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***Greetings from Wisdom, Montana* by Ruth Rudner (review)**

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

264 Western American Literature Hollywood, By Charles Bukowski. (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989. 239 pages, \$11.00.) "I'm afraid of Hollywood," says Hank Chinaski in Charles Bukowski's latest novel Hollywood. He ought to be. The momentum of the Hollywood dealmaking process contains a nastiness that dwarfs the personality of even the most powerful player. And Bukowski has made a career out of celebrating the small-time nastiness of his alter-ego and by-now-familiar character Chinaski. Like Bukowski himself, Chinaski is a minor cult figure—a blowhard writer and self-proclaimed alcoholic well-acquainted with L.A.'s skidrow flophouses and their denizens. Bukowski's 1987 film Barfly was a semi-autobiographical tour of this world. The plot of Hollywood recounts the making of a movie that sounds virtually identical to Barfly. Chinaski is the picture's screenwriter. In Hollywood Chinaski brags that in the past he's been a "really top-notch fuck-up." But now the "fuck-up" is cutting Hollywood deals and driving a Beemer. "We thought they were shit... and

now we are,” Chinaski’s anachronistically compliant wife says as they shmooze at Musso Franks, the legendary Hollywood watering hole. Selling out is probably the oldest—and therefore the most treacherous—theme in the history of the Hollywood novel. A modicum of success seems to have taken the edge off Bukowski’s rage, and rage is generally what propels the best novels on selling out. The most affecting moments in Hollywood are those that occur on a small scale. Chinaski runs from a barroom crowd of his biker fans, unable to respond to their need for an encounter with him. He wants to throw his arms around them “like some Dostoevsky,” but “the world had somehow gone too far, and spontaneous kindness could, never be so easy. It was something we would all have to work for once again” he thinks as he makes his exit. One thing success hasn’t blunted is Bukowski’s brutal and unapologetic sexism. Chinaski aligns himself with those who have “no fear of the Feminists (sic) . . . the defenders of maleness and balls in the U.S.” Don’t look for Bukowski’s aging crotch rocket to pop up in anybody’s canon of the politically correct.

JANIS HELBERT
Pacific Palisades, California
Greetings from Wisdom, Montana. By Ruth Rudner. (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum, Inc., 1989. 164 pages, \$15.95.) Ruth Rudner, a New Yorker and a freelance journalist who has published guidebooks concerning the Austrian Alps and the Montana Rockies, seeks more ambitious themes with this volume: travel, social analysis, confession, self-exploration, self-transcendence. In its fifteen short chapters, dated between Reviews 265 June, 1983 and August, 1985, she introduces a broad range of subjects commonly associated with the West: the beauty of mountain landscapes, the tonic of wilderness, the superiority of life under the Big Sky compared with other American possibilities, the innocence of small-town life, the necessity of questing, bridge-burning as a way to self-fulfillment. Because they are so common, because they have in fact been stereotyped, every effect in Rudner’s book depends upon the treatment of those themes, the particulars by which she seeks to bring them to life. And there are some very good examples of nature description—as in “The Road to Wisdom”—and some very effective vignettes, such as her initial visit to a Bozeman psychologist in “The Shrink,” and her first weekend with a future lover named Bruce in “Fourth of July.” But though those themes surface repeatedly, Rudner’s book is not actually about Montana, or wisdom. The chapters together present a fragmented life and document a great loneliness. Montana emerges as an alternative to homicidal and then suicidal compulsions: the breakup of a marriage and the “unbearable sorrow” that follows leave no choice but to break with New York, either to Europe or Montana. The former is tested and rejected. Though Montana is chosen and flattered with some very quotable rhetoric (“ . . . my shyness had vanished. Montana had given me an identity,” and the Turnerian “it is on the edge of wildness that the American spirit is most at home”), the chapters themselves repeatedly show the shyness, the failed attempts...

Hollywood. By Charles Bukowski. (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989. 239 pages, \$11.00.)

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He ought to be. The momentum of the Hollywood dealmaking process contains a nastiness that dwarfs the personality of even the most powerful player. And Bukowski has made a career out of celebrating the small-time nastiness of his alter-ego and by-now-familiar character Chinaski.

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In *Hollywood* Chinaski brags that in the past he's been a "really top-notch fuck-up." But now the "fuck-up" is cutting Hollywood deals and driving a Beemer. "We thought they were shit . . . and now we are," Chinaski's anachronistically compliant wife says as they shmooze at Musso Franks, the legendary Hollywood watering hole.

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The most affecting moments in *Hollywood* are those that occur on a small scale. Chinaski runs from a barroom crowd of his biker fans, unable to respond to their need for an encounter with him. He wants to throw his arms around them "like some Dostoevsky," but "the world had somehow gone too far, and spontaneous kindness could never be so easy. It was something we would all have to work for once again" he thinks as he makes his exit.

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