

go back to the row, they'd just walk up into that hill  
and they lived there like animals --  
part of it was a parkground and some of them lived out  
of the trashcans and others trekked down to the row for  
feed and then returned  
and  
they all sold their blood for  
wine ("the one who gets my transfusion is going to be  
drunk for a long time!" was the old  
joke.)

there must have been 18 or 20 of them up there and  
they were more or less as happy as corporate lawyers  
stockbrokers or airline  
pilots.

civilization has sections just like an orange and when  
you peel the skin away, pull it apart, chew at it, the  
finalization is a mouthful of seed which you can either  
swallow or spit  
out.

most swallow it  
like the guys at North Avenue  
21.

#### PRACTICE

in that depression neighborhood I had two buddies  
Eugene and Frank  
and I had wild fist fights with each of  
them  
once or twice a week.  
the fights lasted 3 or 4 hours and we came out  
with  
smashed noses, fattened lips, black eyes, sprained  
wrists, bruised knuckles, purple  
welts.

our parents said nothing, let us fight on and  
on  
watching disinterestedly and  
finally going back to their newspapers  
or their radios or their thwarted sex lives,  
they only became angry if we tore or ruined our  
clothing and for that, and only for that, we understood  
them.

but Eugene and Frank and I  
we had some good work-outs  
we rumbled through the evenings, crashing through  
hedges, fighting along the asphalt, over the



curbings and into strange front and backyards of  
unknown homes, the dogs barking, the people screaming at  
us.

we were  
maniacal, we never quit until the call for supper  
which none of us could afford to  
miss.

anyhow, Eugene became a Commander in the  
Navy and Frank became a Supreme Court Justice, State of  
California, and I fiddled with the  
poem.

#### HOW I GOT STARTED

it has taken me decades to realize  
why I was usually chosen over the  
6 or 7 candidates for those  
paltry shipping clerk jobs  
in those small business houses  
across the nation.

first, I was big --  
which meant I could lift heavy  
objects.

second, I was ugly --  
which meant I was no threat to  
the secretaries.

third, I looked dumb --  
which meant I was too stupid  
to steal.

if I had been running a business  
and a guy like me had come to apply  
for a job opening  
I would have hired him  
right away.

which is rather  
what I ended up doing anyhow  
in another kind of  
business.

-- Charles Bukowski

San Pedro CA