

# Arthur Vogelsang

## GERALD STERN, CHARLES BUKOWSKI, D.H. LAWRENCE, AND THE SNAKE

The summer was planning to murder us in today's dusk  
With its flat tail shaped wide *and* narrow like Los Angeles on a map  
And that very size and the big tail was coming down from the sky  
And around the corners of endless two-story buildings in other  
Words it was everywhere in the dusk as Jerry from Pennsylvania and I  
Had on the air-conditioning very high in the car as we searched  
For one of dead Bukowski's ex-houses. The traffic was the body  
Of the animal that owned the tail and we wanted to  
See the apartment court with small houses in two rows that looked like a motel  
That I knew was in East Hollywood on two streets,  
A little one ending perpendicular at a slightly bigger one  
That I won't tell you the names of. A paw  
Seemed to come down on the car at Sunset and Gordon  
And the rest of the bright, hot animal eased its fat and muscles and teats  
Down around us and rested and waved its manta ray tail  
Exactly over the city in exactly the shape of the city.  
It was as still and stymied as it gets. We sat still on Sunset.  
Fuck, I said. I'm going to say fuck too, Jerry said.  
Do you know exactly where Bukowski's ex-house is,  
He asked. Yes, I said. We got to another little street  
That I won't tell you the name of, and it was empty except for five parked cars  
And as I knew led to a neighborhood of numerous drab apartment  
Courts with drab small houses in two rows around a central  
Long narrow drab courtyard or long narrow portico  
All of which Jerry was disposed to admire and love and would have tried  
To live there in his previous life circumstances when he had no house  
And had not yet written poems as good as Lawrence's or Bukowski's  
And I went down the street free of the paw and hideous body of the animal  
But not the tail in the sky and parked in front of the second long  
Court. There, I lied, this one. Were you ever in it, do you know which house,  
Jerry asked. No, it's his address, I only had correspondence with him, I  
Partially lied. And reader, reader of "The Snake,"

What do I have to be expiated, what? If  
Anything. The need to write a poem was strong today  
So I did. If I didn't, I would've felt quite bad  
Sick, head sailing away, tight trunk, tingle-face, but Jerry  
Would never have known of the lie as he will in a time after  
This poem is printed, he would always have  
Continued to feel good about and approved of the house Bukowski  
Had not lived in but which looked like the one he had lived in, I swear to  
You, reader, it does look so. And this, Jerry swung one big arm toward the  
Windshield, is East Hollywood? Yes, I lied,  
And then I said something extraordinary and embarrassing,  
I said out loud "Its big tail is coming down from the sky  
And its paw on the roof is restraining the car  
And the rest of the animal is surrounding the car with transparent flesh  
So you can't see it but we can feel it, can't we?"  
In the resulting silence we sat awhile in homage.  
The quote was not the sort of thing you'd memorize or even a quote.

# ROCK HALL

You have given me a black boat and a white boat so mood  
Can govern how I look rowing myself toward town in the short  
Distance. The inlet, called a harbor here, is choppy gray  
Choppy green choppy blue, however the sun feels when it gets around to feeling,  
But the wind is steady and the water's difficult motion is constant as love  
Is often constant over generations of a perplexing family, you can count  
On choppy but not on blue, hardly ever on green, and just sometimes  
On gray. Actually, as you know, there is one boat.  
I love it very much and I have called it a black boat and a white boat.

# THE TWO ARTISTS, I MEAN THE THREE ARTISTS

The brother and sister were famous and frightening  
To read or see. Their bodies were normal. Their  
Products, I mean, the sayings in one case, the images in the other,  
And the shared family brand of huge hot dogs and strange clothes.  
They had different names and looked like somebody  
Else, not each other. Their immense wealth was the sixth  
Most threatening thing about them. I had to do  
With them. I underestimated the brother, and his sayings came to  
Govern the country near the end of me  
When the brother was long gone and the sister longer.  
That was her fault, the only thing wrong with her,  
That she was dead, yeah, and dead too soon. Oh  
Yeah. I was in love. She was (would have been) older  
Considerably. I almost met the brother. I  
Was a student and afraid and did not show up. Later  
I was barely known and had one-ninetieth  
His power and one-one-hundred-eightieth his  
Sister's, but it was enough for him to answer,  
I know you are trying to get close to her,  
She's dead, and I don't have any of her things,  
Certainly none of her images.  
Why aren't you interested in my sayings?  
(I have forgotten whether he wrote this  
Last sentence to me, or I wrote it to him.) Shit,  
I *already know* she's dead, she's gone, but I realized fully  
At last. Did this help me? His sayings  
Were like that, they could help anyone a great deal.  
Well, now I was afraid but free, an improvement, big deal. I've  
Nearly forgotten, my power came from sayings *and* images *both*,  
And it would have been nice to meet them  
Say meet them both in one room, and talk about this,  
They might have been interested in the two things in one person, me,  
And hear the sound of her voice,  
Even though I think they were rarely, if ever, together,  
When alive, and I was barking up the wrong tree in reality.

# THE CELL PHONE AND THE SUN AS ALLIES WIN AND WE LOSE

The sun used hydrogen flame throwers fighting  
With the air and forced it to be orange.

The air held its ground, then left,  
And called that victory. I was the air. Phone

Booths were filled with nothing per usual and were thus the empty air,  
My precious scarce ally, booths.

In other words toward evening  
Of a smoggy day the wind stopped

And a building in the distance was orange,  
Only *it* was orange, with grey for the green below it

And the concrete below it, nice base colors in which it sat.  
One of us said that bldg. way off must be metal,

It is the only thing that is orange in the sky or on the  
Sea off a ways or in the streets which look just like streets.

One said it was an orange Antonioni bldg.  
David walked up to us and said ah

And stood with us and said ah.  
Claudia said yeah, yes it is,

The only person who said yeah and yes  
In the same sentence a lot, I can hear her say it.

**Blacked Out** was far away but would have said, starstruck though  
She is powerful, I guess you all talk like this all the time.

She had heard **Blacked Out Too** trying to say something, so to speak.  
She sounded like **Blacked Out Also** or Dave, the other Dave,

And these last four friends, Dave and the three **Blacked Outs**,  
Sounded like each other, like orange metal rubbing orange metal.

The bldg. was quite big, dear friends, and far away,  
And, our boots on the ground, in the future, in our next tour,

In all the streets here to the bldg., you won't know what  
The dangerous green telephone booths are on each street

But you may remember the orange Antonioni bldg. if  
You should come upon a *red* booth (hideous! be

Alert) or *never*, never come on a red one  
On a street with no red and no green, and no calls

Jangling without purpose like freebies waiting in a private enclosure  
Where you could sometimes speak to a stranger

If, as has happened to all of us, the phone was ringing,  
No one standing in there, empty,

And you could have said anything to whoever was on that other end  
Before the disappearance of the allies of the air and me.