

## Book Review

*Slouching Toward Nirvana--  
New Poems*  
by Charles Bukowski

Aptly put I believe since "nirvana"  
is the ability to achieve  
a state of bliss no matter  
what may be amiss  
in the world around you.

Bukowski offers us  
a superb eye  
for interesting, relevant  
detail, a virtuostic  
honing of words.  
Meanings are straight-  
forward, yet prompt us  
to think in layers.

This combination should create  
outstanding poetry, and yet  
as I turn pages randomly, read  
here and there, something  
is missing.

He provides us with a clue:  
    "to me  
there's no agony  
no struggle  
as I write."

And I ask myself: if  
there is no agony,  
or struggle, how  
can we expect to find  
    humanity?

I thereby come to understand  
why Bukowski's reminiscences  
have been received so warmly  
by a culture that expresses  
only contempt for anyone  
who isn't as rich as we are—  
or imagine ourselves to be.  
This is a proper home  
for the poet who expresses  
only contempt for anyone  
who isn't as smart as he is—  
or. . . .

"Nirvana"—the ability to achieve  
a state of bliss no matter  
what may be amiss  
in the world around you.

On the back of the dust jacket  
Bukowski marvels that he can  
drive a \$35,000 car, pay  
\$20,000 in estimated taxes  
every three months, while  
still being able (and I quote)  
"to write some of the best  
poetry of our time."

After recovering from  
the immodesty of these words,  
I tell myself that—at least  
speaking in terms of craft—  
there might be some justification  
for his assertion. Nevertheless,  
after reading enough  
to be sure I am not  
judging prematurely  
I close the volume,  
put it up on my shelf  
with some considerable relief.

I will not be subjected  
to further drippings  
from this arrogant mind.

The best poetry of our time,  
I decide, needs to achieve more  
than simply holding up a mirror—  
even a very, very shiny mirror—  
in which we might recognize  
the world we inhabit. It should  
give us some indication  
that the poet actually cares.

Steve Bloom  
December 2005