

3 Volumes of Poetry From the Pen of Charles Bukowski

BY BEN PLEASANTS

**The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses
Over the Hills** by Charles Bukowski
(Black Sparrow Press: \$1)

**Penguin Modern Poets: Charles Bukowski,
Philip Lamantia, Harold Norse** (Penguin
Books: \$1.15)

A Dirty Old Man by Charles Bukowski
(Essex House: \$1.95)

• For 10 years Charles Bukowski has been hiding out in the back alleys of the American avant-garde king of the mimeo presses, a squatter on the poetic badlands of Los Angeles race tracks and the bars of Alvarado. Ten years sorting mail at the L.A. Terminal Annex, a surrealist postman in suicide pajamas, while Jean-Paul Sartre and

Jean Genet have called him the best poet writing in America, while Henry Miller has praised him to the skies, while every important young poet in the English speaking world has been hanging around in outlaw bookstores like Earth or Either/Or searching for limited editions of Bukowski's works from presses like Open Skull or Hearse Chapbooks.

Bukowski has ridden it out drinking his beer (tall), puffing on 10-cent black cigars and piling up book after book, first poetry, then prose. His "Crucifix in a Deathhand" and "It Catches My Heart in Its Hands," both published by Loujon, won praise from critics across the nation, but both volumes were printed in rare, magnificently bound and illustrated editions, ending up in university special collectins. Only now are his poems reaching a wide reading public. Penguin has published many of them in their excellent Modern Poets 13 (along with works by Harold Norse and Philip LaMantia).

The voice is raspy, part of the beer can littered landscape. The poems strike gut high, direct and hard, nailing the real world down on tablets of stained wallpaper and broken blinds among the one-room furnished longshots of lost American dreams.

"I wait in the white rain for knives like your tongue/ I see the spiral clowns fountain up with myths untrue./ I wrestle spasms in the dark on dark stairways." "and they found him in the morning dangling in the fire escape window,/ face frosted and gone as an electric bulb./ and the sparrows were in the bushes downstairs . . ."

Even better is the new Black Sparrow book "The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over the Hills," comprising most of Bukowski's recent poetry and some of his very best work. For example "life on paper is so much more pleasurable: there are no bombs or flies or landlords or starving cats and I am in the kitchen staring down at the blue lake of the concertmaster and also the trees, rowboats, boy with the American flag Civil War veteran girl with balloon spotted dog sailboat, the peace of an ancient day with the sun dreaming old battles . . ." The prose goes on from there, putting down the Bukowski vision in Balzacian gusto, his introductory prose exposition, his Sketches of Boy setting fire to the comedy of the Hollywood Ranch mythos of Los Angeles.