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

The Roominghouse Madrigals: Early Selected Poems, 1946-1966 Details

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Charles Bukowski

From Reader Review The Roominghouse Madrigals: Early Selected Poems, 1946-1966 for online ebook

Madeleine says

My introduction to Bukowski was in the form of his later poetry, which is, naturally, quite unlike his earlier stuff. His influences are more obvious (not at all in a bad way) in this collection, and his poetry is much more structured than what I've come to expect from Buk. But it has all the hallmarks of what I love about literature's favorite dirty old man, which is all I ever need to be happy.

Though I find it curious that his younger poems seem to betray an obsession with death and his own mortality more than any of his older writings I've encountered. And I wish he hadn't written about spiders in such unflinching detail. I hate spiders almost as much as I love Bukowski.

Andy says

One of the better Buk collections because there's lots of prose about poetry writing, which is cool, not much horse racing and banging chippies for a change. There are some really sweet lines flying around in this tome, too.

Poem titles:

Death Wants More Death

The Swans Walk My Brain, In April It Rains

Thank God For Alleys

The Best Way To Get Famous Is To Run Away

Actually, the old stew-bum dishes out tons of fatherly writerly advice. I took notes because he's almost never wrong!

Stan Lanier says

... the teeth of my soul ache... (EATEN BY BUTTERFLIES)

I once heard James Ellroy say Charles Bukowski was a fraud. My introduction to Bukowski came when I was a green, 17 year old, living in the confines of rural Georgia at the dawn of the 70s. It was a documentary on Georgia Public Television. I had arrived home from my job keeping score at Little League baseball games, pulled out my TV dinner from the oven, set up the TV tray, and turned on the TV. There was a grizzled guy sitting on a stage at a table with a full-sized refrigerator behind him. He got up, opened the fridge (which was full of long-necked bottles) and pulled out a beer. A heckler yelled out something. What I remember Buk saying was, "One more beer and I'll take you on." (to the heckler) "Hell, one more beer and I'll take you all on." (to the crowd) 40+ years later I still like reading the guy's poems.

This volume is a collection of early poems, most I had not, I don't think, read. It contains two of my favorites, however: BIG BASTARD WITH A SWORD and 86'd. Bukowski has his detractors, but I've always appreciated the element of protest in his poetry. How can you not pause when you read:

... one-third of the world starving while
I am indecent enough to worry about my own death
like some monkey engrossed with his flea... (I WRITE THIS UPON THE LAST DRINK'S HAMMER)

or reflect or nod when you read:
but I walk outside
and the heinous men
the steel men
who believe in the privacy of a wallet
and cement
and chosen occasions only
Christmas New Year's the 4th of July
to attempt to manifest a life
that has lain in a drawer like a single glove
that is brought out like a fist:
too much and too late.... (I WRITE THIS UPON THE LAST DRINK'S HAMMER)

In Bukowski's burdened observations, I find many arresting descriptions which often elicit a chuckle. He's certainly not to everyone's liking. I find it still worth the effort, though he himself says:

my poems are only scratchings
on the floor of a
cage. (EATEN BY BUTTERFLIES)

Chris LaMay-West says

I LOVED. Anybody who has ever spent time in the roominghouses of rough streets and/or their own soul will find things here that they recognize in their beauty, ugliness and honesty. The rest of my review can be found here: <http://chris-west.blogspot.com/2012/0...>

Ned says

I keep coming back to this author (about 2/3 through his body of work), a most conflicted man, typing poems alone in obscure tenement houses in a Californian post-war wasteland. His writing has little pretension, or expectation, just pure desire poured out on the page. And the man has real talent, perhaps exceptional, and he must have known that, or he would have found some other outlet. It certainly wasn't a living, in its time or even much later in life when he became better known. This collection is typical of the early years (before and after his hiatus), and what I loved about it is that the author's personality comes through: If you want to know what it is like to walk in another's shoes, here's your chance. Of course the shoes are horribly beaten, the feet staggering from drink or lack of hope, all holding up a person violently angry at his lot, frustrated by women and men alike, and deeply resentful of his creators. Bukowski was one step from the gutter at this stage of

life, sometimes in it, yet somehow managed to convert reams of paper into stacks of beautiful poetry with his old manual typewriter, probably the only vein of life in most of the dilapidated apartment complexes he frequented in the 1940s California. He was one of a kind, and can't help but feel I really know him. Though my station in life couldn't be more different, like Buk I find my fellow man and the world he's created often appalling. Also like him, we find beauty and tenderness and can't help but hold out quiet, cautious hope for a better world and love for each other. I'll be quite now and let him speak:

(p. 45) "the legs are gone and the hopes – the lava of outpouring and I haven't shaved in sixteen days but the mailman still makes his rounds and water still comes out of the faucet and I have a photo of myself with glazed and milky eyes full of simple music in golden trunks and 12 oz. gloves when I made the semi-finals only to be taken out by a German brute who should have been locked in a cage for the insane and allowed to drink blood. Now I am insane and stare at the wallpaper as one would stare at a Cezanne or an early Picasso (he has lost it), and I sent out the girls for beer, the old girls who barely bother to..."

(p. 52) "I want so much that is not here and do not know where to go"

(p. 107) "4:18 a.m., symphony #2, the gas is on but the masses still sleep except the bastard downstairs who always has the light on all night, he yawns all night and sleeps all day, he's either a madman or a poet; and has an ugly wife, neither of them work and we pass each other on the steps (the wife and I) when we go down to dup our bottles, and I look at his name on the mailbox: Fleg. God. No wonder. A fleg never sleeps. Some kind of fish-thing waiting for a twist in the sky."

(p. 135) "her skin is white and sagging, she has on a purple underlip. This is what causes wars, great paintings, suicides, harps, geognosy and hermits."

(p. 139) "it is fairly dismal to know that millions of people are worried about the hydrogen bomb yet they are already dead. Yet they keep trying to make women, money, sense. And finally the Great Bartender will lean forward, white and pure and strong and mystic, to tell you that you've had enough just when you feel like you're getting started"

(p. 177) "so being a poltroon, I have read the classics, I have argued in the marketplace, I have been drunk with the immortals: I have listened to these children cry that language is too huge a bone for all of us: even the finer wits have dulled their massive teeth. Let me be fuddled in the glade, numb with the growth of fancy; let me find me and dogs, and children, let me find towers and lattice sawing in the sun, and a God of Life instead of Death."

(p. 182) "I go inside to wife and hound, both fat and soft as peaches under the sun. I shave by candlelight and lightning. I shave by their holy silence, in a shattered mirror."

(p. 228) "...here we come, hundreds of us, blank-faced and rough (we can take it, god damn it!) over our silver bridge, smoking our cheap cigars in the grapefruit air; here we come, bulls stamping in cheap cotton, bad boys all; ah hell, we'd rather play the ponies or chance a sunburn at the shore, but we're men, god damn it, me, can't you see? Men, coming over our bridge, taking our Rome and our coffee, bitter, brave and numb."

(p. 229) "all about me sit half-talents, and suddenly- I know that there is nothing more incomplete than a half-talent; a man should either be a genius or nothing at all"

(p. 230) "I want you to draw like Mondrian, he says;

but I don't want to draw
like Mondrian,
I want to draw like a sparrow eaten by a cat"

Melanie Daves says

This book meant a lot to me, so I thought I would go back through it and read the random love notes I wrote to Bukowski and the lines I underlined. I know this review won't be noteworthy in any sense, but it is nice to go back through a book you love and remember why you decided to love it the first time you read it.

I am not one for re-reading; I am the worst culprit. I do underline for the sake of reading my favorite parts over and over again, but I typically do not re-read an entire book.

Bukowski has been more to me than just a writer I admire and aspire to be. He got me through my senior year of high school up until this point, where I find myself an army wife who teaches grammar at a community college.

Bukowski makes me want to dream bigger for myself, no matter where I am at in my life.

What I love about this book, in particular, is the way his writing WAS his life during this time. In a lot of his later works, he uses writing the way he used gambling or fucking or unemployment; they were factors in his life. What is special in this book is the fact that writing isn't a factor. He IS a writer, and the typewriter was almost another limb on his body. He HAD to write. It wasn't second nature; it was essential.

Because of his necessity, it makes the way he loves, the way he regrets, and the way he rejects so much more meaningful. I know I am only 23, but I remember when writing was as necessary as breathing, and I can't remember a better time in my life for experiencing the things around me. I hope it isn't just a phase in my life because I appreciate how much this necessity affected Bukowski's work.

I prefer his poetry to his novels and short stories, but I have always loved Bukowski's honesty in his writing above all, and I think he really gets to this honesty in his early works simply because he was not self-aware of his writing yet. It wasn't just a way to pay the bills; it was a way to live, and it is especially prevalent in this book.

Chris says

I don't envy the life he must have lived/endured, but I was amazed by the imagery of his poems. My favorites are "22,000 dollars in three months" and especially "3:30 a.m. conversation". Poetry, like much of art, is subjective. You're either going to love it, or dismiss it. Its a book of poems from a 20 year period, and some are great, and some are not, but I gave it 4 stars for the ones that left such an impression at the time of reading, like a tattoo in the fissure of my brain.

Matthew Konkel says

I guess a lot of people find these earlier poems superior to Buk's later work, but I missed the Hank style I originally fell in love with. Don't misunderstand me, this book confirms Charlie's place as my favorite poet but I just did not find the works as engaging as his other published stuff. Definitely worth a read for any fan or not.

Anas Almansuri says

It's been a while since I read such great book of poetry, especially for Mr. Chinaski ... It felt like reading Love is a Dog from Hell Again!

Monty Wildhack says

Bukowski's finest era of poetry.

Andy says

"Wow Dad, what was Charles Bukowski like when he was a younger author and hadn't quite found his voice just yet?" "Well Billy, if you want to know that, then read The Roominghouse Madrigals."

So this is Bukowski when he was still trying to find his voice as an author. This should come as little surprise as this collection dates takes works from 1946-1956. It is an interesting work for one who wants to know what an early Bukowski was like. I will give you a hint, the majority seem like they are him copying another authors voice in an attempt to find his own. Don't get me wrong. Some are pretty good. However others seem laden down with excessive verbiage and read as if he is trying to sound like a hipster. They are not bad, but they are definitely a different Bukowski from his later voices.

William says

Bukowski, Charles:Counsel [from The Rooming House Madrigals: Early SelectedPoems, 1946-1966 (1988), Black Sparrow Press]

- 1 as the wind breaks in from the sea again
- 2 and the land is marred with riot and disorder
- 3 be careful with the sabre of choice,
- 4 remember
- 5 what may have been noble
- 6 5 centuries
- 7 or even 20 years ago
- 8 is now

9 more often than not
10 wasted action
11 your life runs but once,

12 history has chance after chance
13 to prove men fools.
14 be careful, then, I would say,
15 of any seeming noble
16 deed
17 ideal
18 or action,
19 be for this country or love or Art,
20 be not taken by the nearness of the minute
21 or a beauty or politic
22 that will wilt like a cut flower;
23 love, yes, but not as a task of marriage,
24 and beware bad food and excessive labor;
25 live in a country, you must,
26 but love is not an order
27 either of woman or the land;
28 take your time; and drink as much as is needed
29 in order to maintain continuance,
30 for drink is a form of life
31 wherein the partaker returns to a new chance
32 at life; furthermore, I say,
33 live alone as much as possible;
34 bear children if it happens
35 but try not to bear
36 raising them; engage not in small arguments
37 of hand or voice
38 unless your foe seeks the life of your body
39 or the life of your soul; then,
40 kill, if necessary; and
41 when it comes time to die
42 do not be selfish:
43 consider it inexpensive
44 and where you are going:
45 neither a mark of shame or failure
46 or a call upon sorrow
47 as the wind breaks in from the sea
48 and time goes on
49 flushing your bones with soft peace.

Hikmat Kabir says

This is one of my first forays into poetry and it was a pretty interesting one at that. Bukowski's writings are just so raw and visceral. I felt at times that some themes were reused over and over again in this large

compilation. But the directness of the writing (and unusual style too in my opinion) never made this a dull read.

Mat says

A blazing brilliant bonfire of wondrous poetry.

Where do I begin?

This is quite simply and in all honesty, Bukowski's best book of poetry, hands down. Some have called it 'lyrical', and indeed there are some poems in here which are lyrical, romantic, sweet and droll. As one proceeds through the book, the harder, grittier poems increase and this is the style which Bukowski tended to develop more and more throughout his career and one in which he feels most comfortable. The greatest thing about these poems is that you can feel the desperation, you can almost feel the torpor of his mind as he awakes to deal with another hangover or another lost job opportunity and you can feel his cynicism above all about how everyone can just accept the ugly reality he sees all around him. He is somehow able to magically distill all of these atmospheres and feelings into words and although he is impossibly cynical and a dye-in-the-wool nihilist (no wonder he loved Celine. wonder what he thought of Nietzsche?) he nevertheless is, and funnily enough, a dye-in-the-woll nihilist you can't help adore. The most loveable rogue in literature.

Sure there are a few poems in here which are weak but I found myself underlining certain phrases or lines on almost any given page of this book. It's so good and in fact completely changed my opinion of Bukowski as a poet. Up until now, I had always thought of Bukowski as a great novelist, a sometimes great short-story teller but overall, a fairly average (but relatively singular) poet. THIS BOOK demonstrates just how much talent Bukowski had for poetry too. So what happened to the quality of Bukowski's poetry after this? Well, he was definitely hot and cold. Micheline thinks it was the fame trap that just made him become lazy and lose his edge. I personally think he had a big enough ego to not throw away the 'crap' when he should have. Instead, he ended up submitting just about anything he wrote and some of the poems (not in this book but elsewhere) sound like sketches, and the beginning of an idea, but nowhere near there yet.

I am so glad I read this book. A lot of people have written off Bukowski's poetry or over-praised it. Finally we have a book which allows us to do neither - it shows us that when he was inspired or his muse was around to bet on, then he could pull out all the stops and serve us the real deal. I won't over-praise this book but it's damned good. Damned good. And here I was ready to write another average review of yet another average Bukowski book. I was wrong. And glad I was wrong.

Do yourself a favour and read this. You won't like all of the poems but I will guarantee you that some of it will bring a smile to your face. Highly, highly recommended for modern poetry lovers.

Ghadaa says

a great disappointment.

there are some great parts that I marked and quoted everywhere, but I can't help feeling offended by the constant degradation of women in Bukowski's poems.

I don't understand how he was called the most influential writer of contemporary poetry.. or maybe I just don't understand poetry.. either way, I hope if he did influence young poets that at least they don't imitate his hatred and bitterness.

but aren't all poets bitter?

Stephen says

Not the Bukowski I'm use to reading and hearing. I'm led to believe these are the early verses. In them hides the Bukowski that eventually emerges with the terse, direct approach that seemed naked to me, hiding nothing, hiding behind nothing. His honesty flagrant, pointing to the readers insecurities as well as his own. Here Bukowski's poems feel almost formal or at least dressed up. As if he is saying, If I'm going to express this (what some my deem) vulgar, violent or maybe working-class sentiment, I must show you that I'm aware of W.C. Williams and the American idiom. Thankfully, we know that Bukowski's evolution soon said goodbye to kissing up to or paying tribute to the academic line and allowed his own voice to take him through the body of work he left behind for us to love and admire.

Adam King says

Thermometer and Destroying Beauty. A Trick to Dull Our Bleeding. So many gems in this, I'm sure to keep going back to this treasure trove. I'll recommend this to all my friends, but they're uptight assholes.

Dane Cobain says

This collection brings together Bukowski's earliest selected poems from 1946–1966, which is interesting in itself because according to his author bio, he didn't even start writing poetry until 1955. You can tell that they're his early poems, too. He's still finding his voice as a writer, and it's his voice which made his work so distinct. Because of that, while this is a reasonable enough collection of poetry, it's nowhere near Bukowski's best. I don't think I'd recommend it unless you're already familiar with his later work and you want to see how it all started out.

Don't get me wrong, there are certainly some standout poems here that really stuck in my mind, and I had no problem finding enough that I enjoy to fill a YouTube video. But while you could feel that Bukowski was in there somewhere, you could also feel that he was trying to distill other people's influences into what he was writing instead of going balls-to-the-wall and writing from his heart, instead of his head.

On the plus side, you do get plenty of his usual topics (women, races, alcohol), and you get to see them through a younger set of eyes. It's interesting to see that he was just as obsessed with death in his younger years as he was when he reached his seventies, and that gives me some hope for myself. So I'm glad that I read this, I just wouldn't recommend it to a newbie.

vi macdonald says

I've basically run out of things to properly say about Bukowski at this point. I hate the guy so much, but I honestly can't think of anything eloquent to say about him that I haven't said before. As such I feel like it's time to bring back an old review style I used to use a while back, but abandoned for no particular reason: it's time for a hateful haiku, folks.

Bukowski is shit
Like, really, REALLY bad, guys
Why's he straight man bae?

David Ward says

The Roominghouse Madrigals: Early Selected Poems, 1946-1966 by Charles Bukowski (Harper Collins 1988)(811). Two-hundred-fifty-six pages of poetry - the table of contents alone is four pages long - and there's not a single poem in the whole book that I liked! My rating: 4/10, finished 5/12/14.
