

A Successful Tandem: Charles Bukowski and Marvin Malone*

Marvin Malone, who would play a key role in Bukowski's career by publishing him in almost a hundred *Wormwood Review* issues, discovered Bukowski in either *Hearse* or *The Naked Ear*, depending on Malone's recollection. In 1973, he wrote that "I first became aware of Bukowski's work in the little magazine, *Hearse*, in 1959" (Bukowski, "Narrative Account" 2). In another version, he apparently saw a poem by Bukowski for the first time in *The Naked Ear* (1957) while he was trying to track down Henry Miller periodical appearances -Malone was an avid collector of little magazines. Judson Crews, *The Naked Ear* editor, sent Malone copies of *Existaria* and *Hearse*, both with Bukowski contributions, telling him that *Hearse* was *The Naked Ear*'s "spiritual successor" (Malone, "Bukowski Comes to Wormwood" 14). Malone was in touch with *Existaria*'s editor, Carl Larsen, who was about to publish Bukowski in *rongWrong*, and Larsen furnished him with Bukowski's address. Malone sent Bukowski a few complimentary *Wormwood Review* issues, and Bukowski then submitted his poetry to Malone. A few years later, the Bukowski poems that Jon Webb discarded for his Loujon Press publications, were sent to Malone; "since that time, Wormwood has always had a thick reserve of unpublished Bukowski poems" ("Bukowski Comes to Wormwood" 15). It seems evident that the little magazine editorial network of the time was indeed efficient.

Both Webb's *The Outsider* and Malone's *Wormwood Review* would be pivotal little magazines in Bukowski's early career, and, alongside Douglas Blazek's *Olé*, they were the very few alternative publications that Bukowski would consistently praise in print. For instance, in a letter dated July 25, 1968 to Steve Richmond, his stance was unequivocal: "I pick up the average little and just yawn myself into hopelessness -there are exceptions like Wormwood, Klacto, Outsider but for each of these there are a dozen others, half-heartily

done” (Richmond). Similarly to *Olé*, and in a lesser degree to *The Outsider*, the *Wormwood Review* was, as Malone put it, “a one-man operation, with the editor functioning in all capacities -reading submissions, editing, typing camera-ready copy, designing/preparing cover art, maintaining correspondence and subscription lists, addressing mailing envelopes, plus functioning as a clerk, accountant and fall guy” (“The Why” 223). Malone was an opinionated editor who lay down a set of guidelines to publish *Wormwood Review* by which he would firmly abide. Apart from not publishing friends or other editors, one of the main aims was to attain an unmistakable identity that would allow the little magazine to become a unique publication: “Wormwood tries to achieve a special tone without being characterized as a sewing circle, vanity, academic, daisy chain, vested purpose or political magazine” (Malone, “Charles de Gaulle” 231). Malone apparently accomplished such a goal, and Bukowski would stress his integrity and persistency in an essay about the little magazines published in the early 70s: “Quietly and without weeping or ranting or bitching or quitting or pausing, or without braggadocio letters (as most do) about being arrested for driving drunk on a bicycle in Pacific Palisades ... Malone has simply gone on and on and compiled an exact and lively talent, issue after issue” (“Upon the Mathematics” 17). Bukowski not only admired Malone’s perseverance and his consistent editorial policies, but he also regarded highly the fact that Malone seemed utterly uninterested in publishing well-known authors, as Ben Pleasants remarked in his controversial book about Bukowski’s life: “[Bukowski] said most editors were idiots; they published names, not poems. They looked for the names before they read the poems. He told me the two editors who did not fit into that mold were Jon Webb and Marvin Malone” (148). Indeed, Webb was one of the very few editors Bukowski repeatedly and overtly praised, comparing him to Burnett and Mencken. Apparently, Bukowski believed that Malone was in the same editorial league: “[Bukowski] said that Malone was an old-fashioned editor like Whit Burnett, who read every manuscript and answered every letter”

(149). Bukowski, an eager correspondent himself, was delighted to find an editor who did reply to his inquiries and submissions in a timely fashion, unlike many other negligent little magazine editors.

As in Webb's or Blazek's case, the gratitude was mutual. One of the reasons that might explain why Bukowski continued to support those editors was the fact that they published his work in most, if not all, issues of their magazines. Malone was no exception, and he would champion Bukowski's poetry from 1962, when he appeared for the first time in the *Wormwood Review*, to the very last issue he edited in the 90s, when, after Bukowski's death in 1994, he posthumously printed his material. As Brian Dalton noted, "there's absolutely no question about Marvin Malone's place in spreading the word about Bukowski ... Malone stuck his neck out when plenty of others were letting Bukowski suffer the lengthy aftermath of their rejection slips" (46). While this assertion is partially inaccurate since Bukowski had been published in a considerable number of little magazines by 1962, it is fundamentally true that Malone contributed to Bukowski's growing popularity in the alternative literary scene. Dalton summed up Bukowski's appearances in the *Wormwood Review* thus: "there were 137 issues total (including "double" issues). The contributor who appeared in the most issues ... was Charles Bukowski (97 issues, with 4 chapbooks and 5 special center sections)" (47). According to my own calculations, Malone published Bukowski in 95 issues, totaling 397 poems, one letter-essay and one short-story. The first issue came out in 1962 and the last one in 1999, edited by Malone's daughter, Christa Malone. In the 60s, for instance, 40 of his poems were printed in 18 *Wormwood Review* issues, and in the 80s Malone would publish him in 28 issues, featuring 140 poems. The *Wormwood Review* issue #122-123, a Bukowski-only chapbook titled *People Poems* (1991), contained 43 poems; issue #71, a previous chapbook titled *Legs, Hips and Behind* (1978), printed 38 poems. These figures reveal that Bukowski was indeed the author who was

published in most *Wormwood Review* issues, which fully attests to Malone's unshakeable faith in his work. It was one of the few mutually rewarding literary -and epistolary- relationships Bukowski enjoyed in the publishing scene. Not surprisingly, in 1970 he categorically concluded that "I would place *Wormwood* on top along with the old *Story* magazine, *The Outsider*, *Accent*, *Decade*, as a very definite force in the moulding of a lively and meaningful literature" (Malone, "Unpublished" 4 Apr. 1970). Undoubtedly, Bukowski's unabashed contention speaks volumes for the *Wormwood Review* significance in American letters.

Abel Debritto

[First published in Beat Scene 63, 2010.]

Works cited

- Bukowski, Charles. "Narrative account of career." Unpublished "account" submitted as part of the application for the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship, 1973: 1-3.
- . "Upon the Mathematics of the Breath and the Way." *Small Press Review* 4.4 (1973): 16-17.
- Dalton, Brian. "Marvin Malone's *Wormwood Review*." *Beat Scene*, Charles Bukowski Special issue (Mar. 2004): 46-47.
- Malone, Marvin. "Bukowski Comes to Wormwood." *All's Normal Here. A Charles Bukowski Primer*. Ed. Loss Pequeño Glazier. Fremont, CA: Rudy Duck Press, 1985. 14-16.
- . "Charles de Gaulle and *The Wormwood Review*." *California Librarian* Oct. 1970: 230-35.
- . Unpublished correspondence made available to the author.
- . "The Why and Wherefore of *Wormwood*." *Green Isle in the Sea. An Informal History of the Alternative Press, 1960-85*. Ed. Diane Kruchkow and Curt Johnson. Highland Park, IL: December Press, 1986. 223-231.
- Richmond, Steve. Unpublished correspondence made available to the author.
- Pleasants, Ben. *Visceral Bukowski. Inside the Sniper Landscape of L.A. Writers*. Northville, MI: Sun Dog Press, 2004.