



THE PLEASURES OF
THE DAMNED

POEMS, 1951–1993

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edited by john martin



CANONGATE

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the mockingbird

the mockingbird had been following the cat
all summer
mocking mocking mocking
teasing and cocksure;
the cat crawled under rockers on porches
tail flashing
and said something angry to the mockingbird
which I didn't understand.

yesterday the cat walked calmly up the driveway
with the mockingbird alive in its mouth,
wings fanned, beautiful wings fanned and flopping,
feathers parted like a woman's legs,
and the bird was no longer mocking,
it was asking, it was praying
but the cat
striding down through centuries
would not listen.

I saw it crawl under a yellow car
with the bird
to bargain it to another place.

summer was over.

on the sidewalk and in the sun

I have seen an old man around town recently
carrying an enormous pack.
he uses a walking stick
and moves up and down the streets
with this pack strapped to his back.

I keep seeing him.

if he'd only throw that pack away, I think,
he'd have a chance, not much of a chance
but a chance.

and he's in a tough district—east Hollywood.
they aren't going to give him a
dry bone in east Hollywood.

he is lost. with that pack.
on the sidewalk and in the sun.

god almighty, old man, I think, throw away that
pack.

then I drive on, thinking of my own
problems.

the last time I saw him he was not walking.
it was ten thirty a.m. on north Bronson and
hot, very hot, and he sat on a little ledge, bent,
the pack still strapped to his back.

I slowed down to look at his face.
I had seen one or two other men in my life

with looks on their faces like
that.

I speeded up and turned on the
radio.

I knew that look.

I would never see him again.

dark night poem

they say that
nothing is wasted:
either that
or
it all is.

(uncollected)

the last days of the suicide kid

I can see myself now
after all these suicide days and nights,
being wheeled out of one of those sterile rest homes
(of course, this is only if I get famous and lucky)
by a subnormal and bored nurse . . .
there I am sitting upright in my wheelchair . . .
almost blind, eyes rolling backward into the dark part of my skull
 looking
for the mercy of death . . .

“Isn’t it a lovely day, Mr. Bukowski?”

“O, yeah, yeah . . .”

the children walk past and I don’t even exist
and lovely women walk by
with big hot hips
and warm buttocks and tight hot everything
praying to be loved
and I don’t even
exist . . .

“It’s the first sunlight we’ve had in 3 days,
Mr. Bukowski.”

“Oh, yeah, yeah.”

there I am sitting upright in my wheelchair,
myself whiter than this sheet of paper,
bloodless,
brain gone, gamble gone, me, Bukowski,
gone . . .

“Isn’t it a lovely day, Mr. Bukowski?”

“O, yeah, yeah . . .” pissing in my pajamas, slop drooling out of
my mouth.

2 young schoolboys run by—

“Hey, did you see that old guy?”

“Christ, yes, he made me sick!”

after all the threats to do so
somebody else has committed suicide for me
at last.

the nurse stops the wheelchair, breaks a rose from a nearby bush,
puts it in my hand.

I don’t even know
what it is. it might as well be my pecker
for all the good
it does.