

## CHARLES BUKOWSKI, *THE HOUSE*

They are building a house  
 half a block<sup>1</sup> down  
 and I sit up here  
 with the shades down  
 listening to the sounds,  
 the hammers<sup>2</sup> pounding<sup>3</sup> in nails,  
 thack thack thack thack,  
 and then I hear birds,  
 and thack thack thack,  
 and I go to bed,  
 I pull the covers to my throat;  
 they have been building this house  
 for a month, and soon it will have  
 its people... sleeping, eating,  
 loving, moving around,  
 but somehow  
 now  
 it is not right,  
 there seems a madness,<sup>4</sup>  
 men walk on top with nails  
 in their mouths  
 and I read about Castro and Cuba,  
 and at night I walk by  
 and the ribs<sup>5</sup> of the house show  
 and inside I can see cats walking  
 the way cats walk,  
 and then a boy rides by on a bicycle  
 and still the house is not done  
 and in the morning the men

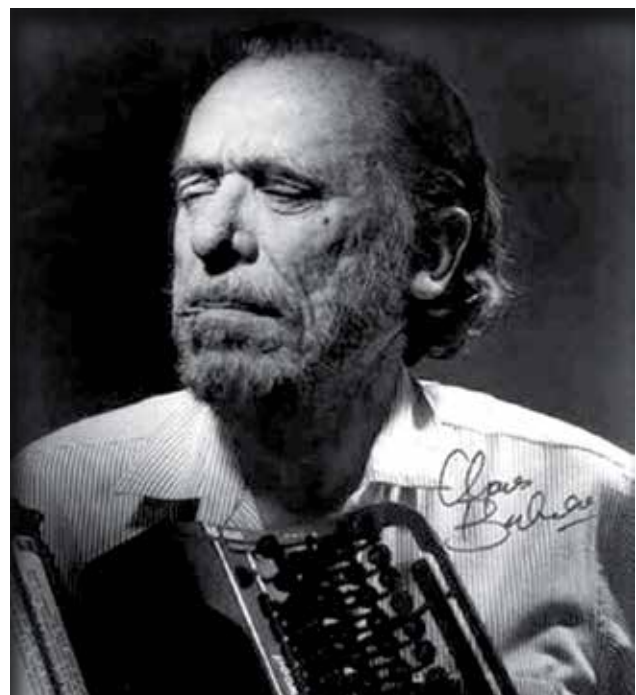
will be back  
 walking around on the house  
 with their hammers,  
 and it seems people should not build houses  
 anymore,  
 it seems people should not get married  
 anymore,  
 it seems people should stop working  
 and sit in small rooms  
 on 2<sup>nd</sup> floors  
 under electric lights without shades;  
 it seems there is a lot to forget  
 and a lot not to do,  
 and in drugstores,<sup>6</sup> markets, bars,  
 the people are tired, they do not want  
 to move, and I stand there at night  
 and look through this house and the  
 house does not want to be built;  
 through its sides I can see the purple hills  
 and the first lights of evening,  
 and it is cold  
 and I button my coat  
 and I stand there looking through the house  
 and the cats stop and look at me  
 until I am embarrassed  
 and move North up the sidewalk  
 where I will buy  
 cigarettes and beer  
 and return to my room.

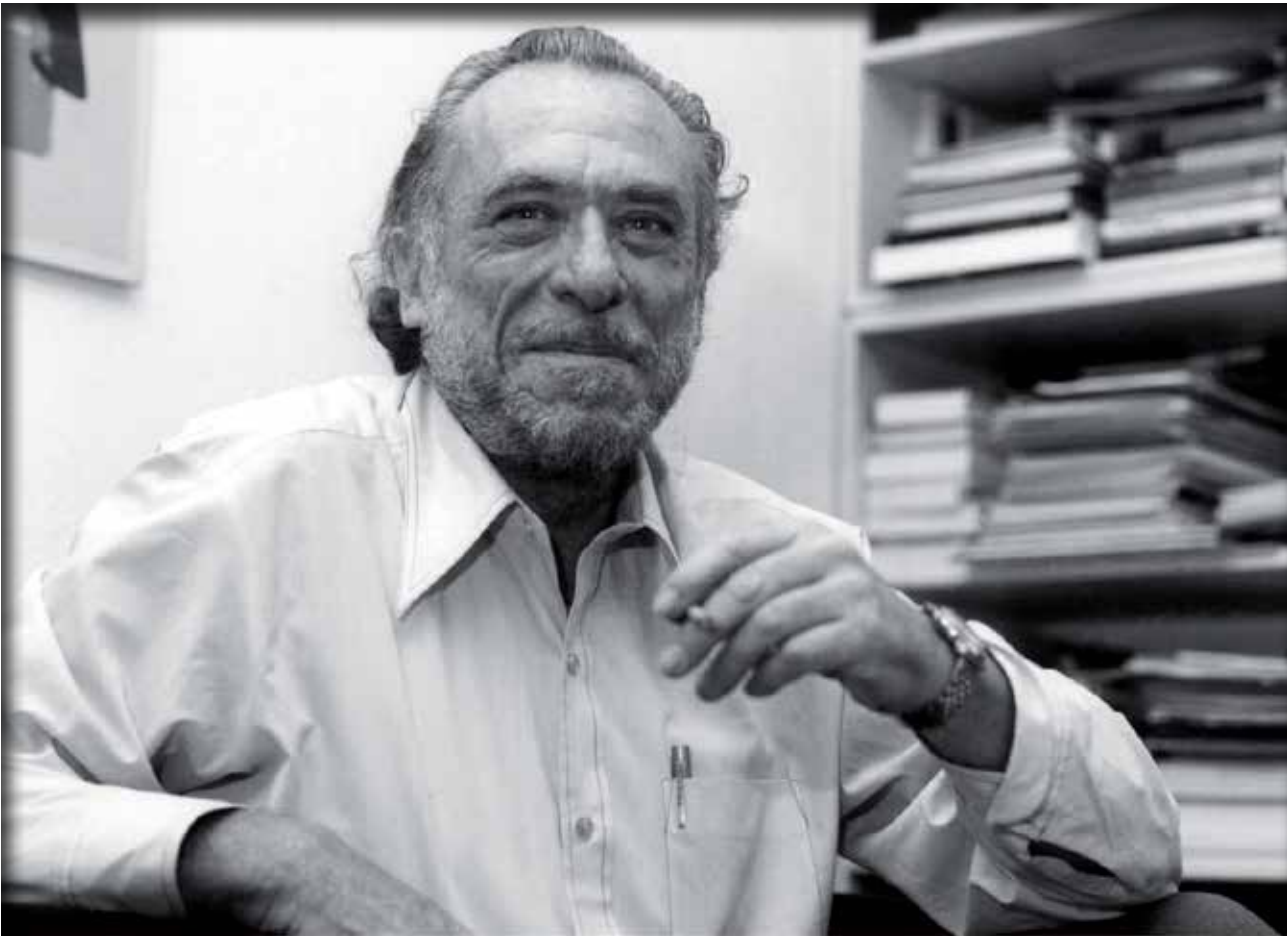


### GLOSSARY

- 1 an area of buildings in a city with streets on all four sides
- 2 tools used to force nails into wood
- 3 hitting
- 4 ideas and actions that show a lack of good judgment
- 5 long curved bones that are in your chest
- 6 *Am.E.*, chemists

Charles Bukowski was born in Germany in 1920 after his mother, a native German, met his father, a Polish American serviceman, during the occupation of Germany at the end of World War I. His family moved to Los Angeles when he was two years old. After graduating from Los Angeles High School, Bukowski attended Los Angeles City College for one year, taking courses in art, journalism, and literature.





At 24 Bukowski published his first short story in a magazine. But he soon grew disillusioned with the publication process and quit writing for almost a decade.

He spent this period in Los Angeles, and roaming across the United States, working odd jobs and staying in inexpensive rooming houses. In the 1950s he began to write poetry. He resumed drinking. He

worked as a post office clerk for over a decade. In 1969 Bukowski quit his job at the Los Angeles post office to make writing his full time career. Less than one month after leaving the postal service he finished his first novel, *Post Office*.

Bukowski died on March 9, 1994, in San Pedro, California at the age of 73, shortly after completing his last novel *Pulp*.

## READING COMPREHENSION

● Answer the following questions.

- ① What is the speaking voice doing at the beginning of the poem?
- ② How long have they been building the house?
- ③ What does the speaking voice see inside the house?
- ④ Why does the speaking voice say that “the house does not want to be built”?
- ⑤ Why does the speaking voice feel embarrassed?
- ⑥ What kind of language does the poet employ?
- ⑦ What is the general tone like?
- ⑧ What is the rhythm of the poem like?

## SPEAKING

● Now try to say in your own words what the poet describes in the poem above.

