to look for this one. On The Bus was a thick, perfect-bound magazine. They published a cool middle section of Bukowski prose. It's around here somewhere. I'll try to find it. I'm sure there are Bukowskians who are aware of it. I would guess that the content has been republished in one or more of those posthumous City Lights Bukowski books.

Q: Why didn't you take his advice regarding "don't ever let them con you into not writing anymore"?

A: I didn't feel like it.



CHARLES-BUKOWSKI-SOCIETY

Mission Statement

The Charles-Bukowski-Society is a literary society devoted to scholarship and research on the life, work and reception of our author Charles Bukowski. We're also working on the improvement of his literary fame and reputation.

We're an officially accredited Non-Profit-Organization (NPO) and member of the roof-organization of literary societies ALG (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Literarischer Gesellschaften) in Germany.

We're an International organization and take members of all nations, race, believe or sex. Members from outside of the EU are able to pay their member's fee of currently 25.- EUR (approx. 35.- USD) per year via PayPal (to: membership@bukowski-gesellschaft.de).

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