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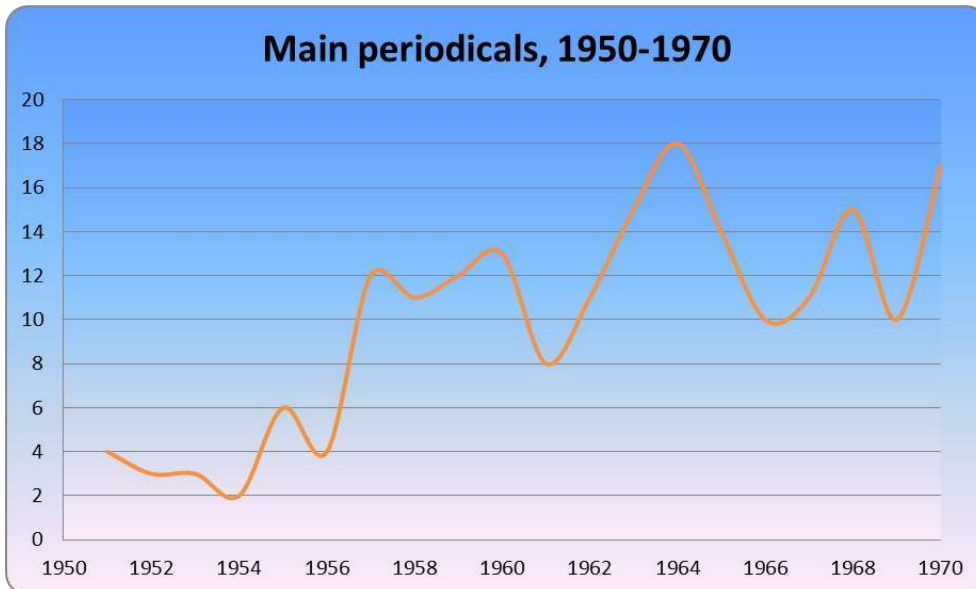
Abel Debritto

- 1 Charles Bukowski was a genuine product of the small press, and the little magazines were the ideal arena to satisfy his perennial urge to be published. A hyper-prolific author, Bukowski indiscriminately submitted material to all kinds of literary ventures: conservative, avant-garde, or “sewing circle” periodicals; furthermore, he considered the highbrow journals as valid an outlet as any other, and not only did he praise them in print, but he also unremittingly sent his poetry to them throughout the years. His work, including poems, short-stories, reviews, essays, “ranters,” manifestos, letters, blurbs, doodles and drawings were faithfully reproduced by the “little” or “mimeo” editors, the underground press and by different literary movements, such as the Beats, the Black Mountaineers, or the New York Schools, even though Bukowski overtly professed no allegiance to any of them. As a matter of fact, despite the enthusiastic reception of his material in the mid to late 60s, Bukowski was noticeably disgruntled with most editors’ approach to publishing as he despised their purported slovenliness and the poor quality of their productions, and he duly voiced his discontent in print.
- 2 The significance of the “littles” in Bukowski’s early literary career has been largely overlooked to date. The little magazines, as opposed to quarterlies and journals, encouraged experimentation and promoted new authors, hence becoming the most appropriate breeding ground for unknown writers such as Bukowski, whose work was largely unconventional. Unlike the academic quarterlies, the little magazines were not subsidized, which resulted in their ephemeral nature. Indeed, a great number of “littles” disappeared after their inaugural issue, and the fact that they seldom broke even deterred many editors from publishing them on a regular basis. Bukowski’s hunger for exposure might explain his appearance in hundreds of these short-lived periodicals. His perseverance was to be eventually rewarded since he was acclaimed “King of the Underground” and “an American legend” by the end of the 60s (Fox, “Living” 57; Katz

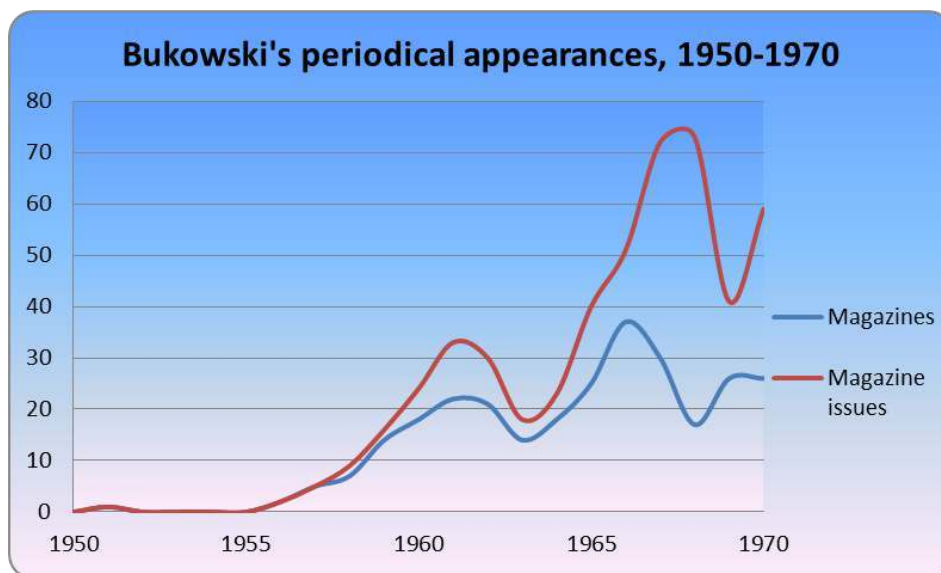
1848). His early publications are crucial to understanding the subsequent recognition of his work.

- 3 There was not an abundance of “littles” in the early to mid 50s as The New Critics and Modernism-influenced journals still prevailed upon the literary arena. However, by the late 50s, several events and new movements, such as the Beats, the Black Mountaineers, the “San Francisco Renaissance,” the Objectivists, the Deep Image poets or the several waves of “New York Schools” paved the way for the literary explosion that was to take place in the 60s, reaching a peak in 1966 with the so-called mimeograph revolution. This surge of non-mainstream publications in the late 50s was instrumental in Bukowski’s career as it literally multiplied his exposure in the small press and little magazine circles, apart from constituting his first major stepping-stone to popularity. Nevertheless, Bukowski had already been published in the “littles” in the 40s and mid 50s. Discussing the literary context where he edged his way into success is essential to fully grasp his evolution in the alternative press.
- 4 During the 40s and the 50s, the American literary scene was the realm of the highbrow quarterlies. The most prestigious journals—*Kenyon Review*, *Sewanee Review* or *Southern Review*, all of them subsidized by universities—were strongly influenced by The New Critics, whose primary function was that of criticism. During the late 40s, the medieval and Renaissance cultures had a powerful impact on the “Berkeley Renaissance” group. It is not known whether Bukowski submitted to those journals, but his unpublished correspondence and some late poems show that he was particularly attracted to the critical articles featured in those periodicals, especially in the case of the *Kenyon Review*.
- 5 In the early 50s, many editors of little magazines still believed in Modernism as a role model to be followed, and they constantly quoted T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound to express their views concerning publishing. The *Partisan Review*, the *Hudson Review* or *Poetry* were obvious examples of magazines still entrenched in the tradition, while emerging “littles” such as *Circle*, *The Ark*, *Goad*, *Inferno*, *Origin* or *Golden Goose* were trying to break loose from those Modernist reins. Though Bukowski submitted to both Cid Corman’s *Origin* and *The Ark*, his work was not accepted, whereas Kenneth Patchen, Kenneth Rexroth, Paul Goodman, William Everson, e. e. cummings, William Carlos Williams and Robert Duncan were all published in *The Ark* in 1947.
- 6 By the mid 50s, it was evident that a huge change was imminent. Years later, Bukowski reminisced about this period thus: “It is difficult to say exactly when the Revolution began, but roughly I’d judge about 1955 ... and the effect of it has reached into and over the sacred ivy walls and even out into the streets of Man” (“Introduction” 1). Quite possibly, Bukowski was thinking of the “San Francisco Renaissance,” which, although conceived in the 40s by Kenneth Rexroth, became noticeably popular in October 1955 with the Six Gallery Reading, where Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl* was first read in public. Several Beat-related events took place in the following years, preceded by Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s City Lights bookstore opening in 1953: *Howl* and the first issue of the cult magazine *Semina* were published in 1956; Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* and the *Evergreen Review* were premiered in 1957; William Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch*, *Beatitude* and *Big Table* came out in 1959.
- 7 As critic Jim Burns succinctly put it, “many of the initial beat documents first appeared in print around 1957, [and] a peak was reached in, roughly, 1960” (84). It was a fruitful period that heralded the literary explosion of the mid 60s. Kostelanetz explained that “the years 1958-9 represented the beginning of a revival in American culture ... Some of

the potentially important new eclectic quarterlies made their debuts in that season” (26). The first seminal “littles” from this period were Tuli Kupferberg’s *Birth* (1957), John Wieners’ *Measure* (1957), Robert Bly’s *The Fifties* (1958), LeRoi Jones’ *Yugen* (1958), Jack Spicer’s *J* (1959), John Bryan’s *Renaissance* (1961) and LeRoi Jones and Diane di Prima’s *Floating Bear* (1961). Coincidentally enough, the outcrop of these key alternative publications took place when an increasing number of “littles” began to accept and publish Bukowski’s work, as illustrated in the following graphs:



Graph 1, based on the chronological timeline designed by Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips in *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side. Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980*, displays the total number of the main periodicals published from 1950 to 1970, clearly showing an upward pattern beginning circa 1957 which would reach its peak in 1964-66.

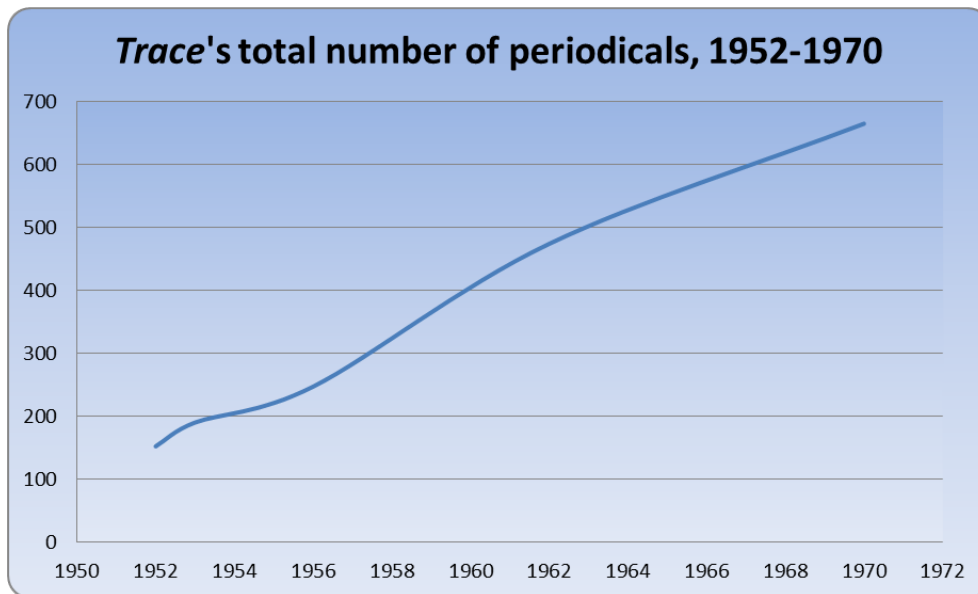


Graph 2, based on all the Bukowski bibliographies published to date and on several hundred periodicals located in American libraries, indicates the chronological total number of magazine titles as well as the total number of magazine issues which published Bukowski’s work from 1950 to 1970. As in graph 1, the increase in publications becomes evident in the late 50s.

- 8 While the Modernism-influenced journals were being displaced by the emerging Beat publications, other literary movements were taking shape all across the United States or

they unequivocally consolidated their relevance on the literary scene. Such was the case, on the one hand, of the Black Mountaineers, with Charles Olson and Robert Creeley as their main figures, and the Objectivists—also called second-generation Modernists—on the other, led by Louis Zukofsky and George Oppen. Their main literary publications were the already mentioned *Origin* (1951) and *The Fifties* (1958), as well as the *Black Mountain Review* (1954), *Trobar* (1960), *El Corno Emplumado* [*The Plumed Horn*] (1962) or *Wild Dog* (1963), among many others. The last two periodicals featured Bukowski's contributions several times in the 60s.

- 9 The creation of new schools was definitely encouraged during this period: The Deep Image school, including authors such as Jerome Rothenberg, David Antin, Clayton Eshleman and Diane Wakoski, published *Matter*, *Some/thing*, or *Caterpillar* and other little magazines, where Bukowski's poetry was printed. In New York, there were several waves of the commonly called "New York Schools." The main figures of the different New York School generations were John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, Ron Padgett, Dick Gallup, Joe Brainard or Ted Berrigan, and the magazines that represented these schools were *Folder* (1953), *White Dove Review* (1959), *Fuck You* (1962), "C" (1963) or *Angel Hair* (1966). The late 50s could be described as a volcano about to erupt. Undoubtedly, all those new schools, groups and periodicals were paving the way for a change that would release the literary scene from the overbearing control of the academic quarterlies and the last vestiges of Modernism.
- 10 Many critics believe that the subsequent literary "revolution" of the 60s could be compared to the one that took place at the beginning of the 20th century, when there was a noticeable surge of new literary magazines: *The Little Review*, where James Joyce's *Ulysses* was first published in installments and where the "Foreign Editor" was none other than Ezra Pound, *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, the *Double Dealer*, *Contact*, *Blast*, *The Dial*, *Anvil* or *The Hound and Horn* were some of the major "littles" published during that period in the United States, and they all appeared to focus on publishing the best new literature available. Hence, some studies downplay the significance of the so-called revolution of the 60s by stating that it was a mere repetition of an earlier, perhaps more influential, revolution.
- 11 Whether the repetition of a previous pattern or not, the 60s did outnumber the "littles" published in the previous decades. The increasing number of magazines responded to several factors, the main ones being the low cost of new printing technologies and the fact that no special training was required to operate a mimeograph machine. For instance, by the mid 60s, young students could publish a mimeographed "little" in a matter of days in their parents' garage or back yard spending as little as 50 or 75 dollars in the process.
- 12 James Boyer May put out a most valuable directory in his *Trace* magazine, which indexed most of the "littles" published in America and in England on a yearly basis. The 1953 directory listed 190 magazines, and the 1970 one, 665 (Brownson 387). According to a different source, the 1952 directory had 152 magazines, and the 1956 one, 247; by 1963, there were 747 little magazines and small presses, and then they really took off and proliferated in greater numbers (May 383), which eventually led to the 665 "littles" listed in the 1970 directory—small presses were not included in that figure. The outpouring of little magazines during the 60s is evident, as graph 3 shows. If it is taken into account that most "littles" were abysmally short-lived, the total number of magazines compiled in the 1970 directory is simply astounding as the great majority were probably new ventures.



GRAPH 3 based on *Trace's* annual directory, displays the total number of periodicals published from 1952 to 1970. The upward pattern is visibly similar to the one shown in graphs 1 and 2.

- 13 Naturally, the enormous quantity of “littles” published during this period did not equate with quality. Many critical voices, as early as the mid 60s, complained that the huge number of magazines resulted in both mediocrity and apathy. Most mimeographed “littles” were similar in appearance and the printed poetry was remarkably amateurish; indeed, very few magazines stood out: “while so many specimens currently exist, only a handful are worth examining” (Boyers 51). Bukowski himself criticized the fact that most “littles” and “mimeos” oftentimes published below par material, including his own.
- 14 The mimeograph revolution is generally considered the peak of the literary upheaval of the 60s. Nevertheless, as is the case when defining “little magazines” or “small press,” “mimeo revolution” is a misleading term; on the one hand, as Clay explains, “well over half the materials produced under its banner were not strictly produced on the mimeograph machine” (15). As a matter of fact, there was a substantial increase of offset “littles” in the 60s, eventually exceeding the total number of “mimeos.” On the other hand, though it is usually said that the “mimeo revolution” took place circa 1965, many editors had been publishing mimeographed magazines for a long time. For instance, the first “mimeo,” *Gyroscope*, dates back to 1929. A milestone “little” from the 40s, *The Ark* (1947), was also a “mimeo.” *J* (1959) and *Beatitude* (1959) were equally mimeographed, as well as *Simbolica* (1959), *Merlin’s Magic* (1961), or the *Anagogic & Paideumic Review* (1961), which featured Bukowski’s work.
- 15 The “mimeos” were relatively easy to produce and extremely inexpensive. As Ed Sanders, editor of *Fuck You*, one of the most representative magazines of the period, recalled, “printing was affordable, very, very affordable. For like \$10 you could publish a poetry magazine and give it out or sell it at your poetry readings” (L. Smith, “Remembering” 119). According to other editors, such as Douglas Blazek, the cost could be anywhere between 75 and 125 dollars. At any rate, the production cost of the “mimeos” was not excessive to most poets and editors, and financial concerns did not prevent them from becoming publishers, which contributed—considerably so—to the proliferation of these periodicals.

- 16 Another feature of the “mimeos,” and one that especially delighted Bukowski, was its sense of immediacy. Though quality was not always taken into account, speed played a fundamental role in assembling “mimeos.” Since operating a mimeograph did not require technical skills, flyers or broadsides could be completed in an hour, and a chapbook could take a day at the very most. Bukowski was usually harsh on most editors, but he did praise those who were quick to print his work, such as Evelyn Thorne and Will Tullos (*Epos*) or Roy Miller and George Hitchcock (*San Francisco Review*). For this reason, he was pleased with the “mimeo” editors, as he would be with John Bryan and his underground newspaper, *Open City*: “I like ACTION. I mean, you know how some of the mags move, something very deadening about it ... that’s one reason I have been writing a column a week for *Open City*--so far. ACTION. It jumps from the typewriter onto the page. I hand it to Bryan, ZAP, it EXPLODES,” Bukowski explained to editor Charles Potts in 1968 (*Poems Written* 38).
- 17 Though biographer Neeli Cherkovski--somewhat romantically--argues that “the poor paper stocks the editors used and the careless printing jobs were statements of their disdain for established journals” (158), it was quite possible that those editors simply put the immediate, affordable nature of their magazines before any other consideration. The fact that “mimeos” were clumsily produced did not mean that their editors were criticizing the so-called slick journals. The “disdain” that Cherkovski mentions could be taken as a consequence of the means involved in putting together a mimeographed periodical, but hardly as a *raison d’être*. As Bukowski suggests: “The ‘Mimeo’ Revolution is sometimes more revolting than revolutionary--printing hasty faded careless and misspelled poems and stories. Yet I do suppose that the very lack of pressure and expense does create a freedom from which arises some good hotbed literature” (“Who’s Big” 9). Rather than giving shape to well-crafted artifacts, perhaps the main motivation of the “mimeo” editors was distributing art diligently.
- 18 d.a. levy did disdain the established journals, though, and he made it abundantly clear in his work. All studies cite levy as the central figure of the “mimeo revolution,” as “one of the truly unique and authentic spirits” of the movement (Clay 48). Besides his several publishing ventures--where Bukowski’s work was featured--levy’s main contribution was his unshakeable effort to establish a well-connected circle of editors willing to circulate the best new literature available. levy, who defined himself as a “poeteditorpublisher,” soon set up, without institutional or corporate support, an efficient editorial network with Morris Edelson (*Quixote*), Douglas Blazek (*Olé*), and D.R. Wagner (*Runcible Spoon*, *Moonstones*). Incidentally, all those “mimeos” published Bukowski. Some editors, such as D.R. Wagner or Morris Edelson, printed his poems more than once in different magazines; in Blazek’s case, he published Bukowski in all *Olé* issues. Taking into account that “Blazek emerged as *the* editor of the ‘mimeo revolution’ ... [And] *Olé* attained legendary proportions” (Mangelsdorff 36), the fact that Bukowski became increasingly popular makes perfect sense.
- 19 Blazek, levy, Wagner and Edelson were not the only “mimeo” editors to champion Bukowski. The Marrahwannah Quarterly, *Olé*, *Runcible Spoon*, *Kauri*, *Intrepid*, *Magazine*, *Poetry Newsletter*, *Grande Ronde Review*, *Litmus*, *Blitz*, *Salted Feathers*, *Wild Dog*, *Aspects*, *Floating Bear*, *Poetry Review* and *Fuck You: A Magazine for the Arts* are usually listed as the most representative magazines of the period. All of them, save the last four titles, showcased Bukowski’s work in their pages; it is evident that those editors

appreciated his poetry, almost reverently so, and their magazines unequivocally contributed to turn him into a well-known figure in the alternative literary scene.

- 20 Despite the exposure received in the “littles” that flourished during the 50s and exploded into the revolution of the 60s, and despite the fact that his work was generously distributed via the network of “mimeo” editors, Bukowski professed no allegiance to any movement or school. He saw himself as a literary outsider who took Ezra Pound’s “do your work” motto literally; the “littles,” newspapers, “mimeos,” and small presses were outlets for his prolific output, and he indiscriminately submitted to all of them. It is wrong to assume that he felt closer to leftist, iconoclastic or dissenting ventures because he also submitted to right-wing or conservative publications and academic journals. Not surprisingly, representatives of all schools, groups, and trends accepted and extensively published his literary production.
- 21 For instance, though his name was appropriated by Beat-oriented publications such as *Beatitude* (1960) or *The Outsider* (1961), or by “littles” that supported well-established writers—*The San Francisco Review* (1958) —and even though critics claimed that “Bukowski is the most beat of all beats, the apotheosis of Beatnikism” (Fox, *A Critical* 10), it would be difficult to prove that Bukowski was a Beat, a confessional or a staunch supporter of the counter-culture ideology. In addition, he always claimed to be apolitical, and the closest he ever felt to Communism was when Dorothy Healey paid him a visit in 1966 and he gave her inscribed copies of his most recent books, *Cold Dogs in the Courtyard* and *Crucifix in a Deathhand*. At the risk of repetition, Bukowski was indeed an outsider who was not interested in schools of any kind. As Al Purdy, a Canadian poet who extensively corresponded with Bukowski in the 60s, put it, “[Bukowski] bears little relation to the snug coterie of Olsen-Duncan-Creeley, and even less to such academic pilchards as Richard Wilbur and Robert Lowell” (137). Poet Jack Conroy, editor of the legendary *Anvil* magazine, was even more categorical than Purdy: “[Bukowski] cannot be classified or yoked with any other poet, living or dead” (5). Yet, as most biographies and studies point out, Bukowski’s attitude, by his own admission, resembled that of Robinson Jeffers, one of the very few contemporary authors that he ever praised in print.
- 22 Bukowski himself expressed on several occasions his dislike of any literary group or school: “To me, the entire poetic scene seems dominated by obvious and soulless and ridiculous and lonely jackasses. from the university group at the one end to the beat mob at the other ... they go from creators to being entertainers” (Perkins 16-17). Bukowski was merciless in his criticism, and no group was spared: “Those Black Mountain School snobs, let them smell their own turds! The Kenyon boys, let them write their celluloid senseless inoffensive poems” (*Living* 58). However, Bukowski’s comments should not be taken literally. He did enjoy the critical articles published in the *Kenyon Review* and he wrote several poems where he overtly praised them, such as “*Kenyon Review, after the sandstorm*” or “*the Kenyon Review and other matters.*” In fact, Bukowski admired some of the big “littles” and he even contended that those periodicals were better than most “littles.” Furthermore, Bukowski submitted to dozens of quarterlies throughout his career, and a large number of respected journals accepted his poetry.
- 23 Bukowski and the “littles” had a passionate, stormy, mutually rewarding love/hate relationship. He criticized them unrelentingly and, yet, he needed them as the ideal arena for his staggering literary output. One of the main functions of the “littles” as an outlet was that of satisfying Bukowski’s voracious need to be published. Several of the editors who released his work in the early 60s recall that urge to appear in print. Edward Van

Aelstyn, who edited the *Northwest Review* before it was temporarily suppressed in 1964, stressed that he was “amazed and amused at how passionate he was, and how eager he was to make contact with anyone who would appreciate his work” (“N. R. / Bukowski”). George Kimball, who co-edited *Grist* magazine with John Fowler and Charles Plymell in the mid 60s, reminisced that Bukowski “was writing pretty much daily, making up for lost time, as it were, and had a pretty substantial backlog of material and was always looking for new exposure in magazines he found to his liking” (Kimball).

- 24 Biographer Howard Sounes claimed that Judson Crews—a prolific author and editor himself—had explained to him that Bukowski’s obsession to achieve literary recognition could reach suicidal heights: “[Bukowski] wrote to me and said to please publish his poems, else he was going to commit suicide” (qtd. in Sounes, *Locked* 36). When asked about this particular exchange, Sounes replied that “I haven’t got the [suicide] letter ... My source was Judson Crews himself, who no longer had the letter either” (“More Buk”). It is not known whether Bukowski actually wrote that missive to Crews or not, but Bukowski submitted frequently to him in the early to mid 50s, and in 1953 he told Crews: “I’ll be honest with you. You might as well keep those poems as long as you want to because when you send them back I’ll throw them away” (Ransom, 4 Nov. 1953). Though this might be taken as a means of putting pressure on Crews to publish those poems, and also as an unintended tribute to his beloved Li Po, who burned his own poetry and sailed it down the river, the suicidal tone is conspicuous by its absence. In any case, Bukowski’s perseverance was eventually rewarded when Crews published one of his short poems in *The Naked Ear* in late 1957.
- 25 During the 50s, Bukowski was painfully aware of the crucial fact that only the “littles” would publish his work steadily. He had been previously—and constantly—rejected by mainstream magazines in the 40s such as *The New Yorker*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper’s* or *Esquire*. Bukowski knew that the “littles” championed new authors and fearlessly printed radical, obscene, or controversial material. In a 1966 essay about the “littles” of the time, Bukowski argued that “many of us ... continue to submit and get published in the best of the ‘littles’ because they are the only remaining platforms of truth and good art in a very frightened and sick Age” (“Who’s Big” 9). Bukowski did not want to conform to the strict rules, principles and guidelines of the quarterlies; his goal, if any, was to remain faithful to his own literary instincts, and the “littles” were, again, the most appropriate outlet. Indeed, as Freedland concluded in an erotic periodical, “Buk is little known outside of the most gung-ho literary set because he insists on giving all his work away to the ‘little magazines’ of the avant-garde” (94). Years later, when Black Sparrow Press regularly published Bukowski, he received several offers from important New York publishing houses. However, he chose to remain loyal to the small press and declined all those financially tempting offers.
- 26 By defining himself out of those major publishers, Bukowski focused all his efforts on the “littles.” He submitted his work—mostly poetry, though occasionally fiction as well—to any literary magazine. The directory published in J. B. May’s *Trace* was especially useful to Bukowski as it listed hundreds of new periodicals each year. Since Bukowski had made it abundantly clear that he did not care about schools, groups or literary movements, he tried most of the newly listed “littles” in *Trace*’s directory, even the ones he criticized harshly. His then friend Jory Sherman summarized Bukowski’s approach quite accurately: “Bukowski was indiscriminate when he began publishing his poetry” (13). For instance, he submitted to “littles” favoring traditional verse: *Simbolica*, *Flame*, *Scimitar and Song*, *Epos*

or *Descant*, among many others; the poem printed in *Flame* was an unusual rhyming artifact, or a “rhymmer,” as Bukowski mockingly called them. One of the poems published in *Descant* was so *unbukowskian* that a long-time Bukowski collector thought it was a misattribution: “then the kelp, bitumen, alabaster, seashells / held court, and then came the shadows, / dark as walls under a dying sun: and bellicose and / vicious the sea pounded the sinking ships” (“Export” 26). Likewise, Bukowski stated in several letters that most of the poems published in *Epos* were too “poetic” or “fancy,” while the work printed in *Simbolica* and *Scimitar and Song* seemed to be written by 19th century authors. However, in spite of the traditional nature of these magazines, the hunger for recognition was definitely stronger than any other consideration.

- 27 Similarly, Bukowski tried well-established magazines or academic journals such as *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Kenyon Review*, *Esquire*, *Harper's*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Yorker*, *Evergreen Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal* or *Impetus*. Though he was not particularly successful with this group of magazines, he submitted to them on several occasions. Bukowski also sent poetry to Beat publications (*Beatitude*, *The Ark*), experimental “littles” (*Semina*), early mimeographed periodicals (*Anagogic & Paideumic Review*, *Merlin's Magic*), racehorse ventures (*American Turf Monthly*), or magazines distributed in barbershops only (*Dare*). He also submitted to little “littles” such as *The Naked Ear*, and others so rare that they are not listed in any checklist, directory or online resource: *Maestro Insana's Review*, *Aristotle's Animals*, *Le Petit Sphinx*, *Wheel*, or *Aquarius*, to mention only a few.
- 28 Most of these “littles” were hastily produced and their readership was limited as their circulation rarely exceeded the three hundred copies. Moreover, their editors lacked funds to publish them periodically and many of them simply disappeared after the first or the second issue. As Gregor argues, “Bukowski would produce volumes of poetry and send them out to be sucked up by the little press industry; they would instantly fall into a deep hole of obscurity and unavailability” (32). Though this is a rather broad generalization—“littles” are accessible in libraries—it does attest to the fleeting nature of many of the little magazines that Bukowski submitted to during this period, and to the difficulty—or even impossibility—in locating some of them.
- 29 Bukowski's relentless literary bombardment was finally rewarded—although slowly so in the late 50s. However, in the early 60s the huge, efficient network of independent editors across the United States began to widely publish him as a “new” voice on the literary scene. As Miles explains, “the same names of contributors occurred time and again [in the “littles”], but none so frequently as Charles Bukowski” (1). Poet and friend John Thomas interviewed Bukowski in 1967 for the underground newspaper *Los Angeles Free Press*; Thomas was aware that the burgeoning Bukowski cult had its roots deeply entrenched in the “littles” and the small press: “For years, nearly every little poetry magazine on the rack has had some of Bukowski's work on exhibit. He's in the good ones, he's in the asswipers, he's in those sad little one-shot collections from the bleakest corners of Scribbler's Limbo” (12). Bukowski's presence in the “littles” had become an undeniable—almost too persistent—reality.
- 30 From the five publications in 1957 to the 41 issues featuring his work in 1969, reaching a peak of 73 periodical appearances in 1968, Bukowski was in 263 separate magazines, totaling 444 issues, in this period (see graph 2, p. 4). Critics were indeed surprised, even aghast, at the number of editors willing to publish Bukowski: “Since he began chopping out poetry at age 35, he has appeared in every important ‘little’ from one coast to the

other,” or “he is, indeed, almost ubiquitous in that select circle of ephemeral but important, off-set, hand-set, and nowadays mimeographed, avant garde journals” (Katz 1848; Taylor 16). These and many other examples point out in the same direction: Bukowski is generally cited as the most widely published poet in the American alternative literary scene in the 60s. He was, critics concluded, the little magazine and small press poet *par excellence*.

- 31 Although Bukowski is usually tagged as a poet, “author” would be indeed a more accurate term. His poetry was unflaggingly promoted, but his short-stories, letters, drawings and doodles, or essays were printed as well. For instance, *Targets*, *Kauri*, *Intrepid*, *El Corno Emplumado*, *Olé*, *Intermission*, *Understatement*, *Renaissance* or *Down Here* published Bukowski’s letters in their main pages. Editor Michael Perkins liked his correspondence so much that he put out a lengthy selection—thirty pages—of the Charles Bukowski / Tom McNamara letters in *Down Here*. Some magazines, such as *Coastlines* or *The Outsider*, ran excerpts from his letters in the Contributors’ Notes section in place of the customary biographical note. His letters were also used as short biographies in some of his early chapbooks, as introductions to other authors’ books, or as stand-alone essays. Furthermore, many editors noticed the increasing presence of his correspondence in the “littles,” and they proceeded to pen parodies of his epistolary style, such as Felix Pollak’s “A Letter from Chuck Buck,” or Phyllis Onstott Arone’s “Life Is a Handkerchief Full of Snot, By Quarrels Bubullski.”
- 32 The fact that little magazine editors published Bukowski extensively and championed his work tirelessly was met with skepticism and harsh criticism on occasion. Quantity did not always equate with quality in Bukowski’s case. “Doubtless the most valid criticism of Bukowski is that he has published too much, i.e too much *bad* stuff” (Dorbin 25). J. Smith maintains that his gigantic output “contain[s] much dross” (15). Other critics have accused Bukowski of being a mere typist, hence his massive, monotonous, coarse, non-literary production. Not surprisingly, his output has earned him the dubious distinction of “America’s sewer Shakespeare” (Edelson 3) or such unflattering depictions as “sloppy Narcissus,” “lazy bum with intellectual flair,” or “poet laureate of sleaze” (qtd. in Freyermuth 22). It goes without saying that it was not mandatory for editors to publish Bukowski’s mediocre material; he wrote countless below average poems and stories, and any sensible editor would not have printed them.
- 33 However, editors were aware of Bukowski’s growing popularity in the underground literary scene, and they rightly surmised that their magazines could benefit from publishing him—even his subpar poetry or fiction. As *Grist* co-editor reminisced, “his name already carried a certain cachet in what was essentially still a pretty small club, so it was good for us publish him” (Kimball). This pattern could reach absurd heights: the editor of *Entrails* magazine printed the second page of a poem believing it to be complete, even though it clearly made no sense, and the same excised version was reprinted a year later in an anthology. No one seemed to notice. Bukowski’s apparently unselfish attitude could be easily glorified: “[Bukowski] helped countless little magazine editors to keep their shoestring operations afloat, as an act of contribution to the profession and service to the community” (Saunders). It is highly unlikely that Bukowski ever wanted to help the “profession” or the “community” deliberately. He did not object to editors taking advantage of his popularity, but he definitely did not intend to help their “littles” when he submitted to them. He simply needed an outlet, and magazines required immediate funds in order to survive. It was indeed a mutually rewarding relationship.

- 34 Since Bukowski appeared in so many periodicals, profits could be expected. Nevertheless, as publishing a little magazine brought about a financial loss by definition, the only payment most authors ever received were their contributor's copies. As Bukowski somehow humorously put it in a letter to J. B. May: "I've earned 47\$ in 20 years of writing, and I think that's 2\$ a year (omitting stamps, paper, envelopes, ribbons, divorces and typewriters)" (Fullerton, 13 Dec. 1959). In 1965, Bukowski mentioned similar figures: "[I] haven't made a dime on poetry ... I've only been writing poetry since I was 35--about ten years ago, and I figure about ten cents a year would be very good pay ... I did get \$2 for a poem once ... and when I was young and used to go the short story--\$25 for one from *Story* and ten bucks for one from *Portfolio*. so I've made around \$80 writing" (*Screams* 175). It is evident, then, that being published in the "littles" was not lucrative. However, Bukowski was paid larger amounts in the late 60s, especially for his contributions to the erotic press. For instance, the "sex papers" paid him 25 dollars per prose column, and the so-called girlie or skin magazines sent him a 200 or 300 dollar check for each short-story. Those were not substantial amounts, but to Bukowski they were infinitely larger than the non-payment from most "littles."
- 35 Even though Bukowski knew that the "littles" would not make him any wealthier, he was perfectly aware that they were the most logical outlet for his massive production, and he was grateful to them for having contributed to make his voice popular in the alternative literary circles. Yet, his assessment of the "littles" published during the late 50s and the 60s was--save very few cases--outright virulent. The following tirade, published in 1963, sums up his view on the subject:
- [Literary magazines] are a scurvy lot, most of them, run by homosexuals, madmen, posers, people with acne, fast-buckers, snivelers, religious old ladies, whippers of hounds and so forth. Mail out a selection of poetry and chances are:
- a. you won't get it back.
 - b. you'll get it back with a promise of publication but it will never be published.
 - c. your work will be returned, after some years, without either a rejection slip or a note.
 - d. they will think you a genius and they will come to your door to look at you and drink your beer and talk.
 - e. you will get semi-literary letters from divorced ladies with children or from ladies with various maladies such as:
 1. missing leg.
 2. overfat butt.
 3. a love for Henry James.
 4. a stock of old poems about the sea and the moon. ("Untitled Contribution" 43)
- 36 The very few "littles" that Bukowski ever praised were those that stressed immediacy and printed his work in record time. Most of the remaining ones were the target of his wrath. He was particularly vexed at the apparent sloppiness of many editors. He could not understand why it took some of them months or years to reply--if they replied--to his inquiries. As Bukowski told editor Jon Webb, "in 1956 I sent *Experiment* a handful of poems that (which) they accepted, and now 5 years later they tell me they are going to publish one of them, which is delayed reaction if I ever saw any" (McCormick, 1961). Similarly, *In/Sert* or *Olivant* were extremely slow to publish him or they simply kept his work and did not print it, without a single note of explanation. This seemed to be a common situation during this period as Bukowski complained about it with resignation: "There are 10 or 12 other magazines that have accepted my stuff but ... there is an immense lag in some cases between acceptance and publication. Much of this type of thing makes one feel as if he

were writing into a void” (*Screams* 11). In some extreme instances, the “immense lag” was followed by a return of material already accepted for publication—as both *Folder* and *Existaria* did in the late 50s. This practice especially infuriated Bukowski, as the unpublished correspondence from the period reveals. Interestingly, he committed the same editorial sin—that of returning previously accepted poetry—when he co-edited *Harlequin* in 1957.

- 37 Bukowski’s stance remained virtually unchanged throughout his career, professing no love for the hastily produced periodicals that zealously published him. He complained to J. B. May that “the littles are an irresponsible bunch guided by young men ... starting with fiery ideals and large ideas ... and finally putting out a tacked-together, hacked-together poor selection of typographically botched poems before getting married and disappearing from the scene” (Fullerton, 2 Jan. 1960). A decade later, Bukowski claimed that the “littles” from the 50s were “a much finer stomping ground” than the contemporary literary magazines because they had become “a dumping ground of very poor literature and poetry” (“Dirty” 76). In 1973, in a rather predictable volte-face, Bukowski compared the “littles” of the 70s to their predecessors, though he chose to praise the ones from the beginning of the century instead of those from the 50s, denoting his preference for the “littles” from *any* period to the current ones, as if he were completely disenchanted with the magazines he was submitting to at the time. Almost two decades later, his view was the same: “[A] guy says he’s starting up a mag ... [and] you send him something. And then the ‘magazine’ arrives ... It’s just sheets of paper run off a mimeo machine and stapled together. Not even a cover” (*Reach* 208). Indeed, the situation worsened considerably during the so-called xerox revolution of the 90s because photocopying allowed most editors to produce magazines in an inexpensive and immediate fashion.
- 38 Despite Bukowski’s somewhat harsh criticism of the “littles,” uncalled for on occasion, they were undoubtedly instrumental in enhancing his reputation as a writer and helping him become the most published author of the 60s. Bukowski himself did acknowledge that some “littles,” such as *Olé*, the *Wormwood Review* or *The Outsider*, were particularly relevant; he considered that their contribution to the literary magazine revolution of the 60s was disproportionately larger than the insignificant role of a myriad “littles” that had been long forgotten, and he even lavished praise on them by claiming that they “print[ed] a living and electric literature” (“Who’s Big” 9). Had it not been for his regular appearances in those periodicals, and experience the ensuing feedback which allowed him to fully blossom as an author, Bukowski might not have achieved such a popular status by the late 60s, when he was hailed as a “cult figure” (Miles 174). Bukowski was an unmistakable product of the small press, an unparalleled phenomenon in the “littles” that proliferated in the United States during the 60s, and their impact on his early career proved to be invaluable in both developing his talent and turning him into an international icon.

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ABSTRACTS

The little magazines were instrumental in turning Charles Bukowski into a hugely popular figure in American letters and, yet, their significance in Bukowski's early career has been largely overlooked. For Bukowski, the little magazines were the ideal outlet for his prolific output, and their editors, who saw him as a spiritual leader, championed his work so vehemently that he eventually became the most published author of the 1960s—his indisputable rise to fame in the alternative literary scene is displayed in the graphs provided. Bukowski's position was ambiguous: he needed those periodicals to satisfy his hunger for exposure and recognition and, yet, he attacked their editors for their allegedly unskillful productions, especially in the case of the mimeographs. This previously uncharted territory is illustrated by means of a critical and historical journey through the main magazines of the period, stressing how zealously they published Bukowski's work and helped him become an international icon.

INDEX

Keywords: Charles Bukowski, little magazines, mimeograph, periodicals, small press

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