



Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life

By Howard Sounes



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A former postman and long-term alcoholic who did not become a full-time writer until middle age, Charles Bukowski was the author of autobiographical novels that captured the low life--including *Post Office*, *Factotum*, and *Women*--and made him a literary celebrity, with a major Hollywood film (*Barfly*) based on his life. Drawing on new interviews with virtually all of Bukowski's friends, family, and many lovers; unprecedented access to his private letters and unpublished writing; and commentary from Norman Mailer, Allen Ginsberg, Sean Penn, Mickey Rourke, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, R. Crumb, and Harry Dean Stanton, Howard Sounes has uncovered the extraordinary true story of the Dirty Old Man of American literature. Illustrated with drawings by Bukowski and over sixty photographs, *Charles Bukowski* is a must for Bukowski devotees and new readers alike. As the *Los Angeles Times* noted, "Bukowski is one of those writers people remember more for the legend than for the work....but, as Howard Sounes shows in this exhaustively researched biography, it wasn't the whole story."

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Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life By Howard Sounes Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Exhilarating, hilarious and often emotionally draining, this superb biography of the maverick, hard-bitten bard of the Los Angeles demimonde uncorks a potent brew of wild, antiheroic anecdotes. Sounes (Fred & Rose) often corrects Bukowski's version of events, without deflating the writer or losing sympathy for his often depressing life, from his sad, twisted childhood (complete with regular beatings) in Los Angeles to his discovery of both alcohol and literature as a teen. Dropping out of L.A. City College in 1940, Bukowski was classified 4-F, went on the road and worked odd jobs, all the while mailing poems and stories to little magazines. At age 27, Bukowski (1920-1994) had his first relationship with a woman, the alcoholic and routinely unfaithful Jane Cooney Baker, who became a prototype for his female characters. He wrote his first novel, *Post Office* (1971), in only three weeks, and his autobiographical screenplay for Barbet Schroeders' film *Barfly* (1987) brought him, improbably, into the Hollywood circle. Sounes spent two years interviewing more than 100 people, including women in Bukowski's tangled love life, who provide intimate details. Peering nonjudgmentally down every avenue of grief and despair, Sounes improves on previous books on Bukowski by Neeli Cherkovski, Steve Richmond and Russell Harrison. After reading Sounes' account, it is difficult to agree with his subject's self-assessment that, despite a prolific output of over a thousand poems, six novels and several collections of stories, "I won't be leaving much. Something to read, maybe. A wild onion in the gutted road. Paris in the dark. More than 70 illustrations, including R. Crumb art and several previously unpublished photos of key people in the poet's life." Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

Bukowski has always had a cult following, but he is probably best known from Mickey Rourke's portrayal of him in the Hollywood movie *Barfly*. Sounes, a British journalist, relies on interviews and correspondence with friends and lovers as well as material from Bukowski's highly autobiographical works to create a lively portrait of American literature's "Dirty Old Man." Sounes documents Bukowski's joyless childhood (the result of an abusive father and a severe case of acne), his struggle to support himself at low-paying jobs (including a stultifying stretch at the Post Office), his lifelong battle with alcoholism, and his belated rise to celebrity. Much of the book reads like a history of sexual conquests as Bukowski makes a startling transformation from Quasimodo to Casanova along the road to fame and prosperity. Fans who enjoyed Neeli Cherkovski's *Hank* (LJ 1/91) will welcome this fresh look at Bukowski's life. Recommended for larger literature collections. A William Gargan, Brooklyn Coll. Lib., CUNY Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From [Booklist](#)

Well after the retrospectives that followed cult favorite Bukowski's demise comes a dandy look at his gloriously misled life. "Buk" revealed in being the self-destructive, tortured artist. His confrontational, drunken readings in the late '60s laid the foundation for today's poetry slams and validated his wearing the surly, on-the-edge mantle of previous mad geniuses. Sounes recounts the fights, vendettas, flirtations, assaults, and literary happenings in Buk's life in detail, taking care to name names and fix dates. His tone is far more detached than, say, Neely Cherkovski's in *Hank* (1991), but since Bukowski died two years before Sounes started the book, it doesn't suffer from catering to old friendships or sensitivities about its subject. The facts of Bukowski's life rather than his writings are the main thing here. Some of the more recent of those facts concern Buk's collaboration with comic artist R. Crumb and the back-of-the-camera world of the movie *Barfly*, based on a Bukowski novel. Sounes provides a valuable gateway to greater

appreciation of a still underappreciated writer. *Mike Tribby*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Sharon Grace:

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Cheri Turner:

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Julie Chambers:

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