

Bukowski and the Greyhound Bus

by Jerry Ratch

It's a grey and stormy day naturally
We're crowded into a tiny bus shelter
as it pours 57 varieties of cats and hounds

They keep hitting the pavement around us
with the splatting sounds those animals make
when falling out of the heavens

When the Greyhound Bus finally pulls up
and the door opens, we can see it's
Charles Bukowski driving the bus, even though his nametag
reads: Noah

His face is pock-marked and the bus
smells like a barroom, a cigar butt hanging from
his mouth. *"Sorry,"* he says, jerking his thumb behind him

*"It's standing room only. You can ride into Santa Rosa
standing, or sitting in the wet aisle like some of them
or you can stay here at the roadside, it's your choice*

*There's no other bus till tomorrow morning
Well, what's it gonna be? We ain't got all day"*
Bukowski chomps on his old unlit cigar butt

but at least he still has some teeth
We peer into the bus load of people
It's all the old poets from the Great San Francisco

Poetry Wars. They keep looking at me without saying
a word. You can tell some of them don't write
anymore, and they look like the dead. They just

stay on the bus for old time sake, or for the memories
of self-torture, because they enjoy it
And it's only wet on the floor of the aisle

So we get in, of course, with the rest of the herd
and sit down in the water on the floor, back to back
so we can at least have a backrest

The cold and wet seep up my pants
and we grow used to it. I face my peers
and after awhile begin reading some of my

funny poems. *"Read them the good stuff!"*
yells Bukowski from the front of the bus
looking in the rear-view mirror

*"Quit fooling around. Read them Puppet X
This may be your last chance
Go ahead,"* Bukowski growls, *"start reading"*

And he settles back and keeps driving the bus
around the curves, following the river
beside the road, until we pull into Santa Rosa

where most of the passengers get off, weeping
and take busses heading in any other direction
in their complicated, unsettled lives

