



revelations, particularly of his explicit fascination with women, made him as renowned a ladies' man as he was a drinker.

Women who entered his life — some of them travelling across the world to sleep with him after he achieved international success — ended up as characters in his work, the sex and fighting drawn from memory, the names only slightly altered. Not much about these experiences was pretty. One oft-told tale offers a woman decades younger who, as Souneles tells it, felt so ill after having sex with Bukowski she threw up.

Women, even more than drinking, became the great love of Bukowski's life, and his relationships and longing for sex and companionship are the focus of his best work. In "tonight", he writes,

*"your poems about the girls will still be around / 50 years from now when the girls are gone", / my editor phones me / dear*

*editor: the girls appear to be gone / already. / I know what you mean / but give me one truly alive woman / tonight / walking across the floor toward me / and you can have all the poems / the good ones / the bad ones / or any that I might write / after this one.*

The most famous of the many muses in this work is Wanda Wilcox, whom Faye Dunaway played in Barbet Schroeder's film of Bukowski's script, *Barfly* (1987). More than any other single work, this film has provided the general public with its strongest image of Bukowski.

In it, Chinaski (Mickey Rourke) spends his days writing stories and poetry, his nights drinking and fighting with the unfaithful Wilcox.

Wilcox was based on Jane Cooney Baker, the first and greatest of Bukowski's women, who died in 1962 and who inspired much

Charles Bukowski sought solace in books

of his work, including "eulogy to a hell of a dame":

*some dogs who sleep at night / must dream of bones / and I remember your bones / in flesh / and best / in that dark green dress / and those high-heeled bright / black shoes, / you always cursed when you / drank, / your hair coming down you / wanted to explode out of / what was holding you: / rotten memories of a / rotten / past, and / you finally got / out / by dying, / leaving me with the / rotten / present; / you've been dead / 28 years / yet I remember you / better than any of / the rest; / you were the only one / who understood / the futility of the / arrangement of life; / all the others were only / displeased with / trivial segments, / carped / nonsensically about / nonsense; / Jane, you were / killed by / knowing too much. / here's a drink / to your bones / that / this dog / still / dreams about.*

Bukowski remains one of the most widely read and influential of minor writers. He has held sway over generations of writers who believe the secret of making art is to write directly about personal experience. This has produced a kind of Bukowski School, which suggests if it happened, it is true; if it is true, it is real and, therefore, art. Bukowski reveals his thoughts on this in "mind and heart":

*read / what I've written / then / forget it / all. / drink from the well / of your self / and begin / again.*

In the rawness of Bukowski's work, we find a seductive voice that has brought back from the edge a grin and the kind of wisdom we find in "secret laughter":

*the lair of the hunted is / hidden in the last place / you'd ever look / and even if you find it / you won't believe / its really there / in much the same way / as the average person / will not believe a great painting.*

**Kevin Rabalais** is a US-born, Melbourne-based writer. His last book was *Landscape of Desire*.

## over flow

Rosemary Sorensen

APPARENTLY, having the opportunity to enrol in a course and being given the time to work at a writing project with the assistance of professionals are insufficient incentives for the vast numbers of students clamouring to enrol in the nation's creative writing courses. "We think that postgraduates make a huge commitment of time and creativity to their work and should have more chance of reward," says academic **Sharyn Pearce**, whose institution, Queensland University of Technology, has set up a \$2000 prize for such students. There's also an undergraduate writing prize, but this one's open only to QUT students. How odd that universities are now in the business of administering prizes with money attached.

ANOTHER way to compete: Varuna Writers' House (its actual name is Varuna, the Writers' House, but the comma seems redundant) has partnered with Scribe on its New Australian Stories anthology, setting up a competition, to be judged by Varuna director **Peter Bishop**, Scribe editor **Aviva Tuffield** and writer **Cate Kennedy**. Details, about to go up on the Varuna website, will include the entry fee amount; this is tricky territory. The Crime Writers Association, which administers the **S.D. Harvey** Short Story Award as part of the **Ned Kelly** Awards, charges a modest administration fee of \$12, but the fee for other "get-published" competitions can creep up a little. Byron Bay Writers Festival has a poetry comp it charges \$45 entry for, with publication through its own Picaro Press as the incentive. Varuna helps administer this one, too, and they justify the fee by saying it is necessary to ensure the program's sustainability.

THERE ought to be a law against creating a short list of two. How disappointed will **Abbas El-Zein** (*Leave to Remain*) or **Tim Soutphommasane** (*Reclaiming Patriotism*) be when the winner of the