

Representation of Women in the Work of Charles Bukowski

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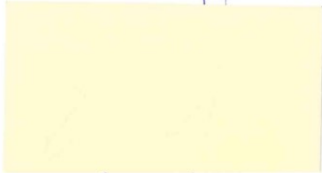
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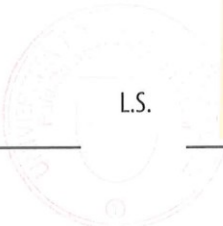
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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na analýzu tří románů Charlese Bukowského, mezi které patří *Poštovní úřad*, *Faktótum* a *Ženy*. Cílem této práce je detailně porovnat vztahy mezi protagonistou děl a ženami, které se v knihách vyskytují. Zároveň poukazuje, do jaké míry byla jeho díla autobiografická, na základě dopisové korespondence a výpovědím blízkých přátel samotného Bukowského, či díky tvrzením žen z jeho předešlých vztahů. V neposlední řadě se práce zaměřuje na vlivy, které zformovaly autorův přístup k ženám a také k životu samotnému.

Klíčová slova: Charles Bukowski, *Poštovní úřad*, *Faktótum*, *Ženy*, feminismus, misogynie, společnost, pracovní třída, alkoholismus, dětství

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis includes the analysis of three novels written by Charles Bukowski, namely *Post Office*, *Factotum* and *Women*. The main aim of my thesis is to compare in detail the relationship between the protagonist and female characters of the above-mentioned novels. In addition, this thesis explores to which extent Bukowski's novels are autobiographical, based on testimony of close friends of Bukowski, letter correspondence or according to statements of women from his previous relationships. Lastly, it deals with factors that possibly influenced the author's approach to women and life in general.

Keywords: Charles Bukowski, *Post Office*, *Factotum*, *Women*, feminism, misogyny, society, working class, alcoholism, childhood

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's/Master's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	9
1 WORKS OF BUKOWSKI.....	10
1.1 ON WRITING.....	10
1.2 DIRTY REALISM.....	12
2 ANALYSIS	15
2.1 POST OFFICE.....	15
2.2 FACTOTUM	24
2.3 WOMEN	28
3 BEHAVIORAL INFLUENCES	33
3.1 CHILDHOOD.....	33
3.2 ALCOHOL.....	36
CONCLUSION	39
BIBLIOGRAPHY	40

INTRODUCTION

Charles Bukowski was a controversial writer, mainly known for his honest depiction and his insensitive treatment of women in his works. The behaviour of his protagonist towards female characters was the primary source of Bukowski's bad reputation, especially among female readers and critics. Most of them associated the behaviour of Henry Chinaski, the protagonist of his novels, with the personality of Bukowski himself. However, some people believe that his writing has a different meaning and that there is a possible explanation for it. Bukowski claimed that his works, especially novels, are autobiographical but the extent to which those statements are true are explored in the book of Howard Sounes called *Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life*, which will be the main source of this thesis. Another important source is Russell Harrison's *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* or *Charles Bukowski, Outsider Literature, and the Beat Movement* by Paul Clements.

The first chapter gives insight into the beginning of his career as a writer. The possible explanation for his reputation of a dirty writer is also discussed, along with the evolution of his writing and the series of failures that lead to his success in the end. Even though Bukowski disliked being associated with any group of writers, the possible categorization and his similarities with the Beat Generation and Dirty Realism are mentioned. As the title suggests, the primary purpose of this thesis is to find out how women are represented in his works. However, since it is not possible to include all of his works, the following chapter analyses three of his novels, namely *Post Office*, *Factotum* and *Women*. These novels are chronologically ordered as they were published, so that the progress of his writing appears clear. In all the above-mentioned novels, the attention is focused on the multiple female characters and the protagonist's behaviour towards them. Each female character is treated differently and most of them unfold parts of Chinaski's complex personality. Not only his negative treatment of women is shown but also the positive one, which is usually overlooked. The last chapter deals with possible circumstances that influenced Bukowski's writing. Thus, the main difference between Bukowski and his *alter ego*, which is the secondary purpose of this thesis, is revealed. His childhood is identified as one of the possible elements responsible for shaping his writing, because of the violence, betrayal and bullying from other children that Bukowski experienced in his early years. The last discussed reason is his alcohol addiction that rapidly transformed his sensitivity into aggression. All the points are based on the testimony of women who had been romantically involved with him, his close friends or from the letter correspondence.

1 WORKS OF BUKOWSKI

1.1 On writing

Heinrich Karl Bukowski later renamed Henry Charles Bukowski, was born in 1920 in Germany and only three year after his birth he moved with his family to America.¹ Bukowski is mainly known as a poet, but he also wrote short stories and a few novels. He was an introverted and sensitive man, known as a crude and offensive writer.² His talent for writing had already been noticed at high school's class of creative writing and after his graduation in 1936, one of his first stories was published in the student magazine.³ At first, he could not gain recognition and struggled to get his work published. During his teenage years, Bukowski focused on short stories, which he was regularly sending to numerous magazines but without success. Bukowski himself offered a possible explanation for why his stories were not published at first: "They were rambling. The plot and the content were secondary. It was a vomiting up, an effusion of feeling."⁴ He could not stand regular jobs either as evident in his works. His hatred against work was so strong that even though his stories and poems did not get published, he declared he would rather starve and keep writing.⁵ For some time he wrote columns to few porn magazines like *Hustler*, however this represented an unfulfilling period of Bukowski's life because he disliked writing stories concerning only sex. Most of them are poorly written mainly because his sole purpose was getting paid.⁶ The stories he wrote for *Hustler*, mainly his column called *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, probably forged Bukowski's reputation of a "dirty writer."⁷ These stories were later published as a book with the same title.⁸ Bukowski even wrote a shocking story about child sexual abuse, yet again for *Hustler*, which gained him even bigger recognition, but worsened his already bad reputation. However, he aspired to write about something more than sex, and the attention he got from *Hustler* columns motivated him to do so. He was aware of the fact that

¹ Michael Hemmingson, *The Dirty Realism Duo: Charles Bukowski and Raymond Carver on Aesthetics of the Ugly* (San Bernardino: The Borgo Press, 2008), 16.

² Paul Clements, *Charles Bukowski, Outsider Literature, and the Beat Movement* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 1.

³ Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 13.

⁴ Ben Pleasants, *Visceral Bukowski: Inside the Sniper Landscape of L.A. Writers* (Northville: Sun Dog Press, 2004), 218.

⁵ Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 21.

⁶ *Ibid.*, XII.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁸ Gay Brewer, *Charles Bukowski: Twayne's United States Authors Series*. (Woodbridge: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 45.

outrageous topics attract the audience. Thus, he used his skills of a “dirty writer” also in his later works.⁹

He was mainly influenced by Ernest Hemingway and John Fante because they share with him a similar style of writing, which includes honesty, short and emotionally neutral sentences or dialogues.¹⁰ However, he also believed that humour is necessary to make the creation interesting, so his works are melancholic and humorous at the same time.¹¹ As well as poetry, stories of Bukowski include women, fights, alcohol, writing, introspection, life from the perspective of a working class, etc. In most of his novels, Henry Chinaski is presented as a protagonist, through whom Bukowski narrates his own life experiences and events. Even though many readers believe that stories included in the book are undoubtedly real, Howard Sounes found enough evidence to prove the opposite. His books are indeed inspired by his own stories but most of them are exaggerated and others are completely made up.¹² It seems Bukowski claimed on purpose that Chinaski portrays himself, to provoke and show his potential ideals. The way he shaped life in his books, created an illusion that blurred the lines between Bukowski’s real life and the fictive one of Henry Chinaski.¹³ Another evidence that Bukowski liked to shock and provoke, was his interest and admiration of extreme personalities, such as Hitler.¹⁴

Beyond his unsuccessful start of his carrier as a writer, Bukowski’s endurance and refusal to stop striving, gained him popularity and success in the end.¹⁵ Bukowski said that he stopped writing for a long period of ten years due to his initial failure, but this information is not true. Reversely, he turned himself into a productive machine and wrote hundreds of poems and short stories, and many of them were successfully published.¹⁶ He believed alcohol helped him to write better and that very likely reinforced his addiction. Moreover, alcohol enabled him to escape the woeful world he lived in. Even though drinking supposedly improved his state of mind, it caused trouble in his relationships and at his workplace. These issues played a huge role in his books, as much as his alcoholism.¹⁷ Bukowski suffered also with

⁹ Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 147-148.

¹⁰ Ibid., XIV.

¹¹ Ibid., 83.

¹² Ibid., XI.

¹³ Ibid., XV.

¹⁴ Ibid., 20.

¹⁵ Abel Debritto, *Charles Bukowski, King of the Underground: From Obscurity to Literary Icon*. (New York: Springer, 2013), 47.

¹⁶ Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 25.

¹⁷ Ibid., XIII.

depression and in 1970, one year before his first novel was published, he considered committing suicide. Even though his book *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* was successful, he still did not have enough money and at the same time, his relationship fell apart. His period of suffering and his frustration was expressed in Bukowski's letter to Neeli Cherkovski, where he wrote: "I thought the life of writer would really be a thing, it's simply hell. I'm just a cheap twittering slave."¹⁸

Bukowski was in a conflict with the whole world, especially with authorities, and with rich and successful people around him. His stance is openly mentioned in his earlier works. However, with the growing fame, Bukowski became less critical, possibly because he was becoming a successful man too. This progress and the reduced critical attitude are visible in his novel *Hollywood*, where Chinaski describes his life of a successful writer. Not only that his criticism has changed but also his approach to people and life in general. Few years before Bukowski died, he battled with leukaemia and had to stop drinking alcohol. Due to this circumstance, he discovered that he was able to write well even sober.¹⁹

1.2 Dirty Realism

Dirty Realism is a sub-genre that was introduced around the 1980s and Charles Bukowski is regarded as its "godfather". Main features of this genre are short stories that contain simple vocabulary and syntax, overall minimalistic works, and primary concentration on the object. In Dirty Realism, authors pay attention to the detail of surroundings and the main characters are usually regular people from the lower or middle working class, alcoholics or people who differ from the rest of the society, whose everyday life is somehow challenging.²⁰

Michael Hemmingson describes Dirty Realism in his book *Dirty Realism Duo*, as "dirty truth – about unattractive people who get drunk, puke, fight, shit their pants, sleep with strangers, and do the wrong thing and suffer consequences."²¹ He also compares Charles Bukowski to Raymond Carver and analyses their similar way of writing and living. Their main similarity is their approach to work, as it is their main obstacle that impedes the achievement of their happiness. Bukowski's hatred for work is the most frequently present topic in his novel *Factotum*, where the main character refuses to keep any job and is regularly unemployed by

¹⁸ Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 110.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, XIII.

²⁰ Michael Hemmingson, *The Dirty Realism Duo: Charles Bukowski and Raymond Carver on Aesthetics of the Ugly* (San Bernardino: The Borgo Press, 2008), 11.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

choice.²² Another element of similarity is women sharing similar issues as the main character. They are usually depicted in a bad light and their characters remain flat throughout the story. The relationships and the sex scenes described in his novels are not romanticized and jealousy, as well as cheating, represent the ugly side of most relationships.²³ However, female characters will be discussed in detail in the analysis part. Bukowski visibly implements these characteristics in his books, but his originality appears in his use of humour. Characters in his books do live a miserable life but they accept the ugliness and roughness of it, simply because they do not try to change or advance in any way in their life.²⁴

Nevertheless, Bukowski is frequently categorized as a member of the Beat Generation. This categorization is not a wrong, as Bukowski shares many of their characteristics. The Beat Movement was founded around the 1950s and consisted of artists who lived a bohemian lifestyle, situated in Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York. One of the most famous representatives of Beats is a poet and writer Allen Ginsberg, accompanied by Jack Kerouac, Philip Whalen, Gregory Corso and many more.²⁵ Their main goal was the “spiritual and cultural revolution” and they are frequently addressed as Hippies.²⁶ Their mindset differed from the rest of society and they emphasized this fact with specific clothing and use of “jazz vocabulary”. It is no secret that most Beats were associated with drugs that supposedly pushed their vision forward.²⁷ However, Bukowski did not like to be associated to the Beats and he strongly expressed his opinion in a few letters. For example, in a letter to Jon Webb from 1962:

Now, the original Beats, as much as they were knocked, had the Idea. But they were flanked and overwhelmed by fakes, guys with nicely clipped beards, lonely-hearts looking for free ass, lime-lighters, rhyming poets, homosexuals, bums, sightseers—the same thing that killed the Village. Art can’t operate in Crowds.²⁸

²² Michael Hemmingson, *The Dirty Realism Duo: Charles Bukowski and Raymond Carver on Aesthetics of the Ugly* (San Bernardino: The Borgo Press, 2008), 44.

²³ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁵ “Beat Movement,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, Accessed November 23, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Beat-movement>.

²⁶ Alan Bisbort, *Beatniks: A Guide to an American Subculture* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2010), preface.

²⁷ “Beat Movement,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, Accessed November 23, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Beat-movement>.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

According to Jack Micheline, his main concern was probably the fact that many Beat writers were homosexuals. He especially disliked Allan Ginsberg, whom he met at the party in Santa Cruz. There, Bukowski started a strife, by saying that Ginsberg was not a good writer and on top of that he attacked his sexual orientation through inappropriate jokes. He was even asked to read at The Naropa Institute, which was a Beat club in Colorado, but Bukowski refused to participate.²⁹ Another disturbing factor were drugs, because Bukowski declared himself strongly against them. Although, there exist speculations that he smoked marihuana multiple times.³⁰ Bukowski refused any kind of label, he was a loner with no interest in belonging.³¹ He was an individual who fought for his own destiny but not for a better world.

²⁹ Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 140-141.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

³¹ "Brothers-in-Arms: GAIUS AND HANK AT THE RACETRACK," JSTOR, Accessed March 10, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2204rr5.9>, 99.

2 ANALYSIS

2.1 Post Office

Post office is the first and most popular novel that Bukowski wrote. This novel was published in 1971 although it was written two years earlier. In 1969, when the publisher John Martin offered Bukowski the chance to quit his job and become a full-time writer, he answered: “If you get me out of the post office, I’ll write more books than you can publish.”³² After successfully quitting his job at the age of 49, Bukowski decided to write his first novel. It did not take him long and Bukowski finished his first novel within three weeks.³³

The book is written in form of stories based on Bukowski’s real-life events. As in his previous works, dialogues are predominant, and the novel is divided into short chapters. Traces of humour can be spotted, even though most topics presented in the book are serious and sometimes even melancholic. This is one of the reasons, why Bukowski’s style of writing is unique and enjoyable in comparison to other writers, who discuss similar topics. The description of the job and its influence on the everyday life of regular workers in the United States Postal Service is the focus of this book. However, Bukowski also devoted a great detail of attention to his numerous experiences with women as well as to his drinking habits. The protagonist of the story is his alter-ego Henry Chinaski. Other characters do have a voice but only through dialogues with Chinaski, therefore the story is very subjective.

“It began as a mistake.”³⁴ The first sentence in the novels begins with an explanation where Chinaski describes how easily he got hired as a mail carrier and how great and calm the job is. However, the critique of the workplace appears already on the next page. After three weeks of work at the post office, Chinaski knows this is not a job for him, nor for anybody else. In addition to being excessively challenging, the work situation is exaggerated by supervisors who treat their subordinates inhumanly.³⁵ The events that are described in the book took place in the late 1950s.³⁶ It is necessary to point out that Bukowski represents quite a new mind-set of an American citizen that has rapidly changed since the Second World

³² Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 101.

³³ *Ibid.*, 104.

³⁴ Charles Bukowski, *Post Office* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 9, <https://archive.org/details/1PostOffice1971/mode/2up>.

³⁵ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 132.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

War. Instead of blindly following rules and being grateful for the opportunity of having a job, Bukowski rebels basically against any rule created by society.³⁷

After nine or ten hours people began getting sleepy and falling into their cases, catching themselves just in time. We were working the zoned mail. If a letter read zone 28 you stuck it to hole no. 28. It was simple. 'One big black guy leaped up and began swinging his arms to keep awake. He staggered about the floor. "God damn! I can't stand it!" he said. And he was a big powerful brute. Using the same muscles over and over again was quite tiring.³⁸

Chinaski gets tired of working as a mail carrier after some time. This frustration leads him to change his position by marking a paper 'clerk' instead of 'carrier' during the Civil service exam. Unfortunately, it is quite clear to Chinaski from the first day that this job would not be any easier. As described in the first sentence, this job is so physically exhausting that workers are not able to concentrate after nine hours of work. Even the strongest ones are struggling with the never-ending, routine job. The last sentence is a critique of the "factory-type labour"³⁹ that was flourishing during the 1950s in the United States. "Then I started coming home unhappy."⁴⁰ Chinaski takes this issue further by claiming that the detrimental effects of the job are not confined to the workplace, as employees take their work stress even back home.⁴¹

"Well, as the boys said, you had to work somewhere. So they accepted what there was. This was the wisdom of the slave."⁴² This extract is taken from the end of the book when Chinaski enters the Federal Building to resign from the post office. Here Chinaski strongly shows his disagreement with the opinion of the majority people, who have decided to surrender to the rules of the system. In this case, those workers (here clerks) who are unhappy with their jobs but keep them only in order to survive. While Chinaski has to work to survive like his peers,

³⁷ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 124.

³⁸ Charles Bukowski, *Post Office* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 41-42, <https://archive.org/details/1PostOffice1971/mode/2up>.

³⁹ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 139.

⁴⁰ Charles Bukowski, *Post Office* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 40, <https://archive.org/details/1PostOffice1971/mode/2up>.

⁴¹ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 140.

⁴² Charles Bukowski, *Post Office* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 110, <https://archive.org/details/1PostOffice1971/mode/2up>.

he differentiates himself as he shows his disagreement by rebelling against the system. He is not willing to sacrifice his soul to become “a slave” as all the others.⁴³

Right after the extract above, Chinaski continues: “A young black girl walked up. She was well-dressed and pleased with her surroundings. I was happy for her. I would have gone mad with the same job.”⁴⁴ Even though the majority of the references to the job and its effects are negative, in this example Chinaski shows how some people manage to prosper from this situation. But again, even in this case, he mentions ‘a young black girl’ for one reason. This girl is happy only because people from the black community, who were aggressively discriminated against at that time, were not offered many job opportunities as office clerks. Thus, those few who managed to get hired were grateful for this type of job.⁴⁵

The most discussed topic in *Post Office* is undoubtedly the workplace and how it affects the physical state of Chinaski, who must sacrifice his time at work in order to survive. Despite that he also gives an insight into his relationships and briefly mentions some random women he meets. On this topic, Chinaski expresses a few times his opinion on women in general. Already on the first page of the book, he describes one woman he met, while delivering some letters. He does not mention her name, the only information he gives to the reader is: “What I mean by big was that her ass was big and her tits were big and that she was big in all the right places. She seemed a bit crazy but I kept looking at her body and I didn't care.”⁴⁶ Her age, profession or personality traits are not included in the description. The only characteristics of this woman that Chinaski underlines are physical ones. She is basically rudely described as a pair of breasts and butt. Then he follows up adding that she is married but her husband is out of town and therefore she is lonely. After a short conversation, Chinaski asks her for the address so he can stop by later. The text continues: “She was a good one all right, she was a good lay but like all lays after the 3rd or 4th night I began to lose interest and didn't go back.”⁴⁷ The character remains voiceless and no other traits are added to her flat personality. Chinaski evaluates their sexual performance without any feelings or respect. As he has no further intentions with this woman, he does not meet her again. Moreover, the

⁴³ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 139.

⁴⁴ Charles Bukowski, *Post Office* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 110, <https://archive.org/details/1PostOffice1971/mode/2up>.

⁴⁵ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 139.

⁴⁶ Charles Bukowski, *Post Office* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 9, <https://archive.org/details/1PostOffice1971/mode/2up>.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

end of the extract clearly shows that women are just a body to Chinaski, as he uses them for sexual satisfaction only. It is important to point out that this woman is married and still gave Chinaski her address. Bukowski is often criticized for the way he writes about women, that he takes advantage of them just to satisfy his sexual needs. However, this nameless woman was evidently interested to have nothing more than the intercourse with Chinaski as well. Immediately on the next page, Chinaski mentions the first female name, his “shackjob Betty.”⁴⁸ Her name is reported a few more times with some small descriptions. Besides being a widowed alcoholic with nice legs, he does not give her any personal traits. The only time Betty has a voice is during their argument. Not until the argument, readers discover that they share Chinaski’s house. Betty starts the argument and declares she wants to break up because she is dissatisfied with their new reality: she has a job while Chinaski has become unemployed. In her opinion, this living situation is not acceptable, as their neighbours might think she is supporting him financially. Even though Chinaski still earns some money at the racetrack by betting on horses, according to Betty he spends too much time on the couch. Betty states her options during the argument: "Me working and you laying around. All the neighbours think I am supporting you." "Hell, I worked and you laid around." "That's different. You're a man, I'm a woman."⁴⁹ She is of the opinion that it is an issue if they as a couple don’t represent stereotypical gender roles, in which a woman takes care of the household and a man in exchange supports the household financially. But Betty is now employed and Chinaski only makes money from horse betting. Even though most of the expenses such as rent and food are covered by Chinaski, does not seem as enough. The perception of reality their neighbours may form is more important to her than their objective financial situation. Yet again, society plays the role even in their relationship. “Oh, I didn't know that. I thought you bitches were always screaming for equal rights?”⁵⁰ After the Suffrage movement, many other political and social movements fighting for women's rights took place. Chinaski attacks Betty for her surprising opinion on gender roles. Bukowski's provocative statements about women, in general, caused him trouble in the form of a critique from the female audience. Mainly because *Post Office* was published during the “second-

⁴⁸ Charles Bukowski, *Post Office* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 10, <https://archive.org/details/1PostOffice1971/mode/2up>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

wave” movement for women's rights.⁵¹ Due to this direct offense of feminism, Bukowski became a misogynist in the eyes of many readers.

Chinaski mentions Betty throughout the book several times after their break-up because they still meet from time to time. He describes her physical decay and how the feelings between them have changed. Once when Chinaski visits Betty at her place, he gets truly concerned about the quantity of alcohol she has there. “Those damn fools! Don't they know any better? If you drink all this stuff it will kill you!” Betty just looked at me. I saw it all in that look. She had two children who never came to see her, never wrote her.”⁵² She was an alcoholic and Chinaski's concern was justifiable. As he describes her, she has lost her spark and almost the will to live because of the absence of her children, her only source of happiness. He tries to convince her to slow down with the alcohol and shortly after he leaves. Despite all the efforts made by Chinaski, Betty ends up in the hospital because of alcohol overdose. He has visited her at the hospital just few days before she died. Chinaski mentions her funeral and its atmosphere but he does not mention Betty nor his feeling for her in the book anymore. However, her death had a huge impact on Bukowski's writing. He kept bringing up Betty, alias Jane Cooney Baker, in many of his poems and in his second novel *Factotum*.

Before going into the detail with regard to the next woman, it is vital to highlight that her character, especially her appearance, does not match with reality. A possible reason why Bukowski may have changed the truth in the book, will be discussed later. Another relationship that Chinaski mentions is with a woman called Joyce. Their first meeting remains unknown, but he does say she is 13 years younger than him. Then Chinaski adds: “She had long blonde hair and was good solid meat. I didn't know, at the time, that she also had plenty of money. She didn't drink but I did. We laughed a lot at first. And went to the racetrack together.”⁵³ Even though Chinaski reveals more information about Joyce than about his first girlfriend Betty, her character is flat while yet again, her physical qualities are thoroughly explored. Joyce only has a voice throughout the dialogues with Chinaski. For the first time in the book, he reveals his jealous personality. As he said, “She was a looker” and during their visits at the racetrack, there were always some men trying to approach her. Chinaski cannot stand these dynamics so he is forced to take action and tell these men to go away, as Joyce is already taken.

⁵¹ “The Second Wave of Feminism,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, Accessed January 15, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-second-wave-of-feminism>.

⁵² Charles Bukowski, *Post Office* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 64, <https://archive.org/details/1PostOffice1971/mode/2up>.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 34.

Shortly after Joyce asks Chinaski to marry her and they end up having a cheap marriage in Las Vegas. “She fed me well, fattened me up and weakened me at the same time. She couldn't get enough. Joyce, my wife, was a nymph.”⁵⁴ This extract clearly shows Bukowski's intention to change the typical representation of a male and female character. In conflict with a classic stereotype, Joyce is presented as a sexual addict, usually associated to the male character. It is not clear, for which reason Bukowski would like to exchange those roles. However, it is possible that he wanted to gain the sympathy of readers, by presenting Chinaski less of a macho character than he was at the beginning of the book.⁵⁵ Despite this remark, Chinaski does not seem to experience any problem regarding their marriage.

Notwithstanding, the initial happiness after some time Joyce tries to moralize on Chinaski's behaviour, which he, of course, does not agree with. “We both ought to get jobs,” Joyce said, “to prove to them that you are not after their money. To prove to them that we are self-sufficient.”⁵⁶ Because of the fact that Joyce is from a rich family, she would like to show her parents she does not need their money. But Chinaski does not feel the need to prove anyone anything, especially because he does not want to exchange his bohemian lifestyle for the lifestyle of a regular worker. However, in the end, they both find themselves a job. Joyce gets a job in a Police department and Chinaski gets a job at the post office, this time as a shipping clerk.

Even though Chinaski does not mention any problems in their marriage, Joyce seems to be interested in a man from her workplace. As Chinaski ironically points out, he was a “real gentleman.”⁵⁷ according to Joyce. At first, he does not show any concern about his wife's interest in another man. One morning, when Chinaski has a day off, he decides to cook dinner for him and Joyce. When she gets home after work, he walks Joyce into the kitchen and says: “I've cooked this in your honor,” I said, “in dedication of our love.” “What the hell's that shit?” she asked.⁵⁸ Although Chinaski does not explicitly describe the motives of his gesture, it seems he tries to prove his wife and show her that he can also be a gentleman, who expresses his affection through cooking. However, her reaction to the seafood that Chinaski cooked is unpleasant, as she does not show any interest nor appreciation for the effort he

⁵⁴ Charles Bukowski, *Post Office* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 35, <https://archive.org/details/1PostOffice1971/mode/2up>.

⁵⁵ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 203.

⁵⁶ Charles Bukowski, *Post Office* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 38, <https://archive.org/details/1PostOffice1971/mode/2up>.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

made. Yet again, Chinaski is portrayed as a good husband, who tries to save the marriage. This is another example of atypical behaviour from a male character. A few days later, Chinaski receives divorce papers. Joyce admits it was because of the man from her workplace.

The third female character mentioned is his co-worker from the post office, Vivien. Chinaski meets her on the way to the bar and describes her as a badly dressed but friendly person. Then he continues: “She looked all right. Stocky. But good ass and thighs, breasts. A hard tough ride.”⁵⁹ As in previous descriptions of other women, more attention is devoted to the physical qualities of Vivien. In addition, his intentions with her are clearly declared in the last sentence. Vi, as Chinaski calls her, is a character whose voice is present only through conversations with him. Even though they spent just one day together, for the first time Chinaski fantasizes of a potential relationship with a woman he just met.

“I could stay here, I thought, make money at the track while she nurses me over the bad moments, rubs oils on my body, cooks for me, talks to me, goes to bed with me. Of course, there would always be arguments. That is the nature of Woman.”⁶⁰ In this extract Chinaski pictures racetrack as a symbol of freedom. Racetrack represents the ideal job that does not take part in absurd rules of the society. His vision of a relationship is the opposite of the thinking of a womanizer. Yet, he does mention also a problematic part of the relationship, in which he basically suggests that women are a source of all the troubles in a relationship. But he seems to accept this fact, as he describes his thoughts about moving in. His conversation with Vi continues, she tells him about her daughter and that she divorced her husband because he was an alcoholic who spends most of his time at the racetrack. It seems this remark pushes the vision of an ideal relationship out of his head. Her ex-husband that she so negatively describes basically represents who Chinaski wants to be. This is the moment when he realizes that there is no way he could ever have a relationship with this woman.

Another atypical portrayal of a male character is revealed when Chinaski describes his failure to sexually perform with Vivien. “Don't be too pissed. It wasn't you. It was the booze. It has happened before.”⁶¹ According to Russell Harrison, intercourse with Vivien is described in an unromantic way and Chinaski is yet again portrayed the opposite of a macho.

⁵⁹ Charles Bukowski, *Post Office* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 70, <https://archive.org/details/1PostOffice1971/mode/2up>.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶¹ Charles Bukowski, *Post Office* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 72, <https://archive.org/details/1PostOffice1971/mode/2up>.

This unmacho-like behavior and ironic treatment of Chinaski's character is more frequent as the book progresses.⁶² Moreover, his problem with alcohol is revealed. As he remarks, he has already struggled with his sexual performance due to alcohol consumption. Before Chinaski leaves Vivien's place, he asks her: "Listen, you need any money, babe?" I reached into my wallet and took out a twenty. I handed it to her. "My, you are sweet!"⁶³ This extract suggests that Vivien is offensively treated like a prostitute because she is given twenty dollars after intercourse with Chinaski. That was the only night they spent together. As she is an employed woman, it is not clear why he gave her money. However, she accepts his money, and this is the last time she is mentioned in the book.

The penultimate name that appears in Chinaski's story is Mary Lou. He meets her during the pause at the racetrack. He depicts her as "a sex creature, a curse, the end of it all"⁶⁴ Once again, Chinaski does not mention any of her personal traits. Mary Lou is not an exception and like his previous women, she has intercourse with Chinaski. She has decided to leave her lover and move out of his place. Thus, the next day they drive to the motel, to pick up some of her stuff. Her partner Hector is there when they enter the apartment. "There was a little dark guy in there with a wart on the side of his nose. He looked dangerous. "You going with him?" he asked Mary Lou. "Yes." "All right. Luck." He lit a cigarette. "Thanks, Hector." Hector? What the hell kind of name was that?"⁶⁵ Chinaski describes his rival in an ironic way because he represents a powerless character who cannot compete with him. Mary Lou decides to leave with Chinaski. As a result of her choice, Chinaski gains confidence and feels like a winner.

The situation rapidly changes when Chinaski detects the reflection of Hector's silhouette in the mirror. Hector approaches him with a switchable knife but Chinaski's reflex is faster. He hits Hector with the beer bottle in his hand. It is not a surprise that Chinaski's presence provokes the physical aggression of Mary Lou's lover. No man would let his lover leave with another man without any attempt to change the outcome of the situation. However, Chinaski turns his anger against Mary Lou as well. "Then I walked over and slapped Mary Lou. She screamed. "Cunt! You set this up, didn't you? You'd let this monkey kill me for the lousy 4

⁶² Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 210.

⁶³ Charles Bukowski, *Post Office* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 72-73, <https://archive.org/details/1PostOffice1971/mode/2up>.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

or 5 hundred bucks in my wallet!”⁶⁶ Because of Chinaski’s belief that their visit was set up and these two wanted to steal his money, the story turns into a chauvinistic act where he physically threatens a possibly innocent woman. As Paul Clements suggests, Chinaski’s (or more precisely Bukowski’s) belief might be derived from his experience with women and from his lousy childhood. Chinaski does not allow the possibility that Hector's attack was caused by the decision of Mary Lou to leave with him. Instead, he turns against her, which reveals his trust issues with women. Moreover, he undermines her femininity by calling her breastless at the end of the argument. The influence of Bukowski’s childhood experience can easily be spotted. Hector portrays his sadistic father and Mary Lou, as well as his mother, does not take any action against the aggression of Hector.⁶⁷

The last female character depicted in *Post Office* is Fay. Her description is richer than the description of previous women. Chinaski does not mention her physical qualities but her physical traits and interests. However, Fay is also a voiceless character, having a voice through dialogues with Chinaski only. From the description, it can be assumed that she is an older woman because of her grey hair. As his previous girlfriends, also Fay is unemployed, has three kids and lives off alimony checks from her previous marriage. Their relationship is not described in a great detail but despite Chinaski's complaint about her messy personality, their relationship seems to have no issues. It is not specifically mentioned when, but Fay gets pregnant. Chinaski does not seem to be enthusiastic about this situation, as he summarizes this fact in one sentence. “Fay was pregnant. But it didn't change her and it didn't change the post office either.”⁶⁸ There is no reference to how he feels about Fay being pregnant, but the tone of his announcement is simply informative and mostly emotionally neutral as the rest of the events in the book. However, Chinaski suffers from depression and his second sentence underlines this condition. The main source of his depression is his job and even the fact that he will soon have a new reason to live, their child, does not seem to change a thing for him.

“She was not a young woman. Maybe she hadn't saved the world but she had made a major improvement. Ring one up for Fay.”⁶⁹ However, his attitude towards Fay rapidly changes

⁶⁶ Charles Bukowski, *Post Office* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 83, <https://archive.org/details/1PostOffice1971/mode/2up>.

⁶⁷ Paul Clements, *Charles Bukowski, Outsider Literature, and the Beat Movement* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 60.

⁶⁸ Charles Bukowski, *Post Office* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 87, <https://archive.org/details/1PostOffice1971/mode/2up>.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

while he is in the hospital with her. Betty and Fay are the most important characters in *Post office*. Betty was Chinaski's first true love, but his emotions were only revealed shortly before she has passed away. Fay is the first woman with whom he has a child, therefore their daughter gave him a reason to live. Even though Fay did not change the world by her protesting against the war, she has changed the life of Chinaski and that was enough. No longer after, Fay announces to Chinaski that she wants to move out and live with their daughter, Marina, alone. Yet again, it is not mentioned why this situation occurred, but Chinaski does not question her motives and helps her to move out. They move around eight blocks from his place, so Chinaski is able to see Marina three to four times a week. However, after some time Fay decided to move to New Mexico and that was the last time they appeared in the book. At the end of the novel, Chinaski resigns from the post office to become a writer. Chinaski undeniably treats women disrespectfully by the way he describes their physical qualities. However, in many situations, Chinaski shows that he can also do the opposite, being caring and apprehensive. Especially in the case of Betty, who plays an important role in his life as his first love. Even though her importance is revealed only in a few lines before she dies, it is clear what a valuable person she is to Chinaski. He uncovers his feelings also in case of Joyce when he tries to save their relationship by making a nice gesture in the form of a dinner. Or with Fay when he admits that she changed his life to better, not only because she gave birth to their daughter, but it seems that this life event changed Chinaski's viewpoint on women in general. As Chinaski himself said: "Women were meant to suffer; no wonder they asked for constant declarations of love."⁷⁰

2.2 Factotum

Bukowski's second novel was published in 1975. The story takes place during the Second World War, but as in a previous book, the historical context is mentioned just once in this novel. Nevertheless, the situation of the Second World War has a huge impact on the main character because it is more difficult for him to find a job. Yet again, Henri Chinaski is a protagonist and even though that characters mentioned in the story have their voice through dialogues, the novel remains subjective. The main theme is the refusal of any kind of job. In comparison with *Post Office*, multiple jobs are depicted in *Factotum* because Chinaski frequently changes his workplace due to his traveling around numerous states in the US. The

⁷⁰ Charles Bukowski, *Post Office* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 91, <https://archive.org/details/1PostOffice1971/mode/2up>.

plot of the story evolves constantly but the main character does not achieve any personal development. Chinaski again shows that his primary goal is to distance himself from society and his main relief are women and alcohol. The critique of people who do not mind their terrible jobs and routine lifestyle is not an exception. The main character openly discusses his egocentricity and various philosophical questions.⁷¹ As in *Post office*, writing represents relatively a small part of the novel but Chinaski tends to refer to himself as a writer if somebody asks him.

Numerous female characters are mentioned in the novel and almost every time when Chinaski depicts them, he seems fascinated by their bodies. Female characters and their physical futures are described in greater detail than in *Post Office*. The story begins in New Orleans, where Chinaski works in a distributing house of some magazine publisher. The first female name mentioned in the story is Martha. One night she knocked on his door with a bottle of wine in her hand and Chinaski naturally let her in. He depicts her physical qualities and then Martha adds her story through conversation with Chinaski. After Martha's attempt to perform a striptease for Chinaski, the first sexual experience in the book is described. According to him, he was basically raped by Martha. As he said: "I felt as if I was being eaten alive."⁷² Chinaski describes her as an unattractive sexual predator from whom he cannot run away. His sexual anxiety, as the whole situation, has a humorous undercurrent. The male character is presented as a victim of a predatory female character. Reversed roles were already presented in *Post office*, where his wife Joyce, was depicted as a nymphomaniac.⁷³ In the end, Chinaski grabs his wallet and hands Martha five dollars. Yet again, as in case of Vivian from *Post Office*, she did not ask him for money. The fact he pays her for the act suggests, that despite his anxiety he was satisfied with the outcome of the situation. The way he humiliates Martha, on the other hand, suggests, that he tries to eliminate from the reader's mind the thought, that the male character is being a victim.⁷⁴ Another woman that Chinaski meets in St. Louis is called Gertrude. According to his description, "She was perfect, pure maddening sex, and she knew it, and she played on it, dripped it, and allowed you to suffer for it. It made her happy. I didn't feel too bad either."⁷⁵

⁷¹ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 154.

⁷² Charles Bukowski, *Factotum* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), 27, HarperCollins e-books.

⁷³ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 187.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁷⁵ Charles Bukowski, *Factotum* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), 47, HarperCollins e-books.

In this extract, he clearly admits that Gertrude is more powerful than any male character, so Chinaski is again victimized. Gertrude's attractiveness is used as a weapon against men in general and her character is depicted as a predator like. However, if Chinaski does not participate in her game, he has the situation under control. It can be noticed that he remains an inactive observer by choice.⁷⁶ As he continues, "Like most men in that situation I realized that I wouldn't get anything out of her—intimate talks, exciting roller-coaster rides, long Sunday afternoon walks—until after I had made some odd promises."⁷⁷ Man has a choice and it is up to him whether to remain in the role of an observer. He also has the option to take a step forward and enter the game but a step forward would mean making some sacrifices in the form of odd promises.⁷⁸ Chinaski seems to be comfortable with the role of an observer at first, but in the end, he invites Gertrude out. Anyway, it seems that Chinaski loses his interest after Gertrude comments on the attractiveness of one man in the bar, while they are together. After that, he never asked Gertrude out again.

The next female character Laura represents Jane Cooney Baker, who is also known as Betty in *Post Office*. While Chinaski is back in Los Angeles, he meets Laura. Although her character is similar to the character of Betty from *Post Office*, there are few changes. They meet in a local bar and Chinaski depicts her as an alcoholic, with nice legs. Few lines later, a reader discovers that she lives in the house of an old millionaire, along with Grace and Jerry. As Laura mentioned, "He throws money on the floor every time he gets drunk," Laura whispered to me. "He says nasty things to us and throws coins at us. He says it's what we're worth. He can get very nasty."⁷⁹ This remark suggests that these women must satisfy the sexual demands of the millionaire in exchange for accommodation, money and alcohol. Even though Laura seems to have more importance in Chinaski's mind and is depicted in greater detail in comparison with Grace and Jerry, he does not have any intimate relationship with her. On the contrary, he has intercourse with Jerry and with Grace too. Chinaski takes a different approach because he gave Martha some money even though she was not a prostitute. Now when it is clear, that Jerry and Grace basically represent prostitutes, they do not receive any money after intercourse with Chinaski. This behaviour might suggest that

⁷⁶ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 189.

⁷⁷ Charles Bukowski, *Factotum* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), 47, HarperCollins e-books.

⁷⁸ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 189.

⁷⁹ Charles Bukowski, *Factotum* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), 63, HarperCollins e-books.

Chinaski does not see them as prostitutes. Although, their characters have been clearly objectified.⁸⁰

The main relationship that Chinaski has in *Factotum* is with Jan. Their characters are very similar because she is also an alcoholic and unemployed. At first, their relationship seems to be flawless because the time they spend together is filled with activities that both like. Jan is even depicted like someone, who excepts spending time with Chinaski, does not have any other interests. However, after some time Chinaski finds a job and the harmony disappears from their relationship. Jan starts to complain that Chinaski does not spend as much time with her as before, because right after work he is off to the racetrack. The fact that the racetrack steals her time with Chinaski makes her angry and it becomes the main topic of their arguments. While, Jan blames the racetrack, Chinaski interprets her complains differently: “The arguments were always the same. I understood it too well now—that great lovers were always men of leisure. I fucked better as a bum than as a puncher of timeclocks.”⁸¹ Even though she did not mention anything about the quality of their sex, for Chinaski it seems to be the only explanation for their arguments. He does not allow the possibility that the reason can be his recent behaviour.⁸² Instead of admitting that he tries to avoid their arguments by spending time on a racetrack, he attacks Jan for going out. Because Chinaski did not pay attention to her and did not show her love, she naturally started to look for it somewhere else. At first, he did not mind that she is somewhere in the bar, potentially with another man.⁸³ One evening he decides to go to the bar where she is. When he enters, he sees her sitting between two men and that view obviously makes him angry. Chinaski responds “I tried to make a woman out of you but you’ll never be anything but a god damned whore!”⁸⁴ Jan is displayed as an unfaithful woman. Moreover, Chinaski degrades her femininity by calling her a “whore”. He acts like a hypocrite in this situation because he is the one who had intercourse with another woman when they were already a couple. Jan might be sitting in the bar with other men, but she just looking for the company that Chinaski deprives her of. In addition, the description Chinaski gives about these men suggests that she

⁸⁰ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 297.

⁸¹ Charles Bukowski, *Factotum* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), 99, HarperCollins e-books.

⁸² Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 192.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁸⁴ Charles Bukowski, *Factotum* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), 100, HarperCollins e-books.

would hardly have sex with any of them because of their physical imperfections. Instead of finding a solution to resolve their tiff, they both pick the wrong direction.⁸⁵

In comparison to *Post Office*, female characters in *Factotum* are depicted often negatively. According to him, some are sexual predators who use their bodies as a weapon to entrap men into their game of promises. Others are the symbol of unfaithfulness like Jan. However, his behavior toward women is not purely chauvinistic but also womanizer like. Overall, Chinaski is most of the time amazed by their bodies, as he says: “Women, I thought, women are magic. What marvelous beings they are!”⁸⁶

2.3 Women

The last novel analysed is called *Women*. Even though Bukowski wrote and published *Factotum* sooner, this book follows-up on *Post Office*. The novel *Women* was published in 1978 and Henry Chinaski is yet again the protagonist. As the title suggests, the main topics discussed in the book are Chinaski’s relationships, sexual experiences but also his desire to understand women, and especially his own self. In comparison to *Post Office* and *Factotum*, the job and society are not an issue anymore and Chinaski identifies himself as a writer. The pattern of this book is quite repetitive because women basically come and eventually leave. When women are not described, the story is filled with writing, alcohol, philosophical questions or with Chinaski’s wondering about how women’s mind work. The protagonist reveals himself and other characters personalities more than in previous novels. Thus, characters are rounder but still, some of them remain flat. Moreover, the main difference appears in the perception of women, because the protagonist shows his unusual sympathy for them and depicts himself with irony and in a bad light.⁸⁷ Female characters that are mentioned are traditionally twenty or thirty years younger than Chinaski. Some of them try to change his lifestyle to better, which he surprisingly does not refuse. After some time, he realizes that he is unable to understand women thinking and becomes aware of the fact that he is chasing an illusion, because a perfect relationship does not exist. He is also finally able to refuse the last woman that appears in the book because at that time he is in a relationship with another woman. Thus, there is a growth in the main character and in his treatment of relationships.

⁸⁵ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 194.

⁸⁶ Charles Bukowski, *Factotum* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), 70, HarperCollins e-books.

⁸⁷ Paul Clements, *Charles Bukowski, Outsider Literature, and the Beat Movement* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 85.

Bukowski included more than ten female characters in this novel, but there is no space to cover all of them, so only a few of them will be analysed. The first and the most important relationship described is with Lydia. Her character represents Bukowski's second wife Linda Lee, who is also mentioned in his last novel called *Hollywood*. Their relationship is described into the biggest detail, in comparison to previous novels.⁸⁸ Chinaski explains that they met after he left the post office, at his first poetry reading. "Lydia walked off. It hadn't worked. I never knew what to say to the ladies."⁸⁹ Chinaski tried to approach her with a dirty joke, which did not work with her. Right from the beginning, he mentions his struggle with women, because he does not know how to get in touch with them. Chinaski is presented as an inexperienced man, who can hardly be a womanizer.

The main difference appears in the treatment of the protagonist. "Jesus Christ, here I am with you, you're twenty years older than I am. I could have something like that. What the hell's wrong with me?"⁹⁰ Here, Chinaski is compared by Lydia with a young man who passed just next to them. Not only that he is being insulted because of his age, but Lydia portrays Chinaski as an unappealing old man whom she could easily replace.⁹¹ The male character is presented as defenceless especially because of Chinaski's reply. "Look. Here are a couple of candy bars. Take one."⁹² Even more surprising is his answer and the overall ignorance of what Lydia just said. His behaviour can be easily compared with Gertrude from *Factotum*, who also commented on the appearance of another man, while they were together in a bar. In the case of Gertrude, he simply lost his interest and never talked to her again.⁹³ Moreover, Chinaski is ridiculed even in regard to sexual experiences, which makes his character even more unmasculine than before. "You're over 50 years old and you've never eaten pussy?" Yet again, roles are reversed because the male character is ironically depicted as sexually inexperienced. Lydia and other female characters do not follow the traditional pattern and are presented as experienced and confident individuals.⁹⁴ Lydia, who has a certain vision about Chinaski from his books, is surprised that his behaviour and experiences do not correspond with his real self. Bukowski's attempt to depict Chinaski as someone more

⁸⁸ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 198.

⁸⁹ Charles Bukowski, *Women* (London: Virgin Books, 2009), 2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹¹ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 202.

⁹² Charles Bukowski, *Women* (London: Virgin Books, 2009), 15.

⁹³ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 202.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

complex than a sexist is undoubtedly successful in this novel. As Russell Harrison suggests, “pseudo-macho” would be a more accurate definition of Chinaski.⁹⁵

Despite all the attempts to depict Chinaski as a fragile person in comparison to Lydia, his character is not entirely unshackled from his womanizing instincts, as he has minimally one affair with another woman while being in a couple with Lydia. However, it is not clear if Lydia also has some affairs, because they were splitting up regularly and even Chinaski shows his concern when he said: “She was a flirt and it irritated me. When we ate out I was sure she was eyeballing some man across the room. When my male friends came by to visit and Lydia was there I could hear her conversation become intimate and sexual.”⁹⁶ Now, this extract might suggest that Chinaski simply projects his guilt onto Lydia. But as Chinaski describes Lydia, she is a party lover and that one “dramatic, erotic.”⁹⁷ dance she performs with another man just in front of Chinaski, might have been an impulse for him to hurt her in a way too. Even though his womanizing balances a bit his character and he is no longer a representation of a weaker individual, Lydia describes to Chinaski her experience with other men via phone calls, while they are not together.

His sensibility and understanding are portrayed in the case of Dee Dee. Even though he is not in love with her, “She was a good woman. I liked her. She was really concerned about me, she wanted me to do well, she wanted me to write well, she wanted me to fuck well, look well. I could feel it. It was fine.”⁹⁸ Of course her physical qualities are traditionally mentioned when he first met her, but the depiction of her personality traits (caring, in this extract) and Chinaski’s appreciation for someone’s personality, has radically improved in comparison to *Post Office* and *Factotum*. Moreover, his concern about Dee Dee’s feelings when he is about to get back with Lydia clearly shows her importance in Chinaski’s life. He does not want to let Dee Dee down and so he decides to explain to her the whole situation, so she can at least understand, why he is getting back with Lydia. Chinaski does not act like a chauvinist or a womanizer in this situation, simply because he shows concern for her feelings.

Another important female character is Katherine. Her real character name is Joanna Dover but Chinaski renames her because she looks like young Katherine Hepburn to him. For the first time in the book, Chinaski thinks of marriage. He even proposes to Katherine, but she

⁹⁵ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 214.

⁹⁶ Charles Bukowski, *Women* (London: Virgin Books, 2009), 29.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

refuses and ripostes with “It’s just sex, Hank, it’s just sex!”⁹⁹ Here, a woman represents more likely a male character, because it is usually a man, who makes a difference between sex and love. Chinaski represents the individual who romanticizes a sexual act and is emotionally involved, so their roles are again reversed. A similar situation emerged in the case of Lydia because after their first intercourse, Chinaski said that he fell in love with her, however, for Lydia, it was also only sex.¹⁰⁰ Besides, he starts to realize that his habits might be one of the reasons Katherine left him: “I knew she was connecting me with the racetrack people and the boxing crowd, and it was true, I was with them, I was one of them.”¹⁰¹ This is not the first time Chinaski comes to realize that his behaviour might be troubling. It already happened in the case of Vivien from *Post Office*. She spoke about his former husband and mocked his habits that were identical to the habits of Chinaski. That destroyed his fantasy of a perfect relationship, so they did not meet again.

The last female character is Tammie. Her real name is Pamela Anderson, better known by her nickname ‘Cupcakes’. She is the author of the book called *Bukowski’s Scarlet*, which consist of a detailed description of their relationship. Pamela’s point of view will be discussed later. Her character is depicted as the least likeable one. When Chinaski first meets her, he is amazed by her body, but he does not find her sympathetic at all. He describes her as a flirt and a pill head. However, after a few dates, Chinaski also falls for her personality. He even dedicates a book to her and writes many poems about her, nevertheless, she always refuses his proves of love. She has a feeling that Chinaski’s only uses her as a source of inspiration for his writing. Flirtatious personality and her carelessness are the main traits, which he cannot stand about her. His jealousy drives him crazy, because every male character that appears while they are together, is somehow involved with Tammie. As in this extract: “Tammie had her head in Bobby’s lap and she had her hand on his balls and then she moved it up and grabbed his cock and held his cock, and all the time her eyes looked directly at me.”¹⁰² Chinaski is again presented as a victim and Tammie represents provocative, sexual predator. However, he still meets other women, while being emotionally involved with Tammie.

After all this, Chinaski offers Tammie a place to stay, because she is currently unemployed and has some financial problems. From time to time, she feels the need to leave Chinaski's

⁹⁹ Charles Bukowski, *Women* (London: Virgin Books, 2009), 100.

¹⁰⁰ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 212.

¹⁰¹ Charles Bukowski, *Women* (London: Virgin Books, 2009), 104.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 120.

place, so she stays at her mother's house. Even that separation was too much for Chinaski to stand so he openly reveals his sentiment and jealousy by leaving her tons of mailboxes and by going around the city looking for her. Yet again, Chinaski is more emotionally involved than the female character.

Even though Bukowski makes female characters rounder, significantly treats them better and gives them more space to express their feeling through dialogues, he does not fully abandon the pattern of his previous novels. Lydia follows the pattern of a nymphomaniac that acts like a crazy person, while Chinaski meets other female characters, even when they are not together. Or in the case of Mindy or Liza, he was too drunk to perform, so the inability to perform and the issue of alcohol is again present.¹⁰³ Despite that, other female characters mentioned in the book do not have a significant role. Overall, roles are reversed in most cases because the male character is more emotionally involved than female characters.

¹⁰³ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 208-209.

3 BEHAVIORAL INFLUENCES

3.1 Childhood

Bukowski's childhood was difficult, especially because of his aggressive father and his unsupportive mother. His traumatic childhood is mentioned in many of his works, interviews and in some of his personal correspondence. His childhood can be considered a main behavioral influence, confirming the theory Michael Kaufman expresses in *Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men's Violence*, which will be discussed later.

Bukowski's mother Katherina Fett and his father Henry Charles Bukowski met after World War One in Germany.¹⁰⁴ They would have probably remained there, but due to the 1923 economic crisis, they decided to move to the United States. After their arrival in Baltimore, the mother of Bukowski changed her name to Kate and started calling little Heinrich Henry, to sound more American. Bukowski's parents have always cared about their reputation and worked hard to obtain a better status in society. To that end, they soon moved to California, where they believed, they could achieve their vision of the American Dream.¹⁰⁵ Despite the hard work of his father, they could not reach their desired status in society. Partly, because the best job his father could find was in a Creamy company in LA, for which he delivered milk. Thus, they faked their status through the clothes of his little son, who was dressed in "velvet trousers and shirts with a frilly collar."¹⁰⁶ His father even fooled his neighbours and pretended to be an engineer.¹⁰⁷ Bukowski found their striving for better status ridiculous and that attitude reinforced his desire to do the exact opposite in the future.¹⁰⁸ They took their pretence to the snobbish level: Bukowski was forbidden to play with other children in their neighbourhood, because his parents believed they were superior to the rest of the community.¹⁰⁹ This caused Bukowski many troubles and he was bullied by other kids, not only because of his dyslexia but also because he did not know how to play any collective games at school, so he became a loser.¹¹⁰ The aggressiveness of his father came to light when Bukowski was in elementary school and his teacher sent him home because of a fight. That

¹⁰⁴ Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 7.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁰⁸ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 172.

¹⁰⁹ Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 10.

¹¹⁰ Jean-François Duval, *Bukowski a Beatníci* (Praha: Pragma, 2014), 148.

was for the first time his father beat him and he did not stop till Bukowski's teenage years. Not only that he was violent against his son but also against his wife. On top of that, he was cheating on her with multiple women. Thus, he was definitely not a good role model for his son. Bukowski claimed that he was beaten almost daily, especially because he failed to perform the absurd tasks his father gave him, such as grass cutting only with scissors.¹¹¹ However, the hardest thing to accept for Bukowski was the fact that his mother was on his father's side, as she did not try to stop him from beating their son.¹¹² This difficult period of Bukowski's life was made even worse by his acne, which was so bad that he refused to participate in gym classes, to prevent his classmates from seeing the big pimples on his back.¹¹³ Bukowski was looking for the way out and started drinking alcohol. His parents found him once when he was terribly drunk, and he even vomited on the rug. When his father tried to punish him, he punched him in the face instead.¹¹⁴ Bukowski even wrote a poem about this incident and here is its part:

with one punch, at the age of 16 and 1/2,
I knocked out my father,
a cruel shiny bastard with bad breath,
and I didn't go home for some time, only now and then
to try to get a dollar from
dear momma.¹¹⁵

Bukowski's misogyny and treatment of women in general in his works are considered his biggest issue, for which he is scorned very frequently. However, his writing has a certain reason and possible explanations.¹¹⁶ Kaufman's essay suggests that if a man acts violently against women, he does so as well in the case of other men and himself. According to Herbert Marcus, this act of violence is caused by the "surplus repression of our sexual and emotional desires."¹¹⁷ This theory perfectly reflects in the style of his writing. The main character of his novels, Henry Chinaski, is a man who loves fights and it seems they are his main ego boost having the ability to make him feel more valuable. His endless internal monologues

¹¹¹ Harrison Russell, *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1994), 11.

¹¹² Pamela Wood, *Charles Bukowski's Scarlet* (Northville: Sun Dog Press, 2010), 76.

¹¹³ Jim Christy, *Buk Book: Och Charles Bukowski* (Praha: Pragma, 2004), 16.

¹¹⁴ Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 16.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹⁶ David Charlson, *Charles Bukowski: Autobiographer, Gender Critic, Iconoclast*. (Trafford Publishing: Bloomington, 2005), 59.

¹¹⁷ "The Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men's Violence," Michael Kaufman, Accessed January 15, 2020, <http://www.michaelkaufman.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03, 2>.

about his character qualities and self-doubting are frequently present too. Another factor of self-violence is his alcoholism, which will be discussed later. Bukowski liked to claim that his stories are autobiographical, and he even said that only 7% of what he wrote was made up and the rest 93% was reality.¹¹⁸

Now, if we compare Charles Bukowski to his *alter ego*, many similarities can be found. Due to his childhood, Bukowski became shy, insecure but at the same time an aggressive individual, which can be explained through the above mentioned “surplus repression.”¹¹⁹ While Bukowski’s masculinity was forming during childhood, it was oppressed by the violence of his father.¹²⁰ Moreover, as Kaufman suggests, violence can become the identity of an individual through witnessing violence or being a victim of one.¹²¹ Thus, Bukowski was a victim of his aggressive father, which possibly reinforced his aggression against other men and also women. However, in his works, he seems to exaggerate his frequent fights and toughness. The photographer Sam Cherry said about Bukowski that he tried to build the image of a rough man, by saying that he killed five men. No one believed him and at the end of the night, Bukowski admitted that he did not kill anyone.¹²² He was even exempted from military service because the psychiatrist discovered that he cannot be accepted for his “extreme sensibility.”¹²³ It seems that Bukowski not only made his *alter ego* strong and aggressive, but he even tried to act like him, just to impress others. However, his tactic did not work, because most people who met him describe him as a “gentle giant, really a sweetheart.”¹²⁴

At least in his books his violence against women was mostly verbal, as mentioned in the analysis part. His disrespectful behaviour against women that caused their degradation of femininity, can be again traced back to his childhood. However, in this case with his mother, for whom Bukowski lost respect because of her unsupportiveness and emotional absence.¹²⁵ Most female characters in his books are unfaithful women who are disrespectful and careless toward him. In this case, Bukowski transferred his insecurity to his *alter ego*. Their

¹¹⁸ Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 7.

¹¹⁹ “The Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men’s Violence,” Michael Kaufman, Accessed January 15, 2020, <http://www.michaelkaufman.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03, 2>.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10-13.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²² Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 62.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

characters partially represent the attitude of his mother. The best example is the case of Hector and Mary Lou from his novel *Post Office*. Chinaski was excluded from their relationship and both of them were against him, which represent the attitude of Bukowski's parents.¹²⁶ But Chinaski excluded the possibility that Hector attacked him because he tried to leave with his girlfriend. Thus, Bukowski's insecurity built up during childhood, due to his acne is present too.¹²⁷ He was judged because of his appearance in his teenage years, so he did not know how to approach girls. Moreover, his first sexual experience with a woman was with a prostitute and his first girlfriend was Jane, whom he met at the age of twenty-seven.¹²⁸ That is another example of "surplus repression" of his sexual desires.¹²⁹ As Paul Clements suggests:

The external world described in the narrative takes of something of the author's inner struggle. The process of projection can be recognized as a need to rid the self of something that threatens the individual and needs to be evacuated.¹³⁰

3.2 Alcohol

Apart from drugs, many artists of any kind have experience with alcohol and Bukowski is no exception. As other writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Jack Kerouac or Dorothy Parker, Bukowski consumed alcohol during the process of writing for better imagination and ability to concentrate, and he experienced the downside effect as well.¹³¹ The alcohol was an integral part of Bukowski's life and he even admitted that he only wrote while drinking.¹³² He was drinking so excessively that it almost killed him, and even though doctors advised him to stop, he did not.¹³³ However, when he was diagnosed with leukaemia, he had to stop for good and his life rapidly changed for the better. His healthier lifestyle also affected his pessimistic mindset, as reflected in his later works.

¹²⁶ Paul Clements, *Charles Bukowski, Outsider Literature, and the Beat Movement* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 62.

¹²⁷ "The Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men's Violence," Michael Kaufman, Accessed January 15, 2020, <http://www.michaelkaufman.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03>, 12.

¹²⁸ Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 29.

¹²⁹ "The Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men's Violence," Michael Kaufman, Accessed January 15, 2020, <http://www.michaelkaufman.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03>, 2.

¹³⁰ Paul Clements, *Charles Bukowski, Outsider Literature, and the Beat Movement* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 62.

¹³¹ "I drink, therefore I am: alcohol and creativity," NCBI, Accessed February 10, 2020, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1297475/>, 646.

¹³² Jean-François Duval, *Bukowski a Beatnici* (Praha: Pragma, 2014), 166.

¹³³ Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 33.

Allan Beveridge suggests that some artists like Van Gogh were too sensitive to manage the difficulties in their life and their only escape was alcohol.¹³⁴ This theory easily applies to the personality of Bukowski, who was diagnosed with “extreme sensibility.”¹³⁵ Moreover, people who knew Bukowski, especially women, affirmed that he was a caring and overly sensitive man, who turned into a beast when drinking over his limit. Unfortunately, the downside effect led to serious consequences in case of his last wife Linda Lee. He broke her nose, while drunk and in a fit of jealousy.¹³⁶ However, Linda Lee is the only woman who experienced his physical violence. As studies show, alcohol turns their consumers into aggressive individuals and their aggressiveness is even four times more intense than the use of illegal drugs:

Study after study indicates that, even in samples containing relatively high baseline rates of illicit drug use, violent events are overwhelmingly more likely to be associated with the consumption of alcohol than with any other substance.¹³⁷

Despite Linda Lee’s experience, his previous girlfriends responded identically to what Pamela Wood (Tammie from the novel *Women*) said: “He was a man who would do just anything to please a woman. It was endearing – but scary at the same time. Sometimes it was too intense.”¹³⁸ Most of his girlfriends were more than twenty years younger than him. Pamela admitted that she was not ready for the love he was giving her, as well as Linda Lee who was 25 years younger than Bukowski, and their free-spirited minds and flirtatious behaviour drove him crazy. That led to multiple jealous rages that caused most of their arguments. For Bukowski every man was a competition, and he enjoyed being accompanied by beautiful young women in public.¹³⁹ However, not every woman that is mentioned in his books was as attractive as he described. An example can be found in his novel *Post Office* when he talks about Barbara Frye as Joyce. He stated that she was so attractive that every man at the racetrack stared at her and tried to approach her. However, in reality, she had a deformity on the neck and she only asked Bukowski to marry her because she was scared

¹³⁴ “I drink, therefore I am: alcohol and creativity,” NCBI, Accessed February 10, 2020, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1297475/>, 647.

¹³⁵ Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 22.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

¹³⁷ “Alcohol, Drugs, and Violence,” JSTOR, Accessed March 23, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/223483>, 307.

¹³⁸ Pamela Wood, *Charles Bukowski’s Scarlet* (Northville: Sun Dog Press, 2010), 50.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

that due to her appearance no one else would.¹⁴⁰ This is another example of Bukowski's idealization of the world in his books, which does not match with his autobiographical story. Pamela Woods also mentioned in her book *Charles Bukowski's Scarlet*, that she could not understand how someone believed that his book *Women* is autobiographical. According to her, it was pure fiction and the only thing that matched with her character was the depiction of her appearance.¹⁴¹ His ex-girlfriend Linda King also suggested that his first love Jane was an alcoholic who had intercourse with anyone who bought her a drink. And that is why Bukowski attributed her behaviour to every woman that came after her. This could also be an explanation for the treatment of women in his works.¹⁴² Moreover, Douglas Blaze, who corresponded through letters with Bukowski for a couple of years, sympathized with the theory of Paul Clements:

As much as he wanted a camaraderie, he wanted to be friends, he wanted to be open, he wanted to share love, he couldn't allow himself that luxury having been hurt so much in the past." Said Douglas Blaze, who corresponded with Bukowski many years.¹⁴³

According to all the facts and opinions that Howard Sounes and others, obtained from people that accompanied Bukowski through his life, it seems that writing was the only place where he could get rid of his frustrations and struggles.¹⁴⁴ His previous experiences discouraged him to confide his inner pain to other people, so he poured his anger into his works. He also created the illusion of his *alter ego* who presented the stronger and tougher individual Bukowski aspired to be.

¹⁴⁰ Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 36-37.

¹⁴¹ Pamela Wood, *Charles Bukowski's Scarlet* (Northville: Sun Dog Press, 2010), 224-225.

¹⁴² Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2010), 32.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁴⁴ Paul Clements, *Charles Bukowski, Outsider Literature, and the Beat Movement* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 62.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this thesis was to analyse the way Bukowski treated female characters throughout three of his novels and to point out possible reasons for this treatment. It also aims at examining to which extent his books are autobiographical and what are the differences between Bukowski and his *alter ego* Henry Chinaski.

The first chapter explored the beginning of his career that formed Bukowski's writing style, as well as his reputation. Bukowski craved popularity at first and he was aware that it is necessary to shock and provoke in order to gain recognition, which is portrayed in his works. Many readers believed his works are autobiographical because even Bukowski claimed so. When he was already famous, his works were less critical, not only towards society but also towards women. This peculiarity strengthens the theory that Bukowski's works were autobiographical only at the end of his career and the rest was only a ploy to gain recognition. The analysis part included a detailed depiction of numerous female characters and their treatment. In the case of *Post Office*, the main theme was the work environment and the critique of society. Male characters were atypically portrayed as weaker in comparison to the female ones. Moreover, female characters had a flat personality and only their physical qualities were mentioned. *Factotum* basically represented Chinaski's admiration for women's bodies. Yet again, roles were reversed because female characters represented sexual predators. However, their characters were rounder. Overall, his second novels followed the pattern of *Post Office*. The last analysed novel *Women* was full of introspection and Chinaski showed more sympathy for female characters. Their characters were even rounder and, in the end, Chinaski realised that he chased the illusion of a perfect relationship. The substantial progress was proved by the refusal of the last woman. However, he did not fully abandon the pattern of his previous novels.

The last chapter concludes with the possible factors that influenced Bukowski's treatment of female characters. The main influence was his childhood, especially his aggressive father, who distorted his viewpoint on interpersonal relationships. The only place that allowed him to get rid of his inner trauma was in his books. However, alcohol transformed the release of his frustration in a form of aggression, not only against women but against the whole world. Even though Bukowski did his best to convince everyone that his behaviour is identical to his *alter ego*, the testimony of his close friends and women showed the opposite. His works might be a bit misogynistic, but it is important to point out the difference between Charles Bukowski and his *alter ego*, who does not share the same personality traits.

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