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THE JOHN WILLIAM CORRINGTON & CHARLES BUKOWSKI CORRESPONDENCE: ON POETRY AND WRITING

edited by
JAMES R. ELKINS*

We have police officers, social workers, nurses, physicians, businessmen, college professors, and even a few writers take up the study of law, but it is rare to find a published poet of John William Corrington's accomplishments in law school.¹ Corrington, before he took up the study of law at Tulane Law School in 1972—at age forty—was an English professor who had decided to be a novelist. Novelist learn the craft of writing in all manner of ways, Corrington learned it as a poet.

Corrington was twenty-eight years old, in his first year of teaching as an Instructor in English, at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, when he first contacted the poet Charles Bukowski.² Bukowski,

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¹ Corrington was, during his early years as a writer, teacher, and scholar, a prolific poet. He had over 180 poems published in literary magazines and journals, a publishing record all the more remarkable as most of these poems appeared in the years 1960-1964. See Joyce Corrington, *The Poetry of John William Corrington: A Bibliography*, 27 *Legal Stud. F.* 623 (2003). Corrington's published works of poetry include: *Where We Are* (Washington, D.C.: The Charioteer Press, 1962); *The Anatomy of Love and Other Poems* (Ft. Lauderdale, Florida: Roman Books, 1964); *Mr. Clean and Other Poems* (San Francisco: Amber House Press, 1964); *Lines to the South and Other Poems* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1965). On Corrington's poetry, see Richard Whitingon, "Introduction," to John William Corrington, *THE ANATOMY OF LOVE & OTHER POEMS* 5-14 (Fort Lauderdale, Florida: Roman Books, 1964); Jo LeCoeur, *No Cross, No Crown: The Poetry of John William Corrington*, 27 *Legal Stud. F.* 613 (2003) (reprinted from *Louisiana Literature: A Review of Literature & Humanities*, Vol. 13 (1) (1996)); Ralph Adamo, "An Exemplary Poem: An Overview of the Poetry of John William Corrington," in William Mills (ed.), *JOHN WILLIAM CORRINGTON: SOUTHERN MAN OF LETTERS* 46-58 (Conway, Arkansas: UCA Press, 1994).

On Corrington, see generally: James R. Elkins, *A Great Gift: Reading John William Corrington*, 26 *Legal Stud. F.* 425 (2002); Mills, *John William Corrington: A Southern Man of Letters*, *id.*; Symposium, *Fishing Deep Waters: John William Corrington (1932-1988)*, *Legal Stud. F.* 493-912 (2002); Lloyd Halliburton, *JOHN WILLIAM CORRINGTON: REFLECTIONS* (XanEdu, 2003).

² The Corrington and Bukowski correspondence is part of the John William Corrington Papers, archived at Centenary College, Shreveport, Louisiana. For Charles Bukowski's letters to Corrington, see Seamus Cooney (ed.), *LIVING ON LUCK: SELECTED LETTERS 1960S-1970S* (Santa Rosa, California: Black Sparrow Press, 1995) (hereinafter *LIVING ON LUCK*).

Bukowski's first letter to Corrington, mailed from Los Angeles, postmarked January 19, 1961, has a penciled notation written by Corrington indicating that it is Bukowski's reply to his first letter. See *LIVING ON LUCK*, *id.* at 9-10.

In editing this selection of Corrington's letters to Charles Bukowski editorial omissions are indicated by ellipses. Corrington often typed names of poems, magazines and book titles in CAPITALS. Poems are presented here in quotes; magazine and journal

older by some twelve years, started writing poetry in his mid-thirties and, like Corrington, had not as yet established himself as a poet when the correspondence began.³ When Corrington initiated their correspondence in late 1960 both men were publishing their poetry in small magazines and literary journals—*Venture*, *Flame*, *Odyssey*, *Descant*, *Discourse*, *Quicksilver*, *The American Weave*, *Chelsea*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Epos*, *Trace*, *Targets*, *Renaissance*, *Midwest*—which today are remembered, if at all, only by the struggling poets of that era. Bukowski's first chapbook, *Flower, Fist and Bestial Wail*, was published in 1960,⁴ before the correspondence began, but was not, by anyone's estimation, a reputation-making book. Corrington had been publishing poetry since 1957 when he was a Rice University graduate student,⁵ and published his first book of poetry, *Where We Are*,⁶ in 1962, after he struck up the correspondence with Bukowski. Bukowski had two collections of poetry—*Longshot Poems for Broke Players*⁷ and *Run With the Hunted*⁸—published in 1962, but they were not the kind of publications to garner critical attention.

Corrington was not shy about expressing his admiration for Bukowski's poetry and viewed Bukowski as an ally in the great battle against the academic poets of their day. Bukowski, who had little formal education, and didn't care much for those who did, was easily enough won over by Corrington's tough jazzy talk (Southern style) and his persistent, often expressed belief in the importance of Bukowski's poetry. Corrington, in the years when their correspondence was most intense,

titles, and book titles are italicized. Only in instances where Corrington used all caps for emphasis have they been retained. Dates are taken from the letters, or, when they appear in brackets, have been supplied by whatever evidence might have been available.

The selections from Corrington's letters appear here with the permission of Joyce Corrington.

³ Bukowski was in his thirties when he first began publishing his poetry, and was in his early forties when the correspondence with Corrington began.

⁴ Charles Bukowski, *FLOWER, FIST AND BESTIAL WAIL* (Eureka, California: Hearst Press, 1960).

⁵ See John William Corrington letter to Tom Bell, dated December 31, 1961. On Corrington's relation to Bell, see note 91, *infra*. Corrington

⁶ John William Corrington, *WHERE WE ARE* (Washington, D.C.: The Charioteer Press, 1962).

⁷ Charles Bukowski, *LONGSHOT POEMS FOR BROKE PLAYERS* (New York: 7 Poets Press, 1962).

⁸ Charles Bukowski, *RUN WITH THE HUNTED* (Chicago: Midwest, 1962).

translated his admiration into the first academic/critical/scholarly writings about Bukowski and his poetry.⁹

The Corrington-Bukowski correspondence continued for almost a decade¹⁰ but was most extensive in the period 1961 to 1963. Corrington did not finally meet Bukowski in person until the spring of 1965. The meeting, later described by various sources,¹¹ didn't go well and would persist as a dark cloud on their relationship. It was the only time Corrington ever personally met with Bukowski.¹²

Howard Sounes notes that "[a]t one time or another, Bukowski man-aged to upset almost everybody who was close to him."¹³ Another friend of Bukowski's, Douglas Blazek, who began corresponding with him in 1964, found that Bukowski could be mean-spirited even with his friends.¹⁴ But the Corrington-Bukowski relationship had begun to falter even before the 1965 meeting. With Corrington off to England to obtain a D.Phil. and moving away from poetry to devote himself to his fiction writing¹⁵ (his first novel, *And Wait For The Night*, was published in 1964¹⁶), the ill-fated Corrington-Bukowski meeting of 1965 would further imperil what had been a high-spirited, intense friendship between two struggling poets, who would both go on to make their reputation as writers. After 1965, Bukowski and Corrington exchanged infre-

⁹ See John William Corrington, *Charles Bukowski and the Savage Surfaces*, 6 (4) Northwest Review 123 (1963); *Charles Bukowski: Three Poems*, 1 (3) The Outsider 93 (1963); "Charles Bukowski at Mid-Flight," introd. to IT CATCHES MY HEART IN ITS HANDS (New Orleans: Loujon Press, 1963)(reprinted in Dorothy Nyren, Maurice Kramer & Elaine Fialka (eds.), MODERN AMERICAN LITERATURE: A LIBRARY OF LITERARY CRITICISM (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1976)).

¹⁰ The last letter from Bukowski to Corrington which I have been able to locate was dated July 23, 1970.

¹¹ See Howard Sounes, CHARLES BUKOWSKI: LOCKED IN THE ARMS OF A CRAZY LIFE 71-72 (New York: Grove Press Books, 1998). See generally Lloyd Halliburton, *Corrington, Bukowski, and the Loujon Press*, 13 (1) Louisiana Literature 103 (1996). See also Seamus Cooney's editor note, to the effect that the Corrington-Bukowski meeting "was not a success and left Bukowski with 'disdain' for his former correspondent, who had now turned to the novel as being more important than poetry." Cooney, *supra*, note 2, at 61.

¹² Joyce Corrington observes that she and her husband were frequently in Los Angeles dealing with their script writing work in the mid-1960s and Bill never expressed an interest in another meeting with Bukowski. Personal correspondence (email) from Joyce Corrington to James R. Elkins, October 27, 2003.

¹³ *Id.* at 87.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 88-89.

¹⁵ The relationship between Bukowski and Corrington was based on their shared interest in promoting their poetry (and each other's work) and when Bill Corrington moved on to fiction, he began to outgrow his interest in Bukowski and his work.

¹⁶ John William Corrington, *AND WAIT FOR THE NIGHT* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1964).

quent letters, and by 1970 each would go his own way. Corrington continued to write fiction, became a screenwriter, studied law at Tulane Law School and practiced law in New Orleans. Bukowski, as disdainful as he had been of Corrington's turn to fiction, began publishing his prose writings in the late '60s,¹⁷ and then with his first novel, *Post Office*, in 1971, after the final break with Corrington, amassed a substantial worldwide audience for his writing which persists today.

THE CORRINGTON-BUKOWSKI CORRESPONDENCE

Letter dated February 25, 1961:

The way I see it is that *things* and *emotions* and *situations* and *people* used to be warped to fit a set of conventions we used to call 'poetry.' Now nobody was any more successful defining 'poetry' then than now.¹⁸ Sure,

¹⁷ Charles Bukowski, *NOTES OF A DIRTY OLD MAN* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1973)(1969).

¹⁸ Corrington viewed the various scholarly efforts to "define" poetry with skepticism, if not disdain:

Stripped to their essentials, definition, criticism, interpretation, and all the other modes of commentary upon the arts can be understood as attempts to corner art itself in a dialectical cul-de-sac. The end of dialectic is to label, and the result of labeling is to isolate, delimit and circumscribe the thing labeled in such a way as to form a more or less absolute barrier between the labeled entity and all other universal phenomena.

That all definition, like all analogy, is false, is an accepted 'legal' fiction. It's maintained that definition makes for ease of handling; and this is generally known—or at least the knowledge is readily available. And yet, the delimitative disease—compulsive labeling—spreads and proliferates. Scholars and literary critics are so ravaged by the infection that their nitpickings become a cultural joke.

John William Corrington, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Label*, Trace #42, at 146 (Summer, 1961). We may "desperately wish to *know* what poetry *is*," says Corrington, but we do not.

'Poetry' is a generic term for millions of disparate entities bearing certain superficial resemblances: most are written down (not all); most employ rhetorical devices (not all); and so forth. [I]n our ignorance, we are terribly tempted simply to blurt out 'vital message' or 'no prose statement' or some other inanity to define it; and then, we believe, with every ounce of our strength, in the absoluteness of what we have blurted out. These self-conceived limitations eventually stiffen our perspectives and become etched into our minds, until finally the definition grows more important than the thing defined. All that does not fit our hallucinated assumption is consigned to darkness as 'not poetry.'

The 'label-syndrome' is understandable: I sympathize with the impulses behind it. If only art would hold still, obey established patterns, express the 'right'

it had rhyme and it had regular meter and there was a language of flowers and imagery that was biblical or classical was *de rigueur*, but this was all the *manners* of poetry even then, and not the guts of it. (You ought to get a copy of Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* to see how great and far-out a 1600's poet could write.)¹⁹ But the reason the conventions were adhered to was that they *worked*. They were guidelines that limited poetry from whatever the 17th Century equivalent of liver-pill ads and catsup labels were. They were little signposts, too, that said: herein you *may* find some poetry. Of course there were, even then, a thousand tenth-raters for every Shakespeare. The rhyme and capitalized letters beginning every line didn't make the stuff poetry, it just happened to be the convention in which poetry (as well as the myriad rubbish) appeared most frequently.

But in those days, when things had to be lopped off and reshaped and conventionalized to fit a mold, it was a miracle that there should be a Shakespeare. Rhyme alone was such a goddamned dictator that (and I know this from having the experience) a man who wanted to write about a very specific and closely-defined thing in, say, the sonnet form, was more likely to end up saying something entirely different from what he first had in mind because he just couldn't find rhymes and words that fit metrically into a sonnet that would also express his original intent. How badly things got warped is impossible to say (I often wonder if maybe a man finally learned to *think* inside the convention, and thus was warped less when he came to committing the already-conventionalized thought to paper—then I saw that the warpage was

ideas, then a man might learn the rules and become an artist without gnawing uncertainties as to whether his work might be worthwhile. But, this is both impossible and ignoble. A work of art is an achievement of such magnitude against such preposterous odds, that an *a priori* certainty about the aesthetic significance of the results is impossible. No amount of pettifoggery in the form of definitions and rules-imposed-from-without can overcome the odds. Phony imperative practically assure dull copies rather than creations.

'There are no firm footholds in creation,' says Charles Bukowski. To dispute this is to invite the abortion of future works of art in Time's womb. The definition of genuine art is the work itself. Like St. Thomas Aquinas' angels, every poem and painting is a unique entity bounded and fixed by its own integrity. As Aristotle put it: '... each has a form and a perfection peculiar to itself and to no other thing.' We are free to dislike certain forms, or certain questionable perfections; but attempted legislation against them via definition is lunacy.

Id. at 147-148. For Bukowski's letter to Trace dealing with these same matters, see LIVING ON LUCK, *supra* note 2, at 12-15.

¹⁹ Corrington wrote his Master's thesis at Rice University on "The Moral Climate of Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy*" (1960).

just as certain, and that learning to think inside a formal rigidity only transfers the warpage back one step and is even worse than the verbal warpage because if you only get messed up on the verbal level, at least *you* are okay. But if you have to warp your whole mental operation to fit a convention, you are fucked up deluxe.)

....

I didn't bug out on the scholastic system of making poems because I wanted to write out of my armpit. I did it because I cannot stand dead flowers and dried-out people paraded as if they were alive.²⁰ Formlessness is a danger. But what is formlessness? I do not know yet. I guest it is when communication of any and all kinds breaks down completely.

What I *do* know is that every experience has a form proper to itself. I know that even the same experience written two days or two decades apart predicates a new form. I know that real form is when you or I struggle long enough to find out how to say this whatever-it-is *as it would say itself* if it had tongue. The subjective lens of our own personality is what we have to use as a focal point. It may not be as easily available to the old general public, but then the G.P. don't read poems anyhow. . . .

The language isn't rich enough for us to totally discard conventions, but at the same time it is immeasurably too rich to suggest the consistent use of 'morally' right forms. Every advance in writing begins with somebody batting one out into left field. Mostly they go for fouls. But nothing is as pretty and clean and astounding a score as a homer that is just inside the line.

.... I suggest we try some good old American pragmatism: if it *works*—if a form or an unform makes spiders in a reader's head, if it melts his eyes and pumps inner tears and makes him see soft girls and candy money, belligerent fish and hayseed brandy: if it assails and overwhelms him in any of a dozen ways with its thingness, then it is

²⁰ In a later, ca. February 1, 1961, Bukowski suggested to Corrington that: "A man's either an artist or a flat tire and what he does need not answer to anything, I'd say, except the energy of his creation." *LIVING ON LUCK*, *supra* note 2, 10-11, at 11. Bukowski might well be right if the artist didn't seek to make his work public, but once he does, he begins to answer not only to himself but also to the critical and public response to his work.

poetry, and everything to the contrary, it is worth everything literature claims as value.²¹

Letter dated August 14, 1961:

Hey, have you ever sent anything to *Mutiny*? They're a little right of where we like it, not as out as the *Outsider*,²² but they put out a pretty

²¹ Charles Bukowski responded in a letter dated March 1, 1961 approving of Corrington's suggestion that he might clean up his argument about poetry and send it off to *Trace*, a literary magazine, for publication. In Bukowski's view

[t]he problem is . . . that as we work toward a purer, looser, more holy warmth of expression and creation, the critics are going to have to work a little harder to find out whether it's water or piss in the holy grail, and even then they might end wrong. You know the old comic strip joke about the painting hung upside down or etc., well, there's a lot of practical truth in this. But pure creation will always have its own answer finally, and it will neither be a set of disciplines or undisciplines, it will simply be.

LIVING ON LUCK, *supra* note 2, at 16. Bukowski goes on to point out that he and Corrington, who was a teacher of English literature at the time, are in a different position and that "[i]n all my years in slaughterhouses, cake factors, truck driving, dockworking, god knows what, I have never been asked what poem is, thank god." *Id.*

²² *The Outsider*, edited and published by Jon Edgar and Louise ("Gypsy Lou") Webb, founders of the Loujon Press, featured the early writings of avant-garde and Beat Generation poets of the early 1960s—Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gary Snyder, Charles Bukowski, William Burroughs, Charles Olson, Louis Zukofsky, Diane DiPrima, Henry Miller, Leroi Jones, Langston Hughes, Jean Genet, Jack Kerouac, Kenneth Patchen, and others. Ken Lopez, a bookseller, in his on-line catalogue 110:A notes:

The Outsider, Vols. 1-3. (New Orleans): (Loujon Press) (1961-1963). The first three issues of this influential little magazine, which published a number of the Beat, and later counterculture, writers while they were still "outsiders." Handset and printed, they were as innovative typographically as they were in terms on contents, and Loujon Press later went on to produce some of the most distinctive productions of the 1960s, an era of great experimentation in book publishing, as in other fields.

The Outsider published in New Orleans appeared as: Volume 1—Fall, 1961 (#1); Summer, 1962 (#2); Spring, 1963 (#3). A final double volume, Volume 2, was published in the winter of 1968/69 as #4/5 (winter 1968-69) after the Webbs moved to Tucson, Arizona.

William Mills, who edited a fine collection of essays on Corrington recalls:

In the fall of 1961 I moved to the French Quarter and began teaching at LSU-New Orleans; on Bill's visits we could walk down to see Jon Edgar Webb and his wife Gypsy Lou, who were putting out the first issue of *The Outsider* magazine. It was a powerful issue with such folks as Corso, Snyder, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Bukowski, plus some of Henry Miller's letters to Walter Lowenfels. Bill's offering was a poem called "Hard Man." All these plus poet laureate, Howard Nemerov, were in the second issue. In the third, Bill had a striking essay on *The Outsider* "Man of the Year," Bukowski. *The Outsider* was one of the best little magazines of those days. It was a labor of love for the Webbs and a constant financial struggle.

good-looking sheet, and I think you ought to try 'em. Also, this close friend of mine (we went to Rice in Houston together,²³ and got our butts stranded out on the Gulf of Mexico one night and got eaten by mosquitos so bad that I finally said, shit I'd rather drown, and jumped in, and finally the Coast Guard came up and pulled an Unkle Sam on us and the commander told us all the way in to Galveston that we'd cost the tax-payers \$100 for the trip, and my friend says you want it in small bills, or maybe in skin, and the commander impounded the frigging sailboat), this friend is now running a blah little mag out of Madison, Wisconsin, but the only reason it's blah is because he hasn't gotten any swingers yet—except old Judson Crews who wigs me that his stuff is usually bad but hardly ever terrible and who sends stuff to everybody.²⁴ Anyhow, if you have something, send it to Marcus Smith [the editor of the Madison magazine]

....

These kids this summer that I teach: they are as different from me as elephants from panthers. No insight, no reflexes, no passions—only the desire to get lost in some crowd and to make it to the plain of mediocrity and feast there forever. I counted it: the phrase “high standard of living” appeared 46 times in a hundred of their themes. . . . They're like nasty children who want thrills but never want anything to be real and irrevocable and absolute. All of life is a dry run, a shakedown cruise for a voyage they'll never take. Would feel sorry for them, but how can you

Done on a C. & P. handpress, with handset type, it took the editors 4,500 hours to prepare the first issue.

William Mills, *Risking the Bait: John William Corrington, 1932-1988*, 26 Legal Stud. F. 829, 830-831 (2002) (first appearing in the *Southern Review*). On the Loujon Press, see generally, Leo J. Weddle, “The Loujon Press: An Historical Analysis,” dissertation, University of Tennessee (2003).

²³ Corrington obtained his Master's degree from Rice University in 1960. And it was at Rice that Corrington met Joyce Elaine Hooper who would become his wife.

²⁴ Judson Crews, born in 1917 in Waco, Texas, was a poet, editor, publisher, and book dealer. Crews “was a prominent figure in the Southwest poetry scene as a poet, editor, and publisher of contemporary poetry and art magazines.” Judson Crews, “Biographical Sketch,” Harry Hanson Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin <<http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/research/fa/crews.bio.html>> Crews was involved with numerous small magazines and published chapbooks of his own work and of friends and colleagues. Crews also operated the Motive Book Shop, which he used in his advocacy of avant-garde poetry and various small poetry magazines. *Id.* At the time Corrington mentions Crews to Bukowski, Crews has already authored: *A Poet's Breath* (1950); *Come Curse the Moon* (1952); *The Wrath Wrenched Splendor of Love* (1956); *The Ogres Who Were His Henchmen* (1958).

feel sorry for a cabbage or a carrot? They are so safe it's scary. I dislike saying it, but Chazz, I don't like 'em. I don't like 'em like I don't like . . . big-name magazine editors and publicity men and all manner of phonies. These are phonies in the egg: when they hatch, they'll make Madison Ave. look like a bunch of compulsive truth-tellers and professional holy men.

Sorry. This is boring, and you already know it, and I have been knowing it but not wanting to believe it because I never minded teaching and have made some good friends in earlier years out of former students. . . . [The students] are corrupted before I lay hands on 'em. they have a fantasy in which they leave school and immediately go on federal relief complete with [a] ration of tranquilizer I can cut a tough stone into shape, or help a mean little bastard find his kicks without a straight-razor, but nothing in my past or knowledge shows me how to make men and women out of yesterday's oatmeal.

Al right, that's all of it. I needed to say it so somebody who would be able to weight it right: I rarely say anything to my colleagues (now *there* is a word).²⁵

Letter dated August 11, 1961:

I . . . found that, being able to write a pretty mean sonnet, I would be an idiot on all scores not to do so: it's great practice for cutting out junk and being precise; a sonnet is the quickest way in the world to get into some pretty good mags; and it throws utter dirt in the eyes of those who would love to put some label on my ass. Finally, and most important, there are things you can get *at* through a sonnet that elude your groping in free verse. This is the sohelpmegod truth, Chas.: you ain't lived till you've made a sonnet out of sweat and frustration and lack of rhymes, and that damned five-beat.

²⁵ In a letter to Tom Bell dated, March 1, 1962 Corrington comments again on his view of teaching: "I may as well lay it on the line about my job. I regard it as a way to make money. Once I had this thing for being a great teacher, and then I found out that the great teacher is oneself. I had great teachers at Centenary [where he attended undergraduate school]—but that was because I knew how to make use of them, and was forever hounding them after class hours." (Corrington also spend a year, as an undergraduate at Louisiana State University.) On Bell, see note 92, *infra*.

Letter dated September [1961][?]:

Waiting for more word on my book.²⁶ I think at first I cared about this book-thing, and now I'm red and ashamed, but it doesn't make much difference because I have just about figured how good I am, how good I'm likely to be, and I don't reckon it makes enough difference any way you look at it to get real excited. It is terrible news to wake up and find all the dependable phoniness you ever had (and I was too fucking cowardly to ever cultivate great stores of it) dribbling away through your fingers. I am almost to the point of wanting to be a great writer rather than a great name

Letter dated August 16, 1961:

O Chas, you know you'll get a copy of *Where We Are*. Jeez, what I hope is you don't get a rash from it Whatever is wrong with it, it don't howl and slobber and shit in the sheets like Hedley.²⁷ You see, the reason you think he's so bad is that he *tries* to write your kind of subjective poetry and fails. Your kind is always the hardest because one slip and you're on the maudlin express. It's like walking a tightrope between honest and sane self-revelation and muttering and bawling like a poisoned pup. My stuff, moving behind and above and around whatever sits like a brazen budda in my inmost guts, rarely spills over that way. I may never reach the clean fantastic power of your best—but then I won't have to go han[g] head for Hedley's kind of jazz.

Wife Joyce says [your] poem about digging the hole in the last *SFR* [*San Francisco Review*] is maybe her real favorite of yours. She says a guy who can't write good sharp humor should hang it up and spare the people, and this one proved you had three dimensions. Now all she wants is the fourth dimension. What's that? Maybe you could call it a sense of history: the ability to frame what we know of now against what we know of the past. This is maybe my strong point.²⁸ As in 'Pastoral',²⁹

²⁶ Corrington is referring here to his first volume of collected poetry, *Where We Are*, published in 1962.

²⁷ See John William Corrington, *Hedley: A Negative View*, *Midwest* #4 34 (1962). In a letter dated September 19, 1962 Corrington tells Bukowski: "Well, you ought to have the new *Midwest* by now. How do you like the way ole Hedley made out? Maybe I overdid it. I hate to throw a typewriter at a man—even if he is a fink of great stature."

²⁸ In a later letter to Bukowski dated March 28, 1962, Corrington appends a two page poem which contains the following lines: "as I love / tomorrow crawling around the legs of my table / how can I spurn yesterday / how / poor I would be / without a yesterday to

I can build better singings by opposing *now* to some *then* or other. I've got this really way out poem on the crash of the Hindenberg, the big blimp that wend down in the late thirties. I think it's good—because I tried to find the eternal element in this kind of disaster. I know you won't think much of this, but I believe in it: this grasp of everything in the *now* and a *then* gives depth. O well, we writes 'em, finally, the best way we knows how, huh?

Letter dated November 7, 1961:

Sure it's all been done and we are only marching over Thomas Wolfe's land and the rest, but it is a good march and the mornings are full of treason, the afternoons slick like a kindly syrup—the nights full of half-blind believing. Nothing is free, and we pay for living with our lives. Cheap at twice the cost, huh? Anyhow, you have to march till, full of days and baby monuments, you fall off like a sated tick.

Sure you have a good picture of me—right to the Picayune cigarette that dangles even now with this anvil typewriter and its dying ribbon, and flares in my head (and some shameful notions of being famous and a lot of other shit I have got to purge, and may need large failure in order to get rid of. Like excess weight, wanting to be a Name is sick and unworthy of any kind of man because only the work counts, and the name is always, after long enough, either a bad name or a huge lie that fuddles readers and pricks critics—who are pricks themselves)—and inwards neither loose nor really present, but chrome guts that catch the spark of my nerves' striking off my brain, and throw the reflection onto paper. I never cry—except once in a dark night-like while, and then always for some other poor heap of pain who has either lost, or, gulled completely, won, and thereby lost. Losing is teary, except my own loss—which is tiny and not even worth sweat—and for these other losses I can find juice collection on the chrome.

build my nows against." In an undated letter (ca. April, 1962), Corrington explains that in the novel he is working on—his first—the manuscript for *And Wait For The Night*—published in 1964—he is writing about "a strange monumental yesterday peopled with all the beloved ghosts of men . . ." In the same letter he muses that: "I may drop in on now again sometime, but not till I can make sense out of it."

²⁹ Corrington's poem, "Pastoral" was first published in the *San Francisco Review* (Vol. 1 (8), 1961) and was included in his first book of poetry, *Where We Are* (Washington, D.C.: The Charioteer Press, 1962) and his last published collection of poetry, *Lines to the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965). The poem later appeared in several anthologies.

The price of honor and the internal hard-nose that cannot be bent to its outer knees or made to play the fool is not to be able to justify tears for yourself (not self-pity; just sincere heartbroken sadness for this pile of agony who happens to be yourself). I can cry for the plight of an orphan dog quicker than I can do anything but sneer at my own broken hands. The devil rides inside, and I fight the sonofabitch and lean on him and tell him to report to the principal, but he fingers the rotten air and makes these poems which have no place in the mouth or eyes of a sharecropper's great grandson, and he robs me of hate and love and lets me have the empty bottles out of which he has poured all the fluids that count and make men susceptible and free. Dr. Frankenstein, making the Great Beast out of his own intestines. Somebody stop me before I write more.

Allright, I just got the creeping philosophies for a while. I got my regular typewriter now, and it don't do that stuff.

....

I don't even want to write this. But Lawson, the man who is publishing *Where We Are* wants a blurb of something to use on promotion. He said, "ask Bukowski to write what he thinks of your work." This stinks, but all you have to say is no. Then I can honestly tell him I asked you. The only good thing is, he must figure your name would help sell books. This looks good.

Lemme hear from you, and just ignore the last thing if you want. I'd just as soon let Lawson play his own literary politics, and hunt up some of his boys to say nice things. Maybe I ought to stick to the little mags.

Letter dated December 6, 1961:

No you don't fool anybody finally, but the goddamned 'finally' is long after you & I are gone, and we will not have the delicate pleasure of watching them dump Frost's collected works in the commode to make room for the racing form—which I would as soon see as see my own stuff made Great & Portentous What you try not to do is fool yourself. Win or lose in the cosmic stakes, I can take it. Never having really thought I was much, or likely to be much, I am thankful for good lines, even for good thoughts, and if other people want to print what happens, okay. It makes no difference one way or the other. I am not so far impressed with what I have done, and this is forever good—because I am

not depressed, either. All is well. This is what the South has done for me.³⁰ I belong to something: a land, a family, a way of life. And thus I don't have to get my ego all laced up with the poetry. I reckon beer and horses do it for you. I feel real bad for people whose writing (or editing) becomes an extension of their personalities. . . . [T]he future will either praise or shit on you. Which is only a passing concern.

Sure I live . . . because I have heard you die. You never get ready to die, and Hem [Hemingway] was still unready but could not think of a good honest alternative.³¹ Anyhow, my Catholic raising made me conscious of death You . . . are born dying, and every day you get closer to the big moment. But there is no need to practice, you can't fail to make it sooner or later, and all that matters is to pray that the ending will be good and not shame all you have done, or your memory to your people—which is important to the people if not to you.

Letter, undated [ca. January, 1962]:

Joe Friedman at *Venture* dropped me note: he took two for next issue,³² & Thompson took some for *Sun* . . . which looks ratty (but it might be a good horse after all).³³ And I got Lars' "Brand X" with some horseshit in it, and a copy or two of *Descant* where you were the head and I was the horse's prat

³⁰ Corrington took great pride in being a Southerner and in the South's literature. For Corrington's view of the South and its literature, see John William Corrington & Miller Williams, *The South and Its Literature*, 26 *Legal Stud. F.* 721 (2002) (The Corrington-Williams essay appeared originally as the introduction to John William Corrington & Miller Williams (eds.), *Southern Writing in the Sixties* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996). Corrington and Miller also co-edited a collection of poetry by Southern writers: John William Corrington & Miller Williams (eds.), *Southern Writing in the Sixties: Poetry* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967).

³¹ Bukowski was not nearly so devoted to Hemingway as Corrington and said as much in several of his letters to Corrington. In a letter dated December, 1961, Bukowski noted that "the hem can be overevaluated like anything else, and while he understood the mathematics of life and cut it fine, bravado and hardfire, there was essentially some music missing, and what he cut out in his figuring as unnecessary is what turned the shotgun in on him." *LIVING ON LUCK*, *supra* note 2, at 21. See also, Bukowski letter to Corrington dated January 12, 1962, *id.* at 23-25.

³² John William Corrington, "uncle david drank too much" and "Magnificat," 4 (1) *Venture* 48, 49 (1961).

³³ John William Corrington, "Libera Nos, Deus," *Sun* #3 17 (1961); "A Christmas Carol," *Sun* #7 13 (1962).

No word from Lawson about the book [*Where We Are*]. I wish to hell I knew whether this guy is rigid or blank. The book was supposed to make it out this January, and if he manages that, I'll kiss your horses. March would sound more like it.

Big blazing word from Harper's. They read another sixty pages of my Civil War memories and offered me a contact on the completed work.³⁴ I already had an option with 'em, but now they talk real loot. This could be a great glory and the beginning of the way out of the classroom. I want out of this silly rats-ass dead-end university scene (which I make okay, but which I suspect will one day pickle me surer than your booze ever will you). If the novel sold big, I might be able to pull out and write all the time.

....

The new issue of *Mutiny* is here. Is miserable. Nothing in it worth the scrutiny of a dull child. The more you see of the 'reputable' bunch, the more you figure the Beats are pretty damned good after all.

Letter dated January 8, 1962:

[D]idn't you like my poem in *Descant*? The one on Shelley³⁵ was too bad to ever get written,³⁶ but I can't apologize for the one on The Army.³⁷ Sometimes I get real scared when I think that maybe of all the poems I ever wrote, I meant that one the most.

....

I write because I believe it is a profession worthy of a man's dignity and his greatness, because it is an honorable way to use up life.

....

³⁴ Corrington, with the help of Larry McMurtry, who he had met at Rice University while he was a graduate student, initially secured a contract from Harper & Row to publish his first novel, *And Wait For The Night*.

³⁵ Shelley is Corrington's daughter.

³⁶ John William Corrington, "For My Daughter Nine Months Old," 6 (1) *Descant* 14 (1961).

³⁷ John William Corrington, "For the Army of Northern Virginia: 1861-1961," 6 (1) *Descant* 14 (1961).

Modern poets, most of 'em, just skirt the edges where the human fallout is not dense or really ugly, and scurry back to academic groves and paste together impressions of impressions. I really believe I have material enough to write for the rest of my life. It's not what you've seen or been, but how much feeling and thought and desperation and strength you can milk out of all you have come across. The water is deep, and it's never certain how long or how well we can swim.

Letter dated January 9, 1962:

I know last poem was no "Communion,"³⁸ but you got to pace yourself. Coming on strong every time burns out too much of the heart, and all strong sayings are not necessarily so. Dynamics, like in a symphony. Even Tchaikovsky soft-pedaled those lush melodies sometimes. Knew that sugar gets pasty when concentrated. . . . So in poetry. there are large and small good things. Your work is full of both.

. . . .

Laughs? When Jon first told me I would be doing intro for your book.³⁹

³⁸ John William Corrington, "Communion" [from "Prayers for a Mass in the Vernacular"], *The Outsider* #3 87 (1963). "Prayers for a Mass in the Vennacular" appeared in 1 (9) *El Corno Emplumado* 59 (1963-64) and was included in Corrington's *The Anatomy of Love* (1964) and *Mr. Clean and Other Poems* (1964).

³⁹ Jon Edgar Webb and his wife, Louise (know as "Gypsy Lou"), began publication of *The Outsider*, a New Orleans magazine, in the Fall, of 1961 upon the founding of the Loujon Press. Both Corrington and Bukowski contributed poetry to *The Outsider*, and both men held Jon Webb in high-esteem. Corrington sometimes found it difficult to get Webb to accept his poetry for publication, and in a letter to Bukowski, dated September 19, 1962, expresses both admiration and exasperation with Webb: "What did Jon Webb take of yours? I'm afraid I'm aced out of the next *Outsider*. I reckon I can stand a one-issue pause without any real bad after-effects. The trouble with Jon is he keeps expecting me to top my last performance every time. This is nowhere: it can't be done and nobody who knows how to put words together even tries." Three weeks later, Corrington wrote Bukowski: "Chas, it seems all good with ole Jon. That crabbed old goof sent me a letter asking for a few poems 'in case a hole in [*Outsider*] #3 opens up.'" Letter dated October 3, 1962. Corrington did make *The Outsider* #3 with a poem titled "Communion."

Webb, according to Corrington, mentioned Bukowski at their first meeting, and Corrington made it clear that he thought Buk was the real thing. The role that Corrington may have played in Webb's decision to publish the first major collection of Bukowski's poetry—*It Catches My Heart In Its Hands*—is unclear. But there was never any doubt about who would write the introduction, and that it would be Corrington. The result was a now rare and highly-collectible book of Bukowski poetry, the first book published by the Webbs' Loujon Press and a book that would substantially further Bukowski's reputation as a poet. Corrington wrote the introduction and, in doing so, made

This is big thing for me. It is rare in life you get to say what you think where it will count. It becomes important to say the right things. So I will try.

Letter dated February 3, 1962:

We are all driven by different demons: fame, love, hate, fear, rage, sympathy. . . . [B]ut you can always swap demons.

. . . .

The skies are dark here, and the Hindus say the world is about to end. By Monday night. All right. I can't see why it should or shouldn't. Whoever runs it don't ask me for advice, but I would let it go on for awhile. Good money after bad? Why sure it's only money.

If it does all go up, I hope you get this letter first. My last words are: fraternal greetings.

Letter dated February 4, 1962:

First poem in 6 weeks today. Called "Viva Zapata."⁴⁰ It is the prose that constipates me, but to write a novel is a good good thing because it is big & requires a lot of memory & you have to really believe it (not in a poem: poems are too short to require belief, & you are embarrassed to become famous writing poems because poems come easily or they are not worth much). . . .

Poems say that a man has eyes & knows words. But a novel shows you what his insides are like because it is hard to write a novel . . . unless

the case for Bukowski as a major poet. See generally Lloyd Halliburton, *Corrington, Bukowski, and the Loujon Press*, 13 (1) Louisiana Literature 103 (1996)(Corrington met Lloyd Halliburton in the 3rd grade when they were school kids in Shreveport). Halliburton continues to write about his old friend, Bill Corrington. See Lloyd Halliburton, *The Man Who Slept With Women: John William Corrington's Shad Sentell*, 27 Legal Stud. F. 641 (2003)(reprinted from JOHN WILLIAM CORRINGTON: REFLECTIONS, *supra* note 1).

⁴⁰ John William Corrington, "Viva Zapata," 16 (8) Mainstream 51 (1963)(included in Corrington's *Lines to the South* (1965)).

you care very much about what you are writing, you say the hell with it & go write a poem or torture your mother-in-law.⁴¹

Letter dated February 13, 1962:

Wherever I am, I got here with poems.

Letter dated March 28, 1962:

I'll have a copy of my book [*Where We Are*] to you as soon as I can get a couple. Much is old, but you can see how beautifully I grew away from cummerbunds and jackass poetry faiths. There are maybe good things toward the end, and your favorite "Pastoral"⁴² is like purely in there!

....

[T]he poems [*Where We Are*] will be out in a week or so. I actually saw proofs on em. You will get a copy the moment I have one in hand.

Letter, undated [March or April ?][1962]

When you've done a lot of little things like scaling small hills and even big hills, you feel like you have got to take on something big or else what the hell did you buy the safety-rope and the alpin[e] spikes for? So my novel. It is not about graduate school or about men who sell insurance So it is about a strange monumental yesterday peopled with all the beloved ghosts of men who were only men until musket balls or cannon shells stripped them of flesh as swords did Hector and an arrow did Achilles. Now they are myths, and it is good to say them. Like in

⁴¹ Bukowski was, early on, resistant to Corrington's favorable view of the novel vs. poetry, but claimed, in a letter dated April 24, 1962, to see what Corrington was saying after he had read a "slice" of Corrington's manuscript for *And Wait For The Night*. Bukowski's first published collection of prose, *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1973)(1969) and his first novel, *Post Office, a Novel* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1971) were published some years after the early '60s intensive correspondence between Bukowski and Corrington.

I learned of Charles Bukowski by way of his prose writing, *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* and his first novel, *Post Office*. I was in the Army, when I chanced upon *Post Office*, trying to forget where I was (Fort Bragg, North Carolina) and where I might be going (Vietnam). I didn't learn about John William Corrington until some 30 years later. See Elkins, *supra* note 1 (recounting how I first learned about Corrington's work).

⁴² See note 29, *supra*.

Ecclesiasticus: *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.⁴³ [A]nd the infamous too. Because all sent their greatness and their sins down to us, and we triumph and suffer for them again.

....

The more I escape my own time, the better I write. I mean (and this is only my way; not the only way) I forget the bullshit about all big issues of *Now*. I keep seeing hungry men in caves with a saber-toothed tiger outside and nothing but chips of flint . . . to turn him off.

-He's a big son of a bitch, one says.

-Yeah. they been running big for the last couple of years.

-Do you think his teeth are poison?

-O man you know it. but not like you think.

-Why don't he go find a lower mammal?

-Too hard to corner. Quit bitching. It had to happen sometime.

You've had it good. We got food for a while.

-It don't make sense. We never grew up to feed that ugly bastard.

-You keep saying it. But it keeps not being true.

-What'll we do?

-Fuck, I don't know. Paint a picture. You see that wall? Do a picture of a bull. If you do a picture of a bull you won't think about the tiger.

-I'm still thinking about the tiger.

-Do another bull.

Letter dated April 2, 1962:

I think maybe you and I look at writing in a different way. With me it is the desire to create a piece of stone so enduring that when the earth gives way, it will survive as a meteor. Something that could stand as a tribute and an epitaph to the dignity, the glory, and the unvanquishable soul of mankind.

....

The longer the period of no poems continues, the more I feel like it will be prose. I feel good when I have done a good piece of prose. When I used to do a 'good' poem, I felt embarrassed-like selling somebody a

⁴³ Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 44:1.

book full of blank pages. I don't know why, and maybe all of a sudden I will be a poet again.⁴⁴ But I feel very good being a novelist.

Letter dated April 10, 1962:

The Book [Where We Are] is in the mail to you. I finally got me a few of them, and baby is it ever pretty printing and too bad a lot of the poems are nice old noise instead of gutwringers. But they are . . . progress forward to new stuff, and at least as you go through, I think you see where the kid learned, how quickly he learned, and how, having learned, he raised a leg at the teachers and went off to knit his own woolen tomb. No disrespect to the old teachers: it's just that you get to seeing how they do it, and once the formula is discovered, it's as flat as a clumsy magic-show or a self-conscious whore. I try never to do the same thing twice, and sometimes not even the same thing once. That way, you're always able to look quizzically at the critics and say, "but man that's old jazz. I'm in another part of the forest. Ain't you heard?"

Letter dated April 17, 1962:

200 poems lost. And still you won't make me a carbon of the new ones so I can stack em away, or send em to me to have the steno make copies? Reverting to my old Southern speech, I got to say: tough shit. You know it can happen. You know it will probably happen. You can't take pleasure in seeing your own work, the good work, lost and eaten up by ignorant fops who play like editors. Yet you won't buy a few lousy sheets of carbon and stick em between two sheets of regular stuff. Fucking anarchist.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Corrington did not "all of a sudden" turn back to poetry. After his first poems were published in 1957, his prolific poetry writing of the early 1960s appeared in four volumes published between 1962 and 1965. See note 1, *supra*. Corrington continued to publish poetry in journals and magazines in the late 1960s, but published only nine poems in the '70s and five in the '80s. Corrington continued as a novelist, writer of short fiction, screen and TV writer, even some philosophical writing, but he never devoted himself again to poetry as he did in the early '60s.

⁴⁵ Bukowski, a connoisseur of bad habits, often sent his poems around to editors and publishers, without bothering to make copies of them, a practice which Corrington tried to get Bukowski to correct. Bukowski, an unlikely person to accept good advice, defiant and reckless, simply refused to keep track of his poems. Bukowski was fortunate, as his relationship with Corrington cooled, to find another admirer and benefactor. On the story of John Martin, the founding of the Black Sparrow Press to publish the work of Bukowski and other "new and neglected writers," see Sounes, *supra* note 11, at 77-100.

....

There is a streak of whore in every man that makes him ready to do anything to see his name, his face plastered on billboards or even in finky little mags. I know the feeling and I am ashamed of it. It bugs me, and makes me ashamed to see stuff in print sometime. . . . All I want is to do away with the need to sound off. All I want to do is . . . get the air clear enough to support a few honest voices. . . .

It was always my philosophy in a poem to strike hard, and get clear of the falling bodies. Nothing is as bad as a poem that hangs around too long.

....

It is the deep passion of every man to be a saint and a hero: to be *right*, and to give that rightness the force of his own unbreakable personality. Who ever wanted to be 'wrong'? Who ever planned to fail? The problem is always that we are cloven by relativity that says this is as good as that; these are no better than those. And even when we think we know the right, our wills are corroded into rubbish by our own doubts and fears.

Letter dated April 24, 1962:

ALL RIGHT

no fucking carbons. Go ahead and bleed your soul and the swinging dribblets of your life into empty holes of magazines that don't exist or have quit before the words came to them.

[Referring to *Where We Are*, his first book of poetry] Seems to be the real bad ones are "Diplomats" and "Middleman" which, even if they were written better skill could not possibly matter. "Proto" is bad enough, however.⁴⁶ But I felt like shit, you ought to have one love poem in any

⁴⁶ Corrington is responding here to Bukowski's letter of April [?], 1962 in which Bukowski comments on receiving his copy of *Where We Are*. In Bukowski's estimation, the "worst poem" in the book is "Protoepithalamion: V." and he doesn't find "Viajera" much of a poem either. Bukowski applauds Corrington's efforts in "Pastoral," and the first 9 lines of "Police Report" which are "good enough for anybody." He likes "The Medusa," praises "Lines to the South," but reserves for "The Orient Hotel" his commendation as the best in the book. Bukowski didn't care much for Richard Whittington's introduction to *Where We Are*, finding little affinity, as had Whittington, between Corrington's poetry and

book even if it is a bad love poem. I hope almost think you're right about "Lines to the South." "Footnote" I did when I was at most 24 . . . and it is wise as hell and has a kind of smooth foppishness about it that makes you want to kick the writer in his smart mouth.⁴⁷ But what does not show there is that the kid was learning how, first of all, to do all the things not worth doing so he could never look back and say aw gee I wish I could do things like that; maybe I would have been good at doing things like that. . . .

The book is too full of little failures to even list em. But it shows as you head for the back, that the kid has protected himself from atrophy of the brain or guts, and that all the "Exemplary" stuff⁴⁸ was just learning; something he had to do so he would not have to stop and do it later when time was thin and the real things were beginning to happen. Anyhow I hope this shows.

. . . .

I don't say it good about Saints and the rest because this is not the century for saying it. You say 'honor' and comes the snicker; you say 'character' and somebody figures you mean an eccentric. You are a man of good soul, Chaz, but sainthood means nothing to you. You figure we've got our hands full being human (which is true), but I think it is more to be human for a time, and then to find, if you can, a way to dive out of humanity and leave a vapor-trail for tomorrow to whistle at. You have got to understand that I am not tense or high on this: only playing the lines and watching the corks bobble until and if I get a strike.

I do not write because I have a moral headache and have to report it to the world, or because I dig typewriters. I write like men paint or carve: to erect my own tombstone in advance. To hollow out a place of small music out of deep silence.

that of Allan Tate, John Crowe Ransom and Robert Penn Warren.

⁴⁷ Bukowski says of "Footnote": "[I]n "Footnote" you are a little too intelligent and vindictive . . ." *Id.*

⁴⁸ Corrington published a series of "Exemplary" poems: "An Exemplary Biography," "An Exemplary Fiction," "An Exemplary History," and an "Exemplary Romance" appear in *Where We Are* (1964). Corrington did not include in *Where We Are*: "An Exemplary Epic," 5 (2) Descant 15 (1960) and "An Exemplary Philosophy," 2 (4) Minn. Rev. 459 (1962).

Letter dated April 26, 1962:

[Thanking Bukowski for his note about the *And Wait For The Night* manuscript]: It makes me feel a lot better about going on with the book. You see, after writing poems for so long, and seeing how easy and how possible it is to make every line what you want it to be (maybe no good, but what you want), the idea of this novel, 500 pages long so far (no, six hundred now, and sure to be 1000 by the end) had me shook. You can't handle that much like it was a single page. You forget. You make mistakes two hundred pages apart. You have to hold these people in your head for so long.

Anyhow, your letter makes me feel like, even failing as everybody who decided to do a 1000 page thing has got to fail, that I will succeed within certain limits.

....

The Georgia Review is publishing chapter one of the book on June 15th in their summer issue.⁴⁹ I will send you a copy. That chapter is not such a gut-wringer, not filled with this kind of beauty. But it is hard and upright and filled with the stringy pride of men broken and yet not crushed. It tells of the Union Army entering Shreveport, and it is seven pages of the tightest, most overwritten prose I ever laid down. Nobody could bear a whole novel written that way, but I think it will serve as a hell of an introduction.

⁴⁹ John William Corrington, *Union in the Rain*, 16 (2) *Georgia Review* 141 (1962). In June, Corrington comments again on the excerpt from *And Wait For The Night*, his first novel, that has been scheduled for publication in the *Georgia Review*: "O Lord, I worked over that seven pages. I wrote and rewrote and finally saw it was okay and okay was all it was going to be because you can't make a novel as tight as a poem and anyhow you shouldn't because It Tires Out Readers—even good ones." John William Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated June 18, 1962.

In July, pleased that Bukowski has reacted favorably to the *Georgia Review* piece of his novel, Corrington outlines his progress on the novel and reports that he has only five chapters left to write. "It will be good to have done with it, but it has been good to do, too. It is what I always wanted to do, and what I want to do from now on. I will write poems, but it is novels [which] get to me. Like you say, I need the room to move in. Short suggestions, line drawings, are fine . . . like hamburgers. But what I love is the full-course dinner where you get to investigate in 600 pages and it is not necessary to scout up a cute conclusion to prove you know how to handle yourself." John William Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski dated July 13, 1962.

You do good things for me, which is what a friend does. But they are better things because I know you would not do them if they were not so. Which unites us. Which is the golden thread through the best of the southern conscience. Maybe this is why I love Poppa [Ernest Hemingway]. Because all my dusty fathers sing out of the soil, "There is a code. There are things one does, and things one never does. There are deaths and deaths, loves and loves. Choose. Be wise. Be strong. Be honest and humble, and die or kill rather than be reduced. There is a code."

. . . . It is finally not so much what man believes as how a man conducts himself that measures him.

You are a good man not because you are a tower of strength, but because you have no strength left to lie and cheat and kiss ass and stumble from one editor to another. You are a good man because they have done everything to you that they could, and what they have not done, you have done to yourself. And now you are free of all but the nibbles under the skin.

If I have any measure of good it is because my temper is too short to lie successfully to lumps, and because the idea of kissing ass is always worse to me than any profit derived from it could be good.

We are not Lees⁵⁰ or Jacksons,⁵¹ but we will have to do until the real article comes along again. At least we can see.

Letter, undated [late spring/early summer, 1962]:

Fine visit with Jon [on] Sunday. He already has worked up a cover-design and such [for the Bukowski book of poetry, *It Catches My Heart in It's Hands*]. The old bugger has good taste. No fancy stuff: title and a design . . . and going through the poems like a ferret. It should be a fine collection. We talked about intro, and I go slowly and carefully because you have written a lot, and of many kinds. It is always easier to write about failures than about successes. If a man writes badly, it is because he is a fool or a liar or a phoney. If he writes well, it is

⁵⁰ Robert E. Lee (1807-1870), a hero to many, Corrington among them.

⁵¹ Thomas Jonathan (Stonewall) Jackson (1824-1863). See generally James I. Robertson, Jr., *STONEWALL JACKSON: THE MAN, THE SOLDIER, THE LEGEND* (New York: Macmillan, 1997).

because the gods have touched his lips with the burning coal . . . and there is very little to say except acknowledge the touch and let it go.

. . . . The moth and butterfly specialists seduce people. This is an age in which any man can take pleasure running from reality. Let us have little delicate chinese things for poems, or well-made finely-wrought 18th century tidbits. Let us love these and ignore that huge roaring final and cosmic blast that is paused just over our shoulders. Like farmer surakawa: -my god, they would say, and die with a snivel.⁵² Anyhow, I guess I will have to write some of this criticism until some good academics come along. They will, but it may take longer than you & I have.

. . . .

There are no remedies for anything in this life. The world will break you and finally it will kill you, but between the first scream and the last, a man can have some love, a few good days, and can learn to handle himself well. Then, in the bad days, he can hold himself together and manage to look good when the roof lands on him. There is honor, tho a man will not find it or its meaning outside himself. There is truth, and it will break your heart, but you will have to go along with it. Because the rest is bullshit and phoney and unworthy of a man.⁵³

Letter dated May 10, 1962:

The only man who really dreads dying is the poor bastard who has never lived. By all measures, I have lived well. What I could do, I have pretty much done. I have cried only rarely and only small tears for what I couldn't do. . . . I have considered my father's courage and my mother's endurance and have wished them well. I have given thanks where it

⁵² Farmer Surakawa is a character in Corrington's poem, "Pastoral." See note 29, *supra*.

⁵³ Corrington has, in previous letters, praised Ernest Hemingway's work, while Bukowski has expressed reservations. In reviewing Bukowski's work in preparation for his introduction to the Jon Webb collection of Bukowski's poetry, *It Catches My Heart In Its Hands*, Corrington suggested that Bukowski was closer to Hemingway "in philosophy and view" that he would admit. Corrington tells Bukowski, "I could quote a hundred lines from poems and letters that have the clean ring of Hem's best. I do not see much 'influence.' It is just that you think like him. So do I, laced with some of the stoicism learned from a lot of southerners who have had to take whatever was being dished out without saying much about it. The rest is nowhere." John William Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, undated [ca. late spring/early summer, 1962].

was due, and tried failing and with maybe some success not to want what I wanted, but what was right and honorable to want. The failures have been legion, but the successes have held the fabric together and kept the juices flowing. Now I am nearly thirty and still not tired enough to lay off—and am almost old enough to trust myself with things of importance: like a family, like writing, like friends. By the time I am 42, I hope I have your juices, and if the price of them is some pain, I expect I can manage that even if I yell some during the process.

So much is luck. So much is the grace of God. But the part that shows and can be seen belongs to us, and neither Lady Luck nor God Almighty is stingy enough to steal the by-line. They like to see us make it, because they know we have to die—and the making is not too much overpayment for the dying that comes after. For us, having never killed for kicks, having made no thorn-crowns for others, the books stay more or less in balance.

Letter , undated [May, 1962]:

We all have clotted pasts, no matter how we go: we are clay, and the glaze wears thin, it wears thin.

....

Dying, Hegel said, “only one man understood me in all my life.” Then he pause and sighed and finished out his last breath: “and he didn’t understand me either.”⁵⁴

Letter dated May 20, 1962:

[Telling Bukowski that he has recently learned from his mother that his father has terminal cancer] He is very tired & very weak. He has lived for sixty-three years in a world not good enough for him. He had a son & a daughter, neither of whom ever took enough time to understand how hard it is to be only honest & sober & to do your duty by your family.

Somehow all I can think of is fire. Of how we burn. How this father lost his father; how this son becomes a father only to set the equation in motion again. I think of how my son in his cradle will be here either

⁵⁴ Georg Wilhelm Hegel (1770-1831), German philosopher.

tomorrow or the day after. How we burn away the days. How an old man's face prisons the heart of a boy treated harshly but still a boy under the folds of melting skin. Something inside is a clock. It tells us when it is done. On June 3rd, my sister will graduate from college with highest honors: *summa cum laude*. That will do it. He raised us & saw us educated, & now the alarm is ringing. The burning starts. So we can become part of the home from which we come. How can I say it is a good thing! Jesus, how do you hold together if you say anything else?

What is coming for us is a thing to be done well & beyond all thought of fear & heartbreak. It would be a shame to let the edges give way or the center crumble. There is no way to repair it if you do.⁵⁵

Letter dated June 18, 1962:

With my father for a week in Shreveport. It was good and bad. I worked at his business (insurance claims and adjusting) and got enough done to feel like I'd been worth something to him. . . .

It is killing him and there is no cure for it, so all I can do is work hard and take his little grandson up to see him (it's too bad my boy will never know the man he's named for because my old man is a rarity and should be known).

On other fronts, they got me teaching summer-school which is a cosmic agony of spirit, but necessary to make money.

Because I will need money. I got an acceptance from Sussex University at Brighton, England where they will let me have a PhD without a lot of shit if I write a good dissertation—which I can do. No classes or exams—which I can no longer do. We have been saving money on this for a long time because I need to get clear of this place and Joyce has never seen Europe, and when we come back we can go to buying land and building a house and dynasty. I should be over for two years. This will see me middle-aged (32 or 33), and I can settle . . . down.

. . . .

⁵⁵ Bukowski in his reply, in a letter dated May 27, 1962, observed that: "Death is eternally everywhere, I need not tell you that. The ways are hard whether they are God's ways or simply ways. To say that I understand the machinery of it or accept it would be a lie, or to say anything to help yo at this moment would also be a lie. You know as much as I." LIVING WITH LUCK, *supra* note 2, at 27-28.

Did that student of mine ever turn up? He was headed for LA and I couldn't educate him, so I thought maybe you could. I'm sorry.

Letter dated July 13, 1962:

It is strange to find the backyard emptied of idols.⁵⁶

Letter dated August 27, 1962:

I would have written sooner, but I've been in Shreveport for two weeks. My father died 20 August there.

He died harder than I want to talk about, and the last three days were as bad as things can be. . . .

He was quite a guy. Born in Memphis, and one of fourteen kids. A third-grade education. The marines in France. Then law school at night, and passing the bar. Years of working for other men until, in 1952, he went into the insurance adjusting business for himself. . . . If he missed he knew we were all down the drain. But he didn't miss. He made 10 grand the first year, and it kept going up. My mother worked in a dry-goods store that first year to make the few bucks that would tide us over. She worked 8 hours a day. She made \$28 a week.

And when he died, he left his sweetheart with something like 70 thousand dollars and a business noted for being honest and able. He left us all with the memory of a man with guts who was also gentle and just. And there are not many like that around any more.

Mother and I sat up with him the night before the funeral. It was a long night and a terrible one, but it was right. Then, the next day, we went to his requiem mass and buried him beneath a tree on a rise of ground that looks down on a little stream. He liked high ground. There was a priest, and something else: there was an honor guard from the air base. They fired three volleys off into the hot sky, and somewhere far off a bugler played taps. Then they folded the flag across his coffin and gave

⁵⁶ In a letter several months later, Bukowski noted that: "Yes, the giants are gone and it makes it a little tougher when you stare down at the white paper." *LIVING WITH LUCK*, *supra* note 2, at 29. See also, Bukowski's letter to Corrington dated February 22, 1967. *Id.* at 75.

it to my mother. It was good and simple and honest, and I guess I was as much crying from pride as from loss then.

....

[N]ext Monday we head for New York. To see a yankee editor and get some yankee money.⁵⁷ To buy Southern land one day.

And I can still write. Maybe I will even be able to write better soon because it is written of men that they do well when they are proud of what they are—and what they come from. You see how it is.

....

It is all a hard way, but there are good things in transit.

Letter dated October 3, 1962:

[Jon] Webb is a good guy, Chas. He finks out, and cannot bear the work “nigger,” hates rhyme, and come on like every two-bit liberal on the block, but he is old and still has fire—has sopped for years and then stayed sober during this whole *Outsider* bit. . . .

The way you teach an English class is the way, I expect, you fight a battle. Most of them are either dead or sure to be killed. OK, this is the way it is. Shake[speare] says: “this must be.” You do not sob over the fact of gravity, and you face the reality of that bad Sunday at Appomattox. And you write with one hand and once in a while you salvage a little something out of the stew with your left.

But I could wash dishes and feel good when I got through a day without any breaking. It is bad to equate people, young or old, with crockery, but I am only recognizing: I didn’t make them stupid fucking self-satisfied potential corpses. And not being dr frankenstein, I cannot bring them around. So I talk—the way you would to a man with a terrible gut-wound who might start crying (and neither you nor he want that) when he feels death shaking its rattle in his ear. And I keep thinking how chickens in a cage, in full sight of the execution-place, pay no heed until the hand closes on their own specific neck: o god what individualists.

⁵⁷ The Corringtons were going to New York to see John Leggett, Bill’s editor at Harper & Row. The following spring, a disagreement over the extent of the revisions of the *And Wait For The Night* manuscript left Corrington seeking a new publisher.

Letter dated October 12 [1962]:

Could you gather up all the old spare copies of mags you've been in that I wouldn't have, and send em to me at your convenience? I get the creepy feeling I haven't seen anything like all the old work, and I want to. You wouldn't have to send all the many mags we've been in together (the first was an issue of *Quicksilver* in 59 or 60⁵⁸)—just the old jobbies around, before and after that time that I would have missed.

Letter dated November 8, 1962:

I got this catalogue from ROMAN BOOKS in Florida.⁵⁹ They sell rare editions of modern writers; manuscripts, etc. You are in there. I am in there. Jon sold this cat all the stuff in *Outsider* #1, letters, etc. It is on sale for \$500. Wanna offer this cat our letters for \$300? Hell, my obscenities directed toward yankees and politicians are worth that, huh?

They are selling *Long Shot Poems* for \$6 a copy. I swear to God. My book si going for \$3. *Hunted* is going for \$3. Chills your box, don't it? It seems they could wait till we're older or a little dead. At this rate we may actually live to see ourselves critically embalmed. This guy must be turning a fantastic profit.

Letter dated December 3, 1962:

You will notice in what I write I hardly ever make the same mistake twice. I keep finding new ways to fail. For a writer, I think this is the method of success. So long as you don't believe you have found anything, you don't get anxious to keep what you haven't found.

A good day at pool. Played for 2 bucks. First time since 1949. I won a round of rotation and one of 8-ball. It feels so good when you look and

⁵⁸ Corrington's "Effete," appeared in 12 (2) *Quicksilver* 4 (1959).

⁵⁹ Jim Roman was a book dealer in Fort Lauderdale, Florida who specialized in First Editions, autographed letters, and manuscript material. Corrington wrote an "introduction" (dated October 31, 1963) to Roman's Catalogue Number Four, in which Roman Books announced the publication of Corrington's *The Anatomy of Love and Other Poems* which Roman Books published in 1964. The announcement indicates that *The Anatomy of Love* will be two editions: "Limited to no more than 50 copies, handbound, in hard covers, quarter cloth and paper-over-boards, with the regular edition of no more than 1000 copies in wrap-around stiff wrappers."

figure and feel that long stick hit the ball, and it hit the other, and then the pocket reach out to gobble the ball like there were magnets going. There is a start and a finish to it, and an absolute measure of success (2 bucks), and this makes pool good therapy for a writer. . . .

But the trade I always wanted to follow was gunsmith. I would love to take a lump of carbon steel and make a rifle. Then rub a piece of wood till it looked like velvet and make the stock. Just like why I write with a pen instead of typewriter. I can feel the making under my hand. Something is happening, bending reality to my specifications. This is the great feeling. Renoir⁶⁰ used to say it. Hands are what matter. Shit on ideas. Ideas are like ore; without the furnace and the stokers, nothing.

Letter dated December 14, 1962:

I got the word on you, you brokenassed finderfuddled miracle. Jon says the COLLECTED BUKOWSKI is on for sure. Now there is a story behind this that you should know. Last time I was down, I asked Jon –why don't you put out a collection of Buk for your first chapbook? –well, Jon said, I was thinking about it. The triangulation of two genuinely great minds did it. Jon says also if Bishop Sheen or Normal Vincent Peale refuse to write intro to the book, I will be given the job. I resent this. Peale is not as close to you; Sheen's understanding of your work is superficial. Ah but me: I will be your judas iscariot. I will say –this man stands with Robert Frost and Carl Sandburg. This bukowski is a document. This man is a monument

But it will be a good thing, chas. I have had my poor ole secretary typing all of [your] poems I could get hold of into a notebook so I wouldn't have to go from one crumbling little mag to another to read a hunk of you at once. This book will be a crackerjack. Jon is, as usual, enthusiastic about it. I hope the old man lives to see himself as revered and respected for his hard work as he deserves to be. But of course it is the work which is his reward. He digs it the end. It takes the place of booze for him. It is good for me to go down there and see a man doing what he likes to do. There is not so much of this any more.

. . . .

⁶⁰ Pierre Auguste Renoir (1841–1919).

Bad day for pool. Nothing went right, enormous losses in prestige and funds. Students snickering. Me asking if any were particularly good with pistols. Snickers cease. . . . It was heartbreaking. A man should not have bad days in his speciality.

Letter dated December 18, 1962:

What I have gotten from you, the friendship, the words, the ideas, the cautions, will be used. Nothing will be wasted. How it will come out I cannot say. It kept surprising my father, but he knew that the hours on the typewriter were part of his legacy to me, and the thing goes on. A man needs many fathers: a father is somebody who winds you up. I have many fathers, so do we all.

What you say about Dalí I know.⁶¹ There is value there, as there is in Stravinsky. But only so much, and only to be used in moderation and when the thing is called for. It is not well to be too clever. It is possible to wreck your mind with cleverness.

What I read mostly is history. And fiction. Reading most poetry is bad because it demoralizes me. Most is hokum, and even the good tends not to matter much. There is a lot to do, and it is best not to get hung up with causes. Being in that last *Coastlines* depressed me.⁶² Me in an anti-war issue. My god. I have always said I WANT PEACE. But first JUSTICE. First LIBERTY.

. . . .

You will (or may) be interested in my man Sentell in the novel [*And Wait For The Night*]. He fears deeply losing his honor, and this today sounds very phoney. But, unfortunately, so does a man's fearing the loss of his soul. But Sentell fears descending into an honorless world because there a man cannot measure whether his life has meaning or not. With honor, a man can descend into anything—but with honor (and honor means truth and the rest of it) gone, he grows fur or feathers—or a scaly skin. Maybe this is what Milton meant with his changes in Satan after the fall. Sentell is pulled between honor and assisting his own people. Which, finally matters most? I don't know; Sentell never knows. We do what we do. We bet. Some of us hedge our bets (and look neither very

⁶¹ Salvador Dalí, Spanish surrealist painter, 1904-1989.

⁶² See John William Corrington, "A Trip to Omaha," 5 (3) *Coastlines* 15 (1962).

good or very bad when they tally the returns. But then what's the use of a pari-mutual if you come out dead even every afternoon?), and the rest toes their lives on the line believing in a single thing—or in multiples of meaning in a single way of life. That way you win or lose with stature. Christ or Bonaparte, both gave what they had. Beyond that, what we prefer is personal.

Letter dated December 20, 1962:

[Commiserating about Bukowski's being jailed for DWI]: [H]old onto the penny of hope in your last unbroken room of the gut, and come out once more. If the days are all alike, the work is not: it goes and grows and needs more time. Ruin the biographers and gadgeteers, live to be old so you can fumble with your fly and sneer at the youngish sicksters. Going now would be too pat, and you know it. On the other side of that blade may lie a stir⁶³ that is darker and worse than all the bad days laid end to end. You have got to go there, but they do not say you have to rush the sentence.

Here's your laugh: I took on a hustler at the hall today and shot 3 games of 8-ball that would have watered your beard. Beauty is where you find it. While this cat was telling me how he too wanted to write, I cleaned the table and he said, —I thought you was a writer. —No, I said, —Now I'm a pool-player. Tonight, all things equal, I will be a lover. I was a father this afternoon at the park with Shelley. Tomorrow I will be a traveler, and one day I will probably be an ape on fire falling over and over from an enormous height with Venus twinkling in my colding eyes.

all right, you can laugh now.

But *cave, cave, deus videt*.⁶⁴ Even the mad hold to life. Because the dead are sane, and if you think the pokey is deadly, think of the satin in the lid of that box. Forever at worst, till the dead rise up at best.

....

⁶³ Stir is a slang term for prison.

⁶⁴ Hieronymous Bosch's, *The Table Top of the Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things* (Prado, Madrid) presents man's fate in a series of circular images. Within the circular panel of images there is a series of concentric rings within which we see Christ emerging from his tomb displaying his wounds. Circumscribing the lower part of the pupil are inscribed the words *Cave Cave Deus Vivit*, "Beware, Beware, God Sees." See *THE COMPLETE PAINTINGS OF BOSCH* plate II (New York: Henry N. Abrams, 1971)(1966) (Gregory Martin introd.; Mia Cinotti catalogue).

I was reading back through some of your letters and found some poems. Some you sent in January when Jane died,⁶⁵ others scattered through the letters. It made about six pages. Do you want copies? I know you got no sentiment and are a real prick about keeping copies (even when your buddies ask so as to see what you are doing, if you are doing) but I thought you might want to look these over and see if there was something for the NW Review [*Northwest Review*] or like that. . . .

Reading the poems about Jane, I wondered if she still haunts you like my father does me. I thought after some months the ones you love who die drift back into that huge room where Hamlet and Robert Jordan and Lee and Glenn Miller are forever doing what it was they did. But this is not so. Of course the dead cannot keep their edges, but in ways I see and can somehow get hold of him better now. This is strange, and it made me think of what somebody said in "Pete Kelly's Blues": "the blues say things were good once and they'll be good again. The only trouble is it's NOW."⁶⁶ We can remember and we can look ahead, but NOW is always slipping out of our hands like sand—or blood. We can never hold it and get the texture of it. Everything becomes history, chas: what *is* means nothing, and sooner or later it is reduced to a few photos, maybe a rusty bayonet and some slowly melting ditches in Virginia. Given time, all of it is either lost or embalmed in the pages of history. Think that even literature may finally loose its meaning and become simply more documents to tell tomorrow about today. My God, we are all lost more certainly than any of us dream. To be immortal means to kill a president or bomb out a continent: then history opens up for you. Except I cannot remember that man who killed McKinley. Who shot the archduke at Sarajevo? He almost condemned me to death because they gassed my father along the Meuse river, but then had my father not gone, would he, even in Memphis, have met my mother? Do you see this serpent? He strangles priests and nests in the ruins of their faith. He is large enough to swallow the universe and needs only paper to wipe himself. He cuddles baby nations and flicks his tail over the ashes of empires. And the most a man can be is a bone in his throat, something a little hard to swallow and digest into dust. Like Shakespeare or Homer. But given time enough, he will dissolve even them.

⁶⁵ Jane Cooney Baker, Bukowski's "first serious girlfriend," inspired the poetry in *The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over the Hills Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1969), and became a character in his later novels. See Sounes, *supra* note 11, at 27-35, 48-54. Jane died on January 22, 1962. *Id.* at 50.

⁶⁶ "Pete Kelly's Blues" (Warner Brothers, 1955).

Who Do You Think You Are⁶⁷

this guy in the cozy grille
was telling me
how rubber looks like milk
straight from the tree
And at the bar
a woman with dirty heels
coughed consumptive ballades
and watched her empty eyes
all orphanannielike
in a dark mirror
framed with rye
someone screamed
-hash
while in the booth behind
dr. jekyll solemnly shook hands
with mr hyde
and I
believing only what
I chose to believe
lifted the top of my hamburger
fearing cheese

Letter dated February 17, 1963:

No, we will not debate the novel. Finally you write what you find back in the mind's debris to write, and the [Civil] War would have made an epic poem in my hands (with Richmond going down like Troy before the barbarians) if there was still the faith and wonder to make epics and have them read. What is wrong with the novel outside the fact that it sells well is that it is so long that you almost surely end up lying or simplifying or playing games or amazing. I am safer than most because my people break my heart. When I write the end of this [*And Wait For The Night*] there will be tears because all my life I have been a little ashamed that I was not there. As long as the book is, I think it will still

⁶⁷ Corrington included in his December 20th letter to Bukowski, "Who Do You Think You Are," a poem which appears in both *Mr. Clean and Other Poems* (San Francisco: Amber House Press, 1964) and *Lines to the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965).

be lean. Anyhow, even if my novel is good, nothing is proven against your claims because most are not good and they are not-good for money.

....

What I want for now is to ride in the right company: you and Jon [Webb] and men like you. I keep probing out to places like the *Massachusetts Review* and laughing as if I had put one over on them when they take a poem. Because they always take the quiet things which are all right but which were not written tomorrow and hence are only a service, not a grace.

You never saw "Mr. Clean"? O lord. One of my beasts. Tour de force they call em. Strong at first reading, but not too much else. It is enclosed. Was supposed to appear in *Between Worlds*, a rag that got out two big good looking issues, but hasn't made [it] in a year.⁶⁸

....

I didn't know you went so strong for Camus. He was a good man, a beautiful man, and the only one of the young to measure up to the old boys. I didn't go with all his stuff, like the conclusions in *The Myth of Sisyphus*,⁶⁹ but he was tall and honorable, kind and strong both in person and on paper. You don't ask more unless you are shopping for gods.

*The Stranger*⁷⁰ punctured me, and when I get done with my learning process, I want to try something up that road. I have a couple of plots jiggling around in my head, some characters, some words. But that is for my forty-years-old time. When I have lost the last of the green and can settle down to hard hard work in which heart thinks and mind feels. Touching the wounds of this century is not for opinionated flashy boys, no matter how clever and hard-eyed. Boys are good and there is much to like in them, but they botch men's work. They believe things are simple and that good will and a quick smile will heal cancers spawned while Caesar was on the road toward a Gaul he had yet to see. Mailer

⁶⁸ Apparently, the poem did not appear in *Between Worlds*. It was first published in and serves as the title poem for *Mr. Clean and Other Poems* published in 1964.

⁶⁹ Albert Camus, *THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS AND OTHER ESSAYS* (New York: Knopf, 1955)(Justin O'Brien trans.)

⁷⁰ Albert Camus, *THE STRANGER* (New York: Vintage Books, 1954)(Stuart Gilbert trans.)

fooled with it a little in *Barbary Shore*⁷¹ and his failure was agonizing. A better man for it was Bernard Wolfe in *The Great Prince Died*.⁷² Still too thin, too much about today, and not about the seed-time for the great unraveling of our civilization. And Koestler in *Darkness at Noon*.⁷³ Here, for as far as he took it, was a piece of perfection. Rubishov *knew* things. Camus wanted us to go on without faith, without code, but shored up only by our sense of common doom, and the kindness that should breed. It is no good. Even if all he surmised is true, the act of faith permits a man to have [a] future even when there is no future. Deny him that and he withers. Not all men, but most men—and what cannot work at least some good for most men is a useless recipe. Christianity's great triumph is not that it produced Christ or Aquinas or Luther . . . but that it made Joe Blow somehow conscious of his own possible dimensions—and those of the poor animated clods of earth around him, that we call Mankind. Faulkner gave Camus the lie: he believed that man will not only endure, but will prevail. I cannot believe less and still function. If this is an act of metaphysical cowardice (& I think it is not, because I know and admit that Camus may be right about our doom), then I will point to my work. If philosophical refusal to face doom produces valuable work, then maybe it is justified.

And those are rarified pastures we move in. Philosophy is for condemned men who have sounded their iron walls and found only deep space outside.

I wish we had some unencumbered loot. I'd just come on out to L.A. and spend a few days with you. Make the track and talk some. As it is, when the \$1 phone calls after nine come in, we can call back and forth without waiting for either a windfall or a suicide motive. When Jon [Webb] and I get your book moving, I know he'll want to call a lot. You've got a lot to look forward to: #3, and then *It Catches My Heart In Its Hands*. Jon has a fine fine cover figured. He always does things with style.

Letter dated March 10, 1963:

I would have written sooner this week but I managed to finish a 70-page chapter of *The Book [And Wait For The Night]*. There is now less than

⁷¹ Norman Mailer, *BARBARY SHORE* (New York: Rhinehart, 1951).

⁷² Bernard Wolfe, *THE GREAT PRINCE DIED* (New York: Scribner, 1959).

⁷³ Arthur Koestler, *DARKNESS AT NOON* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1978)(1941).

100 more pages to write. I will be finished by the end of March or first week in April.

When you see that you have created a nuisance, a novel 900-plus pages long, you feel as if you had been underwater for a year working without being able to see the results. Now I will have to re-read the thing. I have not read the start since better than a year and a half ago. Will the parts fit? God knows I must be a better writer now than when I started. Anyhow I have a calloused finger and a great respect for my own will power. Maybe the first will be no good and I will have to do it over. By then, the second part will be bad. Perpetual reverse-leapfrog.

....

It is . . . not required that all poems be master-pieces. There is room for flawed oddities. Maybe the poem is something like Jarrell's "Death of a Ball Turret Gunner." Which was first poem I ever read.⁷⁴ It got to me a lot when I was in high school. Still years away from writing. Had not even taken up trumpet. But I always remembered that poem. About the same time I got hold of Patchen *Cloth of the Tempest*⁷⁵ and Browning *Personae*.⁷⁶ Funny combination.

....

When the novel is done, I got a story or two to work on.⁷⁷ I got to cook up some new poems. Then I reckon I'll start another novel. You get used to

⁷⁴ Randall Jarrell's "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner":

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.

When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

Corrington returned, if unconsciously, to this poem in his novel, *The Bombardier* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970).

⁷⁵ Kenneth Patchen, *CLOTH OF THE TEMPEST* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943).

⁷⁶ Robert Browning, *DRAMATIS PERSONAE* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1864).

⁷⁷ Corrington published several collections of short stories: *The Lonesome Traveler and Other Stories* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1968); *The Actes and Monuments* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978); *The Southern Reporter Stories* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), and two novellas published under the title, *All My Trials* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1987). Corrington's legal fiction is all to be found in his short stories and novellas. (Corrington's legal fiction was republished in "Fiction by John William Corrington," 27 *Legal Stud. F.* 1-393 (2002) along with a previously unpublished story, "The Absolute Vices," *id.* at 396-423).

having pressure on. It feels feathery and strange without the pressure.

Meanwhile there is the pleasant chore of Jon's Chasbook [*It Catches My Heart in Its Hands*]. I will dig seeing that in print as much as seeing a book of my own. This one will make up for all the little bullshit you've had to take in the past. The only thing I ask is a copy signed right off the top. I think also we ought to both sign a special copy for Jon. When you slice it up, he is quite a guy. Not an editor, but a good guy who does things his own way and is not always smelling somebody's ass to see what kind of reputation he has. Jon is like I would be: a hell of a lot more concerned with building reputations than riding with those already made. He fits well with us. You would dig him very strong. He cannot bear bullshit or bullshitters. It took him a year and a half to see what was under my suits and vests. I expect you had a hand in all that, by the way. He would accept your figures the way I would.

....

I go down to N.O. [New Orleans] this week to see Jon. We will have lots to chew on, and probably the last stitches to sew into your book. I read everything he had and marked what I like best. He will then go over and make his own selections. Then, when I see the final mss, I will re-write my intro, mentioning poems in the book. Then it is just a question of setting it up. If Jon's health holds, it shouldn't take too long.

Letter, undated [ca. March, 1963]:

Letter from Harper's on last piece of novel I sent. Editor raves. Says it is great. No. It may be good. That would satisfy me. But it looks like I may be able to come out on the other side of this book still in one piece and able to function. 1000 pages, about. And all woven out of the dusty leaves and broken scraps of heartsearing paper like that Confederate banknote I sent you. Can you see the pride and then the gradual fear and final desolation that is in it? We are all brothers because the universe is out to stomp us like a roach.

Frost. I suspect we can stand the loss. The old man always gave me heartburn: 'my little horse must think it queer,' ad nauseum.⁷⁸ If the

⁷⁸ Robert Frost, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening":
Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;

future will buy his tripe, then the future is welcome to it. If he is immortal, then I will bow out and be mortal. The gods, Hemingway, Faulkner, Cummings—maybe Fitzgerald and Tom Wolfe, were not like Frost. I'm not critic enough to put it down, but Frost and Joyce Kilmer had more in common than Frost and Hemingway. Frost, the eternal yankee: able to get a buck out of something worthless by selling it to rubes. He did not betray his blood.

When the book is done, we go back and do stories and maybe some good poetry. I have deep respect for poetry because you do it. One Buk makes up for armies of Frosts.

....

Man at northwest rev. [*Northwest Review*] took the Creeley.⁷⁹ Now I am hunting in strange fields and with biggah (bigger) targets than Hedley.⁸⁰ I mean you can't mount a mouse's head on the study wall and say, —I took it with my magnum. We are honorable Indians. Fight hard, but none of that dirty shit of the fairy people. The centuries are our friends. You just wait a pair of hundreds and see.

Letter dated March 15, 1963:

Well you old motheaten fleabitten MYTH, I was down in NOLA [New Orleans, Louisiana] yesterday and saw the Jon and Lou and here it is:

He will not see me stopping here
 To watch his woods fill up with snow.
 My little horse must think it queer
 To stop without a farmhouse near
 Between the woods and frozen lake
 The darkest evening of the year.
 He gives his harness bells a shake
 To ask if there is some mistake.
 The only other sound's the sweep
 Of easy wind and downy flake.
 The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
 But I have promises to keep,
 And miles to go before I sleep,
 And miles to go before I sleep.

Robert Frost, *NEW HAMPSHIRE: A POEM WITH NOTES AND GRACE NOTES* 87 (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1923).

⁷⁹ John William Corrington, *Book Review* (Robert Creeley, *For Love: Poems 1950-6*), 6 (3) *Northwest Rev.* 106 (1963).

⁸⁰ See note 27, *supra*.

[*The Outsider*] #3 is real and I got hold of the first two copies and they swing like a headsman's tool and this special section SWING ALONG WITH BUK is a cobra full of snicks and pooches. You got to like it. Along with wild buildup on *It Catches*. Even says about my intro being okay.

Letter dated March 22, 1963:

I figured [*The Outsider*] #3 would mash your old soul. It was a good and honest thing and will be long discussed and questioned until it dawn on them that you were still hitting while the rest had decided the fight was lost Whether it catches either of us this side of death is a moot and probably no-talent question. I hear Shakeaspeare didn't give a mealy shit whether his stuff survived or not.

. . . .

I was, as you remember, a reporter. Police beat for the *Shreveport Times*. It was rough town and a rough job. Cops are very hard, and you cannot learn to like them or even trust them I only knew one good cop and I think I saw him going under giving way to copfeeling and copthought even as we were friends.⁸¹

It is not that I ever had it so bad: it is that the bad I saw sunk in. My pop used to say making mistakes is all right if you only make each one once (barring the lethal mistakes, which are better left altogether alone). He said two of the same kind constituted a habit, and you don't want bad habits.

. . . .

I have rarely loved what I did not agree with. But this man [Camus] must have been of the finest earth God could find. Nothing to believe, and still radiant with warmth and human beauty. His reason for no

⁸¹ Corrington, some several years after the correspondence with Bukowski languished, began working with his wife, Joyce, on various screen writing projects for Roger Corman. See Frances Doel, "John William Corrington as a Screenwriter," in Mills, *supra* note 1, at 134-143. Writing with Joyce as his collaborator, Corrington returned to his *Shreveport Times* reporter days and produced a series of police/detective mystery books: *So Small A Carnival* (New York: Viking/Penguin, 1986); *A Project Named Desire* (New York: Viking/Penguin, 1987); *A Civil Death* (New York: Viking/Penguin, 1987); *The White Zone* (New York: Viking/Penguin, 1990)(which appeared after Corrington's death in 1988).

suicide is no reason at all. Had he lived, he would have probably found Catholicism waiting outside some morning door. He wanted very much to love, and finally, with enough age, if you want to love—have to love—there is only God left to love. Who is not jealous, and . . . will wait frequently until you are worn out enough to hear him call through the wind, behind the car-horns, out of the night-shakings of the sea.

And the real coin-edged WORD: this weekend the novel is finished. Yes you ancient mummified peter, this weekend sometime I lay pen down after putting period and the big long ache of 950 pages is done. There will be re-write, but that will be of the pen and the typewriter. The heart will have to come back out of the late summer of 1865, and I expect there will be tears in my eyes, and that the tears will be my grandfather's. I liked knowing these people. Even the bad ones had style and a shape to their venom. But it will be over, and they will want, courteously, to sleep again. It is my world now, and my fight, and they would as soon I spoke of them softly and let it go at that. I hope you like the book and can see the bruises of love in it. If there is shit in it, it is the kind a kid puts in when he fails to get the whole picture—not the cheap commercial shit they put in when they see well enough but lack the guts to say what they see.

So soon I will get acquainted with the novel-world first-hand. If they lean on me hard, I may be back to poems alone. But if it goes, I will do both and try to write anything and everything and clean the edges and paste truth across the pages. We will see how far they let you go, huh?

Monday: I finished last night. Birth-trauma. I feel real bad. Like nothing. Maybe I'll start another novel this afternoon. I got to do something.⁸²

Letter dated April 10, 1963

Shame all in my shoes and spotting my vest. Owed you a letter for a pair of weeks and nothing but a big shiny silence which may smell like meditation to some folks, but you know I'm only sleeping.

. . . .

Jon said he has forty orders for your book already, and he hasn't even

⁸² Corrington's "Monday" note was handwritten.

hit the distributors with *Outsider 3* yet. I see a big hanging piece of success in your future: people deciding it's more fun to back you than Creeley (I mean they couldn't tell the difference between Al Smith and Bedford Forrest, most of them. So how can they tell anything about writing?). Jon is large on it all, and I'm ready to make corrections on introduction now so as to have you a clean well-lighted beginning for *It Catches*.

You got to admit a world where you and Jon and I can get together ain't such a bad world.

New stuff taken by *Kenyon Review*⁸³ and *NW [Northwest] Review*. Now that *Kenyon* has taken one, I can beat their asses without anyone saying it is sour grapes.

Next time I novel, I will either come on about the West in the Days after the War,⁸⁴ or else write one about a priest who bugs out and leaves the church.⁸⁵ That latter one would be tough. Meanwhile stories and poems. And articles. Like the one for *NW Review* "Charles Bukowski and the Poetry of Surfaces."⁸⁶ You gonna like it, chief.

Letter date April 20, 1963:

Was down with Jon yesterday and he swings better as the spring comes on. He has got the goddamndest paper and type for your book you ever saw. Strictly private-press stuff. Limited edition jazz. It will look like 25 bucks a copy when he gets done. And he showed me the response on [*Outsider*] #3. At least a hundred letters—all good and better than half asking for copies of your book. He must have at least 80 more orders and these come before the general distribution of #3. I was surprised

⁸³ John William Corrington, "The Mystic," 25 (3) *Kenyon Rev.* 516 (1963). Corrington, in a later letter, tells Bukowski: "[I] can't tell about my stuff. I used to throw stuff away—but no more. [T]he one the *Kenyon* took was a frigging finger exercise. I wouldn't have sent Jon for \$100. A sonnet yet." John William Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated May 4, 1963. In a 1961 letter to Bukowski Corrington speaks with less disdain about sonnets. See John William Corrington letter to Charles Bukowski, dated August 11, 1961, *supra*.

⁸⁴ Corrington is here referring to unpublished fragments of a novel manuscript which he sometimes referred to as *Under the Double Eagle*.

⁸⁵ See John William Corrington, *THE UPPER HAND* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1967).

⁸⁶ John William Corrington, *Charles Bukowski and the Savage Surfaces*, 6 (4) *Northwest Rev.* 123 (1963).

that some of our mutual enemies didn't come on strong about your section. But the only adverse crap was defending Creeley. To be a shitsville poet, he sure generates affection. . . .

Jon sees a coming bad time from the Levertov-Creeley kind of thing. But there is no problem in this. I may even have a chance to use all that academic education I got. I can write a criticism that fulfills all the rules, looks good and stuffy—and that kills without leaving a trace of blood. It ain't like a prize-fight, but it brightens up the summer. Anyhow, it's time for a kind of winnowing out and shaking down in writing. Time some critics get in and say, for what it might be worth: this is meat, and this is bullshit. You got to remember that a craze like that for Creeley is as easy to reverse as it is to cultivate. In fact easier. If the slobs get the notion that things are going against a man, they all bug out or join in. Like wolves. They don't know anything: all they have is enthusiasm.

. . . .

The great thing about writing is that if it is honest and vital, the man writing is never alone.

Letter dated April 24, 1963:

It went well Saturday and Jon now has a final draft of the intro—in which I reveal that Charles Kukowski is pen name of nun in a convent in Kansas City.

. . . .

It will be hard to write about Jon and Lou, but I will if it comes to that. My trouble is that I always get choked talking about what I love. But there have been good days in New Orleans because of them and if Paris was a big thing in the 20's, then they have made n.o. [New Orleans] another big thing. I remember the morning at the Café du Monde having coffee and donuts with Jo [Joyce Corrington] before we went to meet Jon that first day. Me in a Brooks Brothers suit because I knew it was going to be an outsider mag. And I was not going to come on looking *avant-garde* for no sonofabitch. And Jon sniffed me and I looked him over and it was a draw with neither sure of what went with the other. And it stayed a draw for a long time, but on that first cold winter morning somehow your name came up, and he asked what I thought of

your work, and real aggressively I said, buk swings like an iron gate. Yeah, he said, I think so too. So you were even in on it then—months before [*Outsider*] #1 came out, long before Jon took my first poem.

I reckon he will probably help me in the issues to come if I can get the poetry turned on again and come up with quality. A spread in *Outsider* can help a man a lot. As you can testify, it helps the gut. . . .

Listen, you can believe this or shit silver. But I have got almost no fucking good poems left. Sent all I had in wild orgy to get em taken before next book comes out. *Chicago* took three: *Northwest* took 2. Others grabbed by various. Now I have a lot of rotten old shells and a few yuks that are no good. Maybe five fair poems. I got to crank. . . .

All right about *Kenyon*. I will send you copy. No man should have to pay money for it. As you say, there must be something terrible about that poem for them to take it. . . . Now I will get one in *Antioch* and one in *Paris Review* and forget mags. Then will only write for myself—having broken back of the magazine game.

Letter dated April 29, 1963:

Talked to Jon on the phone yesterday Jon says all is going well.

And I finished my bit for the *Northwest Review*. . . . It is called chas bukow and the savage surfaces.⁸⁷ What I did was look around to see what kind of insults people had thrown at you. The consensus was that you are a savage and superficial. So I said, all right we will take those points for granted—and make both terms into compliments. You will get a kick out of how I show that all great poetry moves from the unmeditative and immediate wonder of the savage; how the mysticism of language, the totem of truth locked in words is savage; how only the savage can clear his head enough to *see* and *hear* and *smell* his poem into being rather than *think* it. Thinking belongs in philosophy; feeling and seeing and the rest are the tools of poetry. Again, it is true that your poetry deals with surfaces: with how things look and feel. And again, profundity is for philosophers and historians—and what is wrong with much poetry today is that professors want to rhyme metaphysics and call it poetry. But real poetry has a brilliant surface and the wonder of a savage personality about it. We leave the depths and the

⁸⁷ *Id.*

profundities to Aristotle—and settle for a song. Anyhow, I like the idea of turning criticism against the critics. . . .

And more news. I got a long distance call from the editor of the *Chicago Review*. He invited me to come up and read some poems at the Univ. of Chicago Arts Festival. So I guess I will. Joyce needs a vacation, and the part I like about it is we will drive up and stop in Memphis where the greatest barbecue in the world is laid down, and I will buy ten sandwiches and eat em all the way north. Then there is this place in Chicago called Bergdorffs which is a hell of a restaurant. To tell the truth I judge cities by how good you can eat in em.⁸⁸ Chi[cago] rates pretty good.

Jon says as far as he's concerned the intro is settled. He'll wait till all the poems are done to set it up, tho. Because I told him after reading you in depth, he might see something else that needs to be said, or something that needs should be changed. I want this intro . . . to be the best piece of prose I've ever done.

Letter dated May 4, 1963:

[Imploring Bukowski not to make too much of his planned Chicago speaking gig]: Don't you worry about me. This Chicago thing is for kicks.

. . .

But mostly there is no philosophy behind all this. I got some friends up there and Normal Mailer will be on the show. And these classes [I'm teaching] are pushing me off my nut. It always gets bad late in the year after you have babbled yourself out to these cretins and there are still a few weeks to go.

Most of all don't sweat the novel. I have had a week or so to think about it and if they don't like it my way I'll put it on the shelf,⁸⁹ write another

⁸⁸ For a similar sentiment, see Roger C. Schank, *THE CONNOISSEUR'S GUIDE TO THE MIND: HOW WE THINK, HOW WE LEARN, AND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE INTELLIGENT* (New York: Summit Books, 1991)(Schank draws on his love of eating and fine food as a way to understand how we think and learn).

⁸⁹ On April 24th, Corrington had received a letter from John Leggett, Editor at Harper & Row, following through on earlier suggestions that the manuscript for *And Wait For The Night* would require revisions. Assuming that Corrington would not be willing to

short one about a bad priest and a worn out stripper⁹⁰—and save this one for later. It is too close to my guts to mess with. They will never butcher my southerners. No gettsburgs with me as traitor.

....

I guess someday, if I live long enough, you and Jon and all the good ones will go on ahead of me, leaving me no messages as nobody leaves even his son a message, and I will be old and pissed and fed up with all the talk, and will look around and see the frame of my world shaking into dusty history and will decide, all right, history. And will step into it like buck rogers going through centuries in his time machine.

Letter dated June 6, 1963:

[Jon] is a cool old joe, and sometimes, even there with him, I get the feeling he is going to float away. You got some good friends there. I am no longer a teacher. It is all done for this year and it will be at least a full year before I have to fink around in the stinking classroom again. Maybe, if God is merciful, not even then. They gave me a leave of absence and that \$1000 for 'productivity,' and maybe I will come back and maybe not. . . . [T]his place grates on me. Maybe Tennessee. Maybe Virginia. Maybe South Carolina. There's time.

Putnams gave me \$2500 advance on the novel [*And Wait For The Night*], and only ask a minimum of rewrite and some reorganization. No hoking it up, no bullshit. The Putnam's editor seems okay. . . .⁹¹ Maybe it will be out next spring.

engage in the "strenuous reconceiving and cutting" that Leggett contemplated, he advised Corrington to find a new publisher. Letter of John Leggett, Editor, Harper & Row, to Bill Corrington, dated April 24, 1963. Corrington found a new publisher; *And Wait For The Night* was published by G.P. Putnam's Sons in 1964.

⁹⁰ Corrington here, refers again to the theme of his second novel, *The Upper Hand* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1967).

⁹¹ In a letter to his friend, Tom Bell, Corrington writes: "We're into the revision. Rented this IBM typewriter to get it rushed. The Putnam's editor [Peter Isreal] is, so far, a real great guy. We've disputed four or five points: I've won all encounters. Looks to me like the book may well be better after revision than before. Much fat sliced away." John William Corrington letter to Tom Bell dated June 13, 1963. Corrington goes on to say of the revisions: "The re-write is mostly cutting out stuff you love, but which you know you can do without. Then you have to patch and bridge the deleted sections, and the result is some pretty flat and indifferent writing. But the old writing still has flair, and I guess there is some pretty uninspired stuff in every novel."

Jon is bulling on with the BOOK. I told you I was down and helped him go pick up some type. The first poem is "Tragedy of the Leaves." I like that. It is a strong good poem without a weak line or a poor image. Nobody writes many like that. You have more than your share, and the book will be a storage battery of good work. Jon won't say how much longer. I don't guess too long, because he is moving pretty well. He has a lot sold in advance, and I am pressing him to strictly hold to the price increase after the end of June. \$3 is nothing for such a book. If there are any left, the next *Outsider* will sell em out.

....

The second novel is shaping up. About a renegade priest whose mother listens to Benny Goodman records on the porch of an old Southern house falling apart, and the priest is all fucked up, and gets a job on a bread truck and has nightmares that would curl your toenails and tries it with all kinds of women, and Michaelangelo's *Pieta* is crying for him, and finally there is no way out and he shoots a cop and sits in his bread truck waiting. He will not smoke or drink. Only shoot cops. We all have flaws, and some flaws are virtues bent out of shape.

We run out of time. I am only 30, but the time presses, and soon I will be old like my father and the big darkness will grow up through the soles of my feet and pitch my hands and pull my tongue down my throat, and my children, all married and pleasant will see dad dying and cry real tears of uselessness, and dad will probably be laughing inside to have snagged so much from a world that, like all slot machines, is not supposed to give up anything of value—only a spin and some lemons through a slab of glass—but dad will also be ashamed and angry because there will be still a few ideas that could go, if only the time and a piece of the talent were left. Death is like a curtain waiting to fall, and you have to be a genius on timing to get the soliloquy out before it drops on you, and you find yourself mumbling into the shadows where the audience is cold and prone.

Letter dated June 27, 1963:

Check from Putnams today. \$1350. After five years of slugging, I make some money off words. . . . the revision goes well and fast. Should be done by September. I'll be so fucking glad to put that novel aside that I may never even read it in hardback.

....

I see that your poems have done so well because in them there is no convention, no poetic manner which would stand as a bar between reader and experience you are describing. Funny thing is that while there is nothing 'literary' in your work, there is yet the solid ring of a professional there. In other words, the reader, if he has sense, knows that what he is reading is significant—although it is not 'like' the poetry he is used to reading.

Letter dated July 17, 1963:

Saw Jon yesterday. He is well and 56 pages into book. He will have intro in type next week and will probably send you a proof. I have read it again, and I am not ashamed.

....

Should be finished with the novel rewrite in a month, and then I can get on to something else. I'm fed up with this jazz. Don't get into a novel unless you want to work your ass off for a long time. The problem of the novel is that it is against the mercurial temperament of most artists. You got to have a streak of bank clerk or something in order to do the drudgery.

Editor's Note: The surviving Corrington letters to Bukowski from mid-1963 and thereafter are few in number. The correspondence begins to wind down as Corrington leaves LSU for the University of Sussex where he will obtain his D.Phil. degree. Bukowski was writing Corrington from time to time, at least through 1964. There are no further Corrington to Bukowski letters (archived in the John William Corrington Papers) after 1965. There is at least one short—one paragraph—letter from Bukowski to Corrington in December, 1966, and a longer letter in November, 1967 (in which Bukowski tries to explain how he has had a falling-out with Jon and Gypsy Lou Webb, the publishers of *It Catches My Heart In Its Hands*). There are an additional three letters in 1968, one dated October 15, requesting the return of his letters, and another, the last, dated November 25, 1968, again requesting the return of his letters. The record of the Corrington-Bukowski correspondence ends with a note from Bukowski to Corrington dated July 23, 1970: "Hello William: forget the post office—I quit it late Jan. Have made it so far by giving poetry readings, playing horses, writing dirty stories. On the poetry readings, I have even followed closely behind your Miller Williams, which made me look pretty good. even wrote a novel in 20 days—*Post Office*—supposed to be out in the Fall. And, of course, I still play with my little poems. Luck with your movie bit. /signed/ Buchinski

APPENDIX

CORRINGTON ON THE VALUE OF POETRY TO A WRITER

Letter to Tom Bell⁹² dated October 15, 1961:

I think poetry can teach you a lot. . . . I can handle a single line of prose, make it whip like a hurt snake or curl as smooth as old brandy. But this extreme concern with the individual line and an almost abnormal concern with the *sound* and rhythm of that single line has made writing long prose-things really tense. Bad clumsy unrhythmical sentences bug hell out of me (and I find plenty in everybody except maybe Wolfe and Agee), and thus the work goes slowly and may not really be worth the extra time: does it matter i[f] the back of a statue is sanded when it's set in a niche and nobody sees the back? Anyhow, you'll learn a lot about compaction, making every single word carry its weight, about dropping unnecessary articles, about making a sentence fan out into a whole complexus of meanings. About ambiguity and how to harness it—about how to set a whole passage on fire with a phrase or a word. This is what the poem can teach, and if you can carry it over, you've *got* to be a better novelist for the learning of it.

With almost 100 poems published, I still think of myself as a writer, not a poet. I want to write big novels, and I will. But I was a lucky sonofabitch to land on poetry first. If it has loused me up, I have brains enough to find my way out of the hole. And in the meanwhile, I've gotten the seasoning, the confidence—and the reputation—that [comes from] publishing

Letter to Tom Bell dated December, 31, 1961:

I still feel the net gain from writing poetry has been a big one. The prose is tighter, and there are fewer cliches in it, I reckon. I still pause too long between sentences, and I weight the sound of each prose paragraph as long as old Flaubert must have, but I can live with this. What kills is to write a long section and later see it was chiefly horseshit. Bad

⁹² Corrington met Tom Bell when he was a graduate student at Rice University where Bell was an undergraduate. After his graduation from Rice, Bell worked as a reporter for a Houston newspaper, and with Corrington's help, secured a teaching position in the Department of Journalism at Loyola-New Orleans, a department he would later chair. Corrington and Bell remained lifelong friends. Corrington wrote several interesting letters to Bell in which he explained the value of poetry to him as a writer.

prose is horseshit in a different way than bad poetry is: you are always conscious of making poetry, and when you fall off, you know it and can patch and paint or rip it up and start over. But since you talk and write prose always, since it is your basic manner of signaling, you sometimes forget while using it for other things like a novel, and write whole reams of crap without any red lights flashing or bells going off.

Jean W. Ross Interview-1983

[In 1983, Corrington was interviewed by Jean Ross for *Contemporary Authors*,⁹³ and in response to a question about whether he had originally planned to move from poetry to fiction, tells Ross]:

Yes. It seemed to me that since poetry is shorter, you could execute even a fairly long poem reasonably quickly and concentrate on the individual words, the lines, the rhythms. You just couldn't undertake to write a novel when you were under the pressure of being in graduate school. You're not going to be able to hold that much in your head while you're being interfered with by literary history and criticism courses and that sort of thing. It was a very deliberate decision because I figured, look, why not start with the shortest and most intense form with the ideal of one day writing a page of prose so that is somebody threw open my book at page 301, they'd say, "Hell, what a page." You master the smallest units then you don't have to think about them any longer. You can afford to think about the longer form because you know through your self-training in the short form that the small units are taken care of.

⁹³ Jean W. Ross, "CA [Contemporary Authors] Interview," in Ann Evory & Linda Metzger (eds.), *CONTEMPORARY AUTHORS* 114-117 (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1983)(New Revision Series, Volume 8) (reprinted in *John William Corrington: An Interview*, 26 *Legal Stud. F.* 695 (2002)).

