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Charles Bukowski and Poethics of Dirty Realism

Matěj Pospíšil

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prof. PhDr. Karel Rýdl, CSc.
děkan

Mgr. Olga Roebuck, Ph.D.
vedoucí katedry

V Pardubicích dne 30. listopadu 2018

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ANNOTATION

This bachelor thesis is concerned with the works of Charles Bukowski in the context of the 20th century. The theoretical part of the thesis describes the social and historical context with emphasis on the social revolution in the United States and its impact on literature. There are also described literary movements that were part of the social revolution. The analytical part is concerned with the categorization of Charles Bukowski, and it further analyzed short stories by Bukowski.

KEY WORDS

Beat Generation, Charles Bukowski, Allen Ginsberg, dirty realism, society

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce je zaměřena na tvorbu Charlese Bukowského v kontextu 20. století. Teoretická část této práce je zaměřena na sociální a historický kontext s důrazem sociální revoluci, a vznik nových literárních směrů ve Spojených Státech. Další součástí práce je analýza zařazení Charlese Bukowského do literárního hnutí Beatníků, práci uzavírá analýza vybraných děl od Charlese Bukowského, na kterých je ukázáno, jak Bukowski psal a přemýšlel o literatuře.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Generace Beatníků, Charles Bukowski, Allen Ginsberg, špinavý realismus, společnost

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Introduction

Post-war United States represented a land which was subjected to a change, the change of mentality. New literary movements emerged from the deep-rooted flaws in American values. Together with those changes the United States witnessed the rise of Charles Bukowski, who was one of the most important authors of the 20th century.

The first chapter of this thesis provides readers with the important background knowledge about the post-war change in American society. The first subchapter touches on geopolitical situation in the world, and it briefly outlines start of the Cold War and it mentions the Vietnam War and its impact on the attitudes of Americans. The second subchapter concerns the rise of the Beat movement onto American literary scene, the Beat generation was one of the most important literary movement of the mid-20th century in America, its impact on the literary scene was enormous, the extent of its impact is described in the subchapter. The third subchapter defines the counterculture of the 1960s in the United States. Counterculture is a broad term which is used to describe the goal of the movements, and lifestyle changes of the younger generation. The fourth subchapter describes the rise of the new literary style in American literature called dirty realism, its purpose is to introduce Charles Bukowski. The final subchapter provides other two literary movements prevalent in the American literary space: Postmodernism and the second wave of the Southern literary renaissance.

The second chapter is focused on American author Charles Bukowski and his early life. This first part of this chapter explores events in the Bukowski's life before he became full-time author. Events described in the chapter made Bukowski the author he was and it is pivotal for readers to acknowledge these events. The subchapter corners Bukowski's crudeness in his stories, and how it was perceived by other literary figures, comments on his literary techniques are presented from the point of view of other authors, who encountered his work.

The third chapter provides a view of Bukowski on his own writing. The chapter works with a review published in Open City magazine, in which he criticized classical authors and states the reason for his dislike. The review is important from the legacy standpoint, Bukowski wanted to be remembered, he often played with the concept of legacy, and he wanted to leave some words behind. The chapter also provides Jean-Francois Duval's way how to find the real Charles Bukowski. Duval used an interesting comparison regarding Bukowski and Quasimodo. Duval based all his comparisons from his talks with Bukowski and his wife Linda. Bukowski's

success in Europe was him desirable author to read so translators and journalists like Duval were interested in him and that is why they traveled to the United States to interview him with the vision of them presenting his work back in Europe.

The following chapter deals with Bukowski's relation to the Beats. The views expressed by Bukowski on the address of some the Beat authors namely Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso. In this chapter, some of the Bukowski's letters are analyzed with an emphasis on his changing opinions towards the Beats and the Beat Generation in general. The chapter concludes with the questioning of Bukowski's literary categorization.

In the fifth chapter, the selected works of Charles Bukowski will be studied. The selected short stories from *Absence of the Hero* will be analyzed, mainly to illustrate the uniqueness of the Bukowski's writing style, and his approach to writing. The short story *The Absence of Hero* is analyzed from the view stylistic and social theme, it should provide evidence how Bukowski hit the deeper meaning in the short passage on the story, the story corresponds with the nihilistic view of the world. The second story *Christ with Barbecue Sauces* is analyzed with the relation to his use of language, depiction of religious theme is not common in his works, the analysis should explain the use of the crucifixion. Subsequently story *I just write poetry so I can go to bed with girls* illustrates Bukowski's relation towards women and how he perceived the raw sexual acts. The last column *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* introduces Bukowski's struggle as a freelance writer, it depicts his dark thoughts about suicide and survival. The column functions as an illustration of Bukowski's thinking process when he was struggling to write his poetry or short stories. The goal of the chapter is to show to reader the forms of dirty realism in works of Charles Bukowski.

Overall, the aim of this paper is to illustrate the world of Charles Bukowski's blue-collar American in which he tried to survive on the verge of poverty and alcohol addiction, desperate attempt to survive in the society that was rapidly changing. The paper should also succeed in providing the deeper understanding of Bukowski's character, he as a person evolved the 80s and this evolution created a new public Bukowski that was open and understanding. The paper should also expand the understanding of his literary work from the stand point of language use. Additional aim of this paper is to give the reader expanded knowledge of nuances in between the lines of his texts with emphasis on his perception of dirty realism.

1. Historical and Cultural context

This chapter is concerned with some of the changes the United States underwent during the 20th century, including the post-war period. It describes how these changes influenced and contributed to the development of the American culture with the emphasis on the changes which reshaped and created literary movements.

1.1. Postwar United States

As described in *Writing the Nation*, the United States entered a period of a global leadership after the Second World War, the fact that the continental U.S was never attacked helped quickly retool American industry to consumer production, while the factories of its allies and enemies were destroyed by the war. The United States government spend tens of billion dollars in foreign aid to help rebuild its former enemies Germany and Japan, United States wanted to secure their alliance in the future. A crucial role in the American society played the GI Bill, a bill that paid for education of soldier who returned from the war. The GI Bill help to create a new prospering middle class of civilians, people embraced the model of nuclear family and sought happiness in peace.¹

The United States found a new challenger for the role of the global leader. The Soviet Union organized Eastern European nations into one bloc led by central Russian communist regime, state owns all businesses and administers all the social services as opposed to American free market capitalism, under which private individuals own all businesses. In 1945 the Soviet Union tested its own atomic bomb; the United States and the Soviet Union entered a period called Cold War. The race to accumulate enough nuclear power to destroy the entire humanity had begun. The United States portrayed themselves as a watchdog, they vowed to control the Soviet Union, which meant persecution of American artists and activists with leftist sympathies in the country, as a tool for this persecution the government created institutions like House Un-American Activities Committee. Some of the authors had their career constrained by the government for their political beliefs, like Arthur Miller and others.

While on the global stage the United States challenged the Soviet Union, the nation was in a turmoil due to racial segregation perpetuated by the laws of Jim Crow, laws that kept black Americans socially separate from and legally inferior to white citizens. The desire to change those laws created civil rights movement and black power movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. The protests against segregation were broadcasted all over the United

¹ Amy Berke, Robert R. Bleil, Jordan Cofer, and Doug Davies, *Writing the Nation: A Concise Introduction to American Literature 1865 to Present* \ (Minneapolis, Mn: University of North Georgia, 2015), 719.

States, and with growing television culture the entire nation could see what the movement is fighting for, a substantial role in the movement was played by college-educated white middle class. Dr. King advocated for peaceful protesting, forms of protests included boycotts, marches, and other nonviolent activities. In 1963, American President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, the presidency was assumed by Kennedy's vice-president Lyndon B. Johnson. Johnson came with a legislation called 'Great Society', which was a bundle of policies to expand civil rights, public broadcasting, Medicare, Medicaid, aid to education, the arts, urban and rural development. Neither the Great Society programs nor the civil rights legislation could prevent outbreaks of violence in the black neighborhoods of American cities in the 1960s. A major riot broke out in Los Angeles in August 1965 that left 34 people dead. Rioting continued the next several summer in Chicago, Detroit, and other cities with strong Afro-American communities. On April 4, 1968, Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, in the wake of assassination unrest broke out in more than hundred communities across the country. Following the assassination president Johnson wrote a letter to United States House Representative urging passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which included the Fair Housing Act, the bill passed the House by wide margin on April 10, 1968. The civil rights movement achieved its purpose, the pressure generated by various form of protest forced the government to change its federal laws and slowly deconstruct the systemic racism present in the legislation of the United States.

American involvement in the Vietnam War was under heavy public scrutiny, opposition to the war in the United States developed slowly. In the spring of 1965, the first teach-ins, which questioned why the United States was fighting in Asia, were held on college campuses. Antiwar movement gained a strong support in the following years as the cost of war increased. The war expenses gutted many Great Society programs, which led into even stronger antiwar opposition in the mainstream American society. As previously mentioned, the growth of television culture made Vietnam war the first televised war, each evening on television. Resentment of Americans grew stronger with the increasing American casualties. President Johnson lost polarity during the Vietnam War, to the point where he would not seek a second term. Public saw the involvement in the Vietnam War is not justifiable anymore. The last Americans soldiers withdrew from Vietnam on March 29, 1973 under the Richard Nixon presidency. Nixon addressed the nation in his speech:

For the first time in 12 years, no American military forces are in Vietnam. All of our American POW's are on their way home. The 17 million people of South Vietnam have the right to choose their own government without outside interference, and because of our program of Vietnamization, they

have the strength to defend that right. We have prevented the imposition of a Communist government by force on South Vietnam.²

Literature functioned as a tool for the critique and voicing the concerns of the way American society was going. Authors wrote relentlessly about social issues, systemic racism in their society, as they strived to change the thinking of American people and create a better new society in which everyone has the same rights and freedom to freely voice their opinions. As pointed out by Berke in *Writing the Nation*, American literature since 1945 has seen the rise of countercultural Beats and the confessional poets. Literature functioned as a tool for voices of radical feminism and others. The American writers of that time illustrate the evolution and progress of American society towards social issues and human understanding.³

Literature often drove the social revolutions all around the world, the United States are not exception. Pressure from the Beat Generation allowed Americans to openly discuss the sexuality and the social roles the society has assigned to them. The second wave of the Southern literary Renaissance showed that women are excellent writers and they deserve to be mentioned and praised. Postmodernism showcased that the literature cannot be shackled by the conventions imposed by the language. Postmodernist artists reinvented the way how to write, they expanded stylistic techniques and created new ones.

American society was exposed to the new ideas, old taboos were destroyed, and the new morality has emerged in the younger generation. The foundation of modern western society was laid down in the postwar United States. The newly found societal freedom allowed the exploration of mind.

² Richard Nixon, "Addressing the Nation," (March 29, 1973), <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/november-3-1969-address-nation-war-vietnam>.

³ Berke et al., *Writing the Nation*, 722.

1.2. Beat Generation

The Beat Generation was one of the most influential literary movement in the 20th century, their involvement in the American society brought changes and functioned as a steppingstone in the evolution of American values. This chapter describes the basic values the Beats held and describes themes of their literary work. Jack Kerouac on the Beat Generation:

The Beat Generation, that was a vision we had, John Clellon Holmes and I, and Allen Ginsberg in an even wilder way, in the late Forties, of a generation of crazy, illuminated hipsters suddenly rising and roaming America, serious, crazy, bumming and hitchhiking everywhere, ragged beatific, beautiful in an ugly graceful new way.⁴

Beat Generation, also called Beat movement, was an American social and literal movement originating in the 1950s. The word 'beat' was primarily used after World War II by jazz musicians and hustlers as a slang term meaning down and out, or poor and exhausted. Charters describes what the word "beat" referred to: "The jazz musician Mezz Mezzrow combined it with other words like 'dead beat.'"⁵ Steve Watson describes how the word was appropriated by Kerouac and company: "Herbert Huncke picked the word [beat] from his show business friends on of Near North Side of Chicago, and in the fall of 1945 he introduced the word to William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac."⁶ The Beat movement was anti-establishment and anti-consumerism, they despised the way how rampant consumerism was affecting human mind. Beat Generation created a new moral space around itself, they openly challenged taboos about sexuality perpetuated by the generation of their parents, and some artists were openly homosexual or bisexual. New York City and San Francisco became bastions of Beat Generation and its culture, the progressive nature of those cities helped create an environment in which this bold and expressive form of self-expression could thrive.

According to Charters, The central elements of the Beat culture are the rejection of standard narratives, making a spiritual quest, the exploration of American and Eastern religions, the rejections of economic materials, explicit portrayals of the human condition, experimentation with psychedelic drugs, and sexual liberation and exploration.⁷ Beat literature was more bold, straightforward and expressive than anything that had come before. Beat poets transformed poetry into an expression of lived experience, they often read their poem aloud to a crowd

⁴ Jack Kerouac, "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," *Esquire*, March 1, 1958, 24.

⁵ Ann Charters, *The Beat Reader* (New York; London: Penguin, 2006), xvii.

⁶ Steven Watson, *The Birth of the Beat Generation: Visionaries, Rebels, and Hipsters, 1944-1960*. (New York: Pantheon Books, Cop, 1998), 3.

⁷ Ann Charters, *Beat Down to Your Soul: What Was the Beat Generation?* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001).

accompanied by a jazz band. West hails the new style of poetry: “The publication of Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl* in 1956 marks a turning point in the history of Beat literature, not to mention American literature in general. The long-form poem is intended to be read aloud, almost chanted, a sort of return to an oral tradition that had been neglected in literature for a long time.”⁸ The poem contains many references to drugs and sexual practices, both heterosexual and homosexual. In 1957 Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, a publisher, faced an obscenity trial. Judge decided that poem was not obscene, and he allowed its further publishing. Beat literature shook American literary landscape and opened a new space to authors who sought a non-traditional way of self-expression. Charters outlines Kerouac’s struggle to convince the public about the spiritual side of the Beat Generation:

Kerouac’s efforts to convince magazine editors and television interviewers that his concept of the Beat Generation included a spiritual dimension was unavailing, but the readers of his books, which sold widely, understood him and his contribution to the cultural changes underway in America. The literary establishment was hostile, but the first small group of Beat writers in New York had found its most important supporters a few years before the hullabaloo over *On the Road* and ‘Howl’ in 1957.⁹

Charters continues to describe how the Beat Generation affected American literary space, their attack on capitalism, consumerism, racism, and ecological destruction did not make them money, but their message was understood throughout the United States. The Beats can be compared to the radical writers of the 1930s, like Ezra Pound and Ernest Hemingway, but they did not write about those issues from abroad, they protested their country’s faults on the front lines.¹⁰

The fact that the Beats led the Cultural Revolution from the United States gave them credibility and it contributed to their quickly growing popularity. Many people traveled to New York City and San Francisco to witness the Beat culture live and feel the literature or just lead the bohemian life filled with alcohol, casual sex, and drug experimentation.

Authors recognized the threat that the Beat Generation represented for the established American values. William S. Burroughs about the impact of the Beat Culture:

Once Started, the Beat movement had a momentum of its own and a world-wide impact. In fact, the intelligent conservatives in American saw this as a serious threat to their position long before the Beat writers saw it themselves.

⁸ Ryan West, Beau Patterson, *English Literature: Nineteenth Century*, (Ed-tech Press, 2018), 66, <https://books.google.cz/books?id=Z-PEDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

⁹ Charters, *The Portable Beat reader*, xxiv

¹⁰ Charters, *The Portable Beat reader*, xxx–xxxii

As much more serious threat, say, than the Communist party. The Beat literary movement came at exactly the right time and said something that millions of people all nationalities over the world were waiting to hear. You can't tell anybody anything he doesn't know already. The alienation, the restlessness, the dissatisfaction were already there waiting to when Kerouac pointed on the road.

Artists to my mind the real architects of change, and not political legislators, who implement change after the fact. Art exerts a profound influence on the style of life, the mode, range and direction of perception. Art tells us what we know and don't know that we know. Certainly *On the Road* performed that function in 1957 to an extraordinary extent. There's no doubt that we're living in a freer America as a result of the Beat literary movement, which is an important part of the larger picture of cultural and political change in this country during the last forty years, when a four letter word couldn't appear on the printed page, and minority rights were ridiculous.¹¹

The Beats were the literary movement of the counterculture. They pushed the boundaries of socially acceptable literature which led to the liberalization of literature. Beliefs and ideologies that the Beats held later transfigured into the counterculture of the 1960s, this cultural shift meant the transformation of the Beats into Hippies. Allen Ginsberg remained politically active and became a prominent character in the anti-war movement. Jack Kerouac did not share Ginsberg's political ambitions and broke the link with Ginsberg, later Kerouac criticized Ginsberg's radical expressions at political protests. The Beat Generation faded away in the 1960s, though its social engagement had lasting effect on literature and helped lesser known authors to gain recognition.

Even greater impact of the Beat Generation was felt in the society, the bohemian lifestyle opened eyes of the young generation and they began to reject the social roles imposed by the society. The traditionalist society was killed by the Beat Generation, and the nation after the war wanted to experience something different than the long working hours and brand new consumer goods. The rejection of materialism was shocking and provoking, the younger generation experience the feeling of complete social freedom.

¹¹ Charters, *The Portable Beat reader*, xxxi

1.3. Counterculture of the 1960s

The 1960s were a period when long-held values seemed to break down, especially among the young generation. College-age men and women became political activists and were the driving force behind the civil rights movement and antiwar movements. Young people separated themselves from mainstream culture and traditional values of their parents' generation, they distinguished themselves by appearance and lifestyle. Attitude towards sexuality appeared to loosen, and women began openly protest the traditional roles of housewife and mother that society has assigned to them.

Free Speech movement

American political space witnessed the creation of The New Left. The term "New Left" was coined in the Port Huron Statement in 1962, which criticized the lack of individual freedom and the power of bureaucracy in government, universities, and corporations and called for participatory democracy.¹² Before the shift toward to opposition of the Vietnam War issues like course requirements, discrimination by sororities and fraternities, and minority admissions were the main concerns of college students. Universities had a policy, where they would not interfere with student's political activities off campus, but they expected apolitical activities from the students in campus. This changed on October 1, 1964, at University of California at Berkeley, when Jack Weinberg was arrested for political activism, when he was in a police car there was a spontaneous movement of students they surrounded the police car to prevent it from leaving. Marco Savio emerged as the leader of students; he gave speech from atop the car calling for free speech on campus. After the 32 hours of car confinement Weinberg was booked and freed. As the result of this spontaneous protest Free Speech movement was formed.

Hippie subculture

Integral part of the counterculture was the Hippie subculture. As previously mentioned, hippie subculture took some of the Beat Generations values and in the 1970s as the Beat Generation started to fade away the Hippie subculture absorbed the remaining Beats. Hippies were mostly middle-class whites, but without the political drive. Hippies embraced jeans, tie-dyed shirts, sandals, beard, long hair and a lifestyle of sexual promiscuity and recreational drugs, including marijuana and the hallucinogenic LSD, some of hippies decided to turn away from the modern society and re-settle on ranches, or communes. The very first of communes in the United States

¹² Michael Kazin, "The Port Huron Statement," *Dissent Magazine*, accessed April 27, 2020, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-port-huron-statement-at-fifty>.

was a seven-acre land in Southern Colorado, named Drop City. Sex and drug culture were amplified by the rock music of the time, the hippies were primarily an urban phenomenon. The Haight-Ashbury section of San Francisco and the East Village in New York were the focal points of the counterculture for a brief period from 1965 to 1967.

Women rights movement

Women rights movement as a movement that sought equal rights and opportunities and greater personal freedom for women. Women rights movement concerned the position of women in the society, their involvement in politics, workforce, and exploration of sexuality.¹³ In the United State the second-wave feminism was sparked by Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, the book had immediate impact on the society and women began to question their role in the society, women wanted more than a house, children, and a husband. Friedan questioned women's life fulfillment, she wanted to unchain women from the deep-rooted social roles that society gave them. To pressure the government, the National Organization for women, shortly NOW, was formed. Burkett summarizes the ambitions of National organization for women, the organization wanted to pressure the government into accepting an amendment to the United States Constitution called Equal Rights Amendment, shortly ERA, the amendment was designed to invalidate many state and federal laws that discriminate against women, its central underlying principle was that sex should not determine the legal rights of men or women, the organization also demanded greater access to contraception and abortion. Both measures caused a massive controversy around the nation.¹⁴ The controversial Equal Rights Amendment received 35 of the necessary 38 state ratifications, therefore it was not added to the United States Constitution. Despite this failure the women's rights movement achieved success in women's liberation., women gained access to jobs in every corner of the United States, divorce laws were liberalized; employers were barred from firing pregnant women, and women's studies programs were created in colleges and universities. Women began their political careers and with great success, the change of political climate opened the door to women and the new era of women politicians had begun.

¹³ "Women's Rights Movement," Encyclopædia Britannica, March 5, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/womens-movement>.

¹⁴ "Women's Rights Movement."

1.4. Dirty realism

As described in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*: “Dirty realism, a critical label attached since the early 1980s to a group of American short-story writers, of whom the best-known are Raymond Carver, Jayne Anne Phillips, and Tobias Wolff. The term refers to a tendency for their stories to recount incidents of impoverished life among blue-collar workers in small-town America, in a bare, unsensational style.”¹⁵ Dirty realism as a term was coined by Buford in *Granta* magazine, to define a North American literary movement:

This is a curious, dirty realism about the belly-side of contemporary life, but it is realism so stylized a particularized – so insistently informed by a discomfiting and sometimes elusive irony – that makes the more traditional realistic novels of, say, Updike or Styron seem ornate, even baroque in comparison. Many, like Richard Ford, Raymond Carver, or Frederick Barthelme, write in a flat, ‘unsurprised’ language, pared down to the plainest styles. The sentences are stripped of adornment, and maintain complete control of the simple objects and events that they ask us to witness; it is what’s not being said – the silences, the elisions, the omissions – that seems to speak most.¹⁶

Dirty realism in a style of writing that depicts average American working class, the greyness of everyday life, the thrills of cheap alcohol and sex. In this style one author excels, he is often not mentioned because he is hard to categorize, Charles Bukowski an author who checks all the boxes mentioned above. Barry Miles captured Bukowski’s dirty realistic style: “He [Bukowski] captured many wonderful images of downtown, before all the energy was drained out of it. He is the poet of sprawl: no other poet has written so many poems about freeways, palm trees and lawn, and as well as the racetrack, going to the bank. The minutiae of everyday life in Los Angeles.”¹⁷ Dirty realism was not popular among authors that is why it is so hard to find one who use the style solely. Charles Bukowski managed to stay truthful to the style throughout his entire career when it comes to prose and partially poetry. His depiction of seemingly mundane things as going to the work, drinking alone in an empty flat are his specialties, the genius of his in the depiction of the grim reality. He took his readers into the underground of the blue-collar United States, drinking with the forgotten of the society he discovered his style. For Bukowski dirty realism was not just a style of writing, for him it was the reality in which he lived.

¹⁵ Christ Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 68 [http://armytage.net/pdsdata/%5BChris_Baldick%5D_The_Concise_Oxford_Dictionary_of_L\(BookFi.org\).pdf](http://armytage.net/pdsdata/%5BChris_Baldick%5D_The_Concise_Oxford_Dictionary_of_L(BookFi.org).pdf)

¹⁶ Bill Buford, “Dirty Realism: New Writing from America.,” *Granta*, June 1, 1983

¹⁷ Barry Miles, *Charles Bukowski*, (London: Virgin Books, 2005), 99.

1.5. Literary Context of the Mid-20th century

This chapter provides brief characteristics of literary movements in the United States which are not previously mentioned, but their impact on the society was notable.

Southern literary Renaissance – Second wave

As described in *Writing the Nation*, American South like the rest of the world entered the Cold War. The South tried to keep pace with the changing United States, but its literature produced multiple innovative and critically acclaimed work of the period. As the shining example Eudora Welty's novel, *The Robber Bridegroom* published in 1942, gained attention throughout the nation. South profited from economic prosperity, the new stronger middle class contributed to development of major Southern cities, such as Atlanta and Birmingham. The South started to shift away from agricultural to industrial economy, as the result of this shift the South managed to lift off its image of rural poverty.¹⁸

The literary movement in the South was ahead of the Southern mentality, Afro-American writers felt the rampant racism and they decided to leave the South and continue their work in the more progressive parts of the United States, but with the nation-wide influence of the civil rights movements the South slowly adopted the progressive values of the new United States. The Second wave of the Southern Renaissance produced talented writers, who contributed to the social transformation of the United States. Tennessee Williams is one of the most important playwrights of the 20th-century American drama. Williams in his plays reveals a world of human frustration. Williams' plays contributed to de stigmatization of conversations about sexual orientation.

Postmodernism

As described in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*: "When applied to literature the term is ambiguous, implying either that modernism has been superseded or that it has continued into a new phase."¹⁹ Postmodernist authors use experimental literary techniques developed by modernist earlier in the twentieth century, the authors themselves are inventing new ways of writing, and for this purpose postmodernists adopt the style of "metafiction". Baldick defines metafiction: "...as fiction about fiction, a fiction that comments on its own fictional status."²⁰ Postmodernism is marked, both stylistically and ideologically, by a reliance on such literary conventions as paradox,

¹⁸ Berke et al., *Writing the Nation*, 723.

¹⁹ Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 201.

²⁰ Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 151.

paranoia, dark humor, fragmentation and many more. Postmodernist works often have multiple meaning, or a complete lack of meaning.

Postmodernist authors use several stylistic techniques for an example: Intertextuality, the acknowledgement of previous literary works within other literary work, Magic realism, the introduction of impossible or unrealistic events into a narrative that is otherwise realistic and many other stylistic techniques developed in the 20th century.

Hutcheon provides context in which is postmodernism tied to social changes in the United States: “The basic postmodernist stance—of a questioning of authority—obviously is a result of the ethos of the 1960s.”²¹ Postmodernism in the 20th century was hard to characterize, it had many definitions, and attempts to categorize this style of writing proved slippery, because its open for interpretation and authors had the freedom to reject the label that was assigned to them.

Both literary movements mentioned above impacted the United States and functioned as a driving force behind the social changes. Postmodernism and the second wave of Southern literary Renaissance are not the only movements that were taking their place in American literary world, others form of experimental poetry had emerged and captured the nations mind. Deprived post-war American society was in a perfect state to instigate changes that would challenge its core values. With the strong middle-class, Americans could be subjected to literature on greater scale, authors became aware of the situation and they started discussions about values that had no place in the modern society.

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²¹ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory Fiction* (1988; repr., London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 202.

2. Charles Bukowski, Life and Writing

This chapter describes periods of Charles Bukowski's life, it introduces his life before he became a writer. Bukowski went through the United States and work in many cities, which influenced his style of writing, especially the content of his writing, and how are his experiences projected into his writing.

The author known as Charles Bukowski was born as Heinrich Karl Bukowski on August 16, 1920 in Andernach, to a German American soldier Heinrich Bukowski who remained in Germany after his army service in the First World War. Bukowski spent his childhood in Los Angeles, in school young Charles was bullied because he spoke with a heavy German accent. Poetry Foundation describes Bukowski's early life as a struggle. His father was an advocate for firm discipline and he often beat young Charles for small offences, Bukowski details father's abuse in his autobiographical novel *Ham on Rye*, published in 1982. Bukowski was introduced to alcohol at thirteen years of age by his friend, who is also mentioned in some of his short stories, William 'Baldy' Mullinax.²² Bukowski found alcohol compelling, he began to drink excessively, later he proclaimed alcohol as something that will help him for a long time to come.²³

In 1939, Bukowski began attending Los Angeles City College, but he never graduated, after dropping out he was arrested by FBI agents on suspicion of draft evasion. Bukowski had to take a psychological examination that was part of his mandatory military entrance physical test and was given a Selective Service Classification of 4-F, which meant unfit for military service. In the beginning of the Second World War Bukowski moved into New York City and tried to become a writer, but this ambition was left unfulfilled. Bukowski gave up and went on a ten-year alcohol binge around the United States, he worked various marginal jobs, his main goal was to make some money for alcohol and have casual sex with women. Sexual themes are pivotal for Bukowski's writings. In 1955 he was hospitalized with an alcohol-induced bleeding ulcer and came close to death. After his near-death experience Bukowski cut back on drinking and took up writing again. He did not begin his professional career until the age of thirty-five, and like many other writers at that time, began by publishing in underground newspapers like *Open City* and *L.A. Free Press*. Bukowski still worked day-job at United States Post Office

²² "Charles Bukowski," Poetry Foundation, accessed May 10, 2020, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/charles-bukowski>.

²³ Charles Bukowski, *Ham on Rye: A Novel* (New York: Ecco, 2014), 89.

Department in Los Angeles, with brakes he worked in the post office for eleven year, the longest term of employment he ever held.

In 1969 Bukowski accepted an offer from Black Sparrow Press publisher John Martin and quit his post office job to dedicate himself to full-time writing. Bukowski explains his choice to become full-time writer in an unpublished letter to Carl Weissner: “I have one of two choices – stay in post office and go crazy...or stay out there and play at writer and starve. I have decided to starve.”²⁴

Paul Ciotti of New York Times summarizes the archetype of the main character in Bukowski’s writings: “The main character in his poems and short stories, which are largely autobiographical, is usually a down-and-out write who spends his time working at marginal jobs (and getting fired from them), getting drunk and making love with a succession of bimbos and floozies.”²⁵ Bukowski in his short stories and novels used alter ego named Henry Chinaski, a hard-drinking unskilled worker, a lover of classical music, and a gambler on horses.

Harold Norse in *Memoirs of a Bastard Angel* wrote about his correspondence with Bukowski: “His [letters] were explosives with a pain and humor, an amazing amalgam of wordplay, ripe, earthy, vulgar; his language leapt form the page like a Van Gogh, galvanic, whirling, immediate, full of raw violence, color and light...”²⁶

Norse’s parallel with Van Gogh is amusing, to compare a writer to painter might seem odd, but in a broader context it is possible that Bukowski captured the moment as Van Gogh did in his paintings. The praise of Duval and Norse focuses on the language side of Bukowski’s writing.

Bukowski’s use of violent images and graphic language depicted survival in a corrupt society, because of those images Bukowski was under heavy scrutiny by literal critics. Bukowski was often labeled as a sexist, because in the most of his novels and short stories women function as an object of his sexual interest, he used exceedingly graphic language to describe women’s body, and his sexual practices. Hugh Fox wrote about this issue in *The North American Review*: “Whenever my wife Linda would come with me to visit him he’d play the Man role, but one

²⁴ Jay Dougherty, “An Introduction to Charles Bukowski, by Jay Dougherty,” www.jaydougherty.com, accessed May 10, 2020, <http://www.jaydougherty.com/bukowski/index.html>.

²⁵ Paul Ciotti, “Bukowski”: He’s Written More than 40 Books, and in Europe He’s Treated like a Rock Star. He Has Dined with Norman Mailer and Goes to the Race Track with Sean Penn. Mickey Rourke and Faye Dunaway Are Starring in a Movie Based on His Life. at 66, Poet Charles Bukowski Is Suddenly in Vogue.” *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1987, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-03-22-tm-14539-story.html>.

²⁶ Harold Norse, *Memoirs of a Bastard Angel* (Editora: New York: W. Morrow, 1989), 420.

night when she couldn't come I got to Buk's place and found a whole of different kind guy – easy to get along with, relaxed, accessible."²⁷ Bukowski walked the line, the criticism was justified, and he remained no shaken by the criticism and continued to write in his graphic style.

His attitude towards women became tender as he was getting older. The famous wild star of literature settled down and he enjoyed the last years of his life in Santa Barbara. Bukowski's legacy is often questioned by the literal critics of the 21st century, for the same reason he was questioned while being alive, it is always about his approach to women, how he depicted them in his stories and how he treated them, it is important to note that his stories as they might seem auto biographical but in certain elements the stories are comical, because Bukowski believed that it would give his stories faster dynamic and it would be more captivating to read.

²⁷ Hugh Fox, "The Living Underground: Charles Bukowski," *The North American Review* 254, (1969): 57, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25117001?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

2.1. Bukowski's Crudeness

Duval in *Bukowski and the Beats* describes Bukowski as a counterpuncher, which means that he matches the violence of reality with the same violence in literature, precisely his language is considered violent.²⁸

Duval depicts Bukowski's uniqueness with this proclamation, Bukowski's ability to use single lines of text to depict the situation with dynamic is indeed unique, he purposefully avoided long description of the situations in his text, because it would make the text dead without flow, that is why he did not write many novels and his main focus was on short stories, and in his early career on poetry. Bukowski existed in a violent world and he reciprocated the violence back with his use of language, his approach to writing was straightforward, he chose the most crude and simple words. His works thanks to his language became quite appealing to working-class American class, even though he did not rise quickly to the fame his career took steadier rise to the top.

There were not many authors Bukowski openly praised, one of those authors was Harold Norse, and Bukowski praised him in *The Old Pro*: "He [Norse] can punch it out quickly. In style. Upside down. In grit. On fire. Tooth to tooth, hard. The smell of our butts. The cock of our shame. Light. Rabbit dream. The whole Bomb inside the head whistling Dixie."²⁹

By this proclamation Bukowski respects Norse's style of writing, probably it reminded him his own style, but this rare moment of appreciation shows that Bukowski was able to talk about other authors with recognition if they met his ideals of writing. He did not hide his dislike towards classic authors, in *The Old Pro* Bukowski wrote:

Most people, almost all do not know how to write, say, including Shakespeare, who wrote such terrible stuff that fooled the whole mob, top to bottom. Other bad writers who fooled nearly everybody were E.A. Poe, Ibsen, G.B. Shaw, William Faulkner, Tolstoy, and Gogol. Today they are fooled by Mailer and Pasternak.³⁰

Bukowski, like his literature, was straightforward when it comes to the definition of a good author, all the men he mentioned are immortalized as the icons of literature, they are thought in schools all over the world, but Bukowski classifies them as bad authors who did not know how to write. For some it might seem bitter and disrespectful, but in Bukowski's mind those men

²⁸ Jean-François Duval, *Bukowski and the Beats: A Commentary on the Beat Generation* (Northville, Mich.: Sun Dog Press, 2002), 107.

²⁹ Charles Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, ed. David Calonne (San Francisco: City Lights, 2010), 45.

³⁰ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 45.

are not good writers because of a simple reason, their works are full of empty lines that add nothing to the story and the length of the text is killing the flow of language, and it makes the message gray. This fact makes sense when his works are compared to theirs, Bukowski's language is full of crude words that capture the nature of the situation perfectly without the idolization of language, his words are stripped of ambiguous meanings, and they hit the reader hard and fast.

Even though Bukowski wrote his stories with auto bibliographical elements, he often exaggerated some of the story elements. Duval points out the comical elements in Bukowski's style of writing: "He [Bukowski] overdid some things a little in order to both endow them with more expressive and to accentuate their grotesque element."³¹ But the overdoing is not apparent as it might seem from the Duval quote, Bukowski walk the line perfectly, the exaggeration of elements are only visible when he wants them to be, as illustrated in a short story analyzed in this thesis *Christ with Barbecue sauce*.

The crudeness and comical elements brought Bukowski success in the 1980s, when his work began to emerge in collections. His depiction of the lowest layer of the society had its charm, and his use of language was integral part of that charm. His lifestyle played also the part in his success, when American saw that the man who is considered the new star of literature is living in a cheap flat with nothing but alcohol their admiration had reached new heights. At time the public pressure on Bukowski was enormous, everyone wanted him to be the character from his stories, for a decade Bukowski played that role but when he was getting older he rejected his fake persona a became himself.

³¹ Duval, *Bukowski and the Beats*, 108.

3. Bukowski on himself

On this occasion Bukowski reviewed his own columns *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, the review was published in Open City magazine in 1969. The review is opened by a quote: “It is terribly difficult not to like the smell of your own shit.”³² Bukowski finally felt an accomplishment in 1969 he emerged as the new literary star and his years of writing finally paid off.

Bukowski believed that his style is too crude for magazines, so he expected that parts of his writing will be censored or completely missing. To his astonishment the editor left everything in, Bukowski described the moment when he found out: “I flipped on through and they had left in everything—the rants, the literary, the unliterary, the sex, the no-sex, the whole bag of warty screams and experiences. I was an honor.”³³ Even though Bukowski was established author and the same year he signed his full-time writing contract, his work was considered risky for magazine editors because of his graphic language and depiction of sexual acts.

In the review Bukowski showed self-reflection: “Reading this life-days and nights of my life I wondered how I could be possibly still be *alive* and walking around *now*?”³⁴ He finally acknowledged the wild ride of his life and felt amazement about his survival. The review offered Bukowski a space to criticize big names of literature, of course Bukowski took advantage of the space and wrote:

Frankly I read my *own* stories in easy wonderment, forgetting who I was, almost, almost, and I thought: Ummm, ummm, this son of a bitch can really write. I remember other writers. Being very discouraged with Chekhov, G.B. Shaw, Ibsen, Irwin Shaw, Gogol, Tolstoy, Balzac, Shakespeare, Ezra Pound, so forth. They, all of them, seemed to put literary *form* in front of the actually and living the life itself. In other words, or perhaps more clearly, each of these men condescended that life itself could be evil but that is was all right so long as they could get by and say it in their special literary way.³⁵

Bukowski’s criticism of classical authors is ubiquitous during his entire literary career. He did not fit the description of a classical writer, he did not try to mimic style of above mentioned giants of literature, his mind created the definition of author that fitted him and couple others, namely Harold Norse, whom he labeled as Prince of Poetry. Bukowski continued in the review: “Re-reading them, stories and fantasies, I found them wondrous and flaming. I thought Jesus, there hasn’t been a short storyteller this good since Pirandello. At least since them”³⁶ Bukowski considered Pirandello as a great author with better writing than above mentioned classical

³² Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 56.

³³ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 56.

³⁴ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 57.

³⁵ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 57.

³⁶ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 57–58.

authors he often criticized. His praise of Pirandello made him popular in Italy, especially his short stories. The review ends with a passage about future:

It's crappy to say, but I think that the book is worth reading. And that the unborn literary virgins, 200 years hence, will come in their flowered panties, recognizing the power, after my damned dumb skull has become a chickenshit playground for subnormal worms, gophers, other underworld creatures.³⁷

For Bukowski legacy was important, he understood that needs to leave something behind him that would point out to his literary existence.

According to Duval to find the real Bukowski reader must go through everything he had written. When Bukowski is read only once comes off as a bum that is why his works, including poetry, should be read multiple times. If the reader discovers the real Bukowski, it will be a different more humane Bukowski, that wasn't as heartless as it might seem from his works.³⁸ Duval draws an interesting comparison with Quasimodo: "Not the Beatu and the beast. But the beast and poetry: ugliness and beauty curiously joined in a single being."³⁹ When Bukowski got older and slowed down a bit it became easier to see the real person he was, under that dirty realistic façade there was a gentle man with the understanding for the existential pain. According to Duval Bukowski played a role of a wild star for his fans, but the persona did not suit him so he abandoned it and came forward with the persona of real Charles Bukowski.⁴⁰

Bukowski during the 80s and the 90s completely changed his public appearance, he became much collected in interviews and during his public readings. Perhaps the life full of alcohol finally got to him and he started to feel mortal.

³⁷ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 58.

³⁸ Duval, *Bukowski and the Beats*, 126–127.

³⁹ Duval, *Bukowski and the Beats*, 127.

⁴⁰ Duval, *Bukowski and the Beats*, 127.

4. Charles Bukowski a beat?

Bukowski is often put into the Beat literature category. This chapter explores his relationship with the Beats and gives an outlook of his criticism towards the Beats.

Bukowski had in his repertoire various themes he wrote about, influenced by his own life experiences, Bukowski traveled throughout the United States and held many low paying mundane jobs, he purposefully avoid jobs that required higher mental capacity, because he was afraid that he would lose his literary talent as the work would overtake space in his mind and kill his creativity. Bukowski shares certain themes with the Beats, even though his writings can be considered as depictions of the blue-collar America rather than political with social criticism. Bukowski interconnects social themes that were going in at those times in the United States with his brilliant fiction. The comparison with the Beats is often presented, but Bukowski himself at certain points of his career distanced himself from the Beats, he considered them preposterous. Bukowski thought of himself as a punk, while in France, Bukowski said: “I am not interested in the bohemian, Greenwich village, Parisian bullshit. Algiers, Tangiers... that’s all romantic claptrap.”⁴¹ Bukowski clearly did not care about the message that the Beats were perpetuating. Bukowski in a letter to Carl Weissner, in 1966, wrote: “Burroughs, Ginsberg...how does it feel to be communication with the Lights of Age, and also with me. B. and G, have disappointed me at time, but let’s admit that they have done things, and that no man creates pure Art day after day”⁴²Bukowski admits that some works of those authors could be considered art, but also he added that their later work is the exact opposite of art. This showcases how Bukowski’s formed his opinions about other writers. His stance is often hostile at first, but from his letters it is apparent that he was able to show respect for the fellow writers. Maybe it was a jealousy as it is mention in his letter to Kirby Congdon, in 1966, Bukowski wrote: “Corso? Ginsberg? Maybe I am jealous of the big cats? They’ve got one thing I got—clarity of style, but they’ve got a little too much the sweet tooth for their own (soul-importance) and they suck up a lot of bait.”⁴³

Bukowski examining his peers: “The Ginsberg-Corso-Burroughs circle has been swallowed by the big whale of adulation and they have never quite recovered. But, alas, we have learned that the difference between an artist and a *performer* is the difference between God and a necktie

⁴¹ Neeli Cherkovski, *Hank: The Life of Charles Bukowski* (New York: Random House, 1991), 273.

⁴² Charles Bukowski, *Screams from the Balcony: Selected Letters, 1960-1970*, edited by Seamus Cooney (Santa Rosa: Ecco, 2003), 275.

⁴³ Bukowski, *Bukowski Screams from the Balcony*, 245.

salesman.”⁴⁴ Bukowski expresses his opinion about literature that was written to be performed live, the word performer is clearly aimed at Ginsberg and his poem *Howl*, he points out that the fame swallowed the Beats and stifled their literary progress, he basically does not consider the Beats to be artists. Bukowski saw the Beats as authors who tried to appeal to blue-collar Americans, but they were not part of the blue-collar America. They did not work those mundane low-paying jobs like he did, therefore he found their attempts to write literature for the working class ridiculous. Bukowski, in a letter compiled in *Reach for the Sun*, in 1992, states: “Thank the gods that the first 50 years of my life were spent with the Blue Collars and the truly mad, the truly beaten.”⁴⁵

Bukowski’s opinion of the Beats is rather complicated to define, his opinions vary from recognition to disdain. Before his rise to worldwide popularity Bukowski made fun of the Beats and their works. He did not try to enter the movement at any point, he played the role of a spectator, kept his distance and from time to time expressed his opinions. Bukowski’s often commentary on the Beat movement did not please Ginsberg, Bukowski did not understand how someone can consider Ginsberg an artist, because he did not meet the artist definition in Bukowski’s mind. His attitude toward the Beats is illustrated by his encounter with William S. Burroughs: “As I walked by Burroughs’ place, he was sitting in a chair by the window. He looked at me indifferently”⁴⁶ Both men looked at each other and continued on with their day, the illustration of complete difference between those two, there was not any desire to talk, discuss, and comment on literature, complete disinterest.

The Beats were for Bukowski a frequent reference point. He felt the necessity to state his relation towards the Beat Generation, in 1962 he wrote:

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 kill the Village.⁴⁷

Bukowski acknowledges the idea of the Beat as honorable but he points out that they had been corrupted by fame and their increasing power in the society. He also acknowledges death

⁴⁴ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 39.

⁴⁵ Charles Bukowski, *Reach for the Sun: Selected Letters 1978-1994*, edited by Seamus Cooney, (Santa Rosa, Black Sparrow Press, 1999), 227.

⁴⁶ Charles Bukowski, *Women* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1978), 125.

⁴⁷ Bukowski *Screams from the Balcony*, 40.

of the East Village in New York, which was one of the centers for the Beats and their culture as it was infiltrated by people who had no interest in poetry nor literature.

In a letter in October 1963 Bukowski wrote: “Ginsberg has gotten out of it somehow so he has time to write even if he ends up writing badly. It’s a gathering of dust and electrodes and a vomiting out, later. But he’s got a better chance than if he was working in a Chinese Laundry or as Secretary of State—IF HE REMAINS UNPROFESSIONAL.”⁴⁸

Bukowski’s dislike of Ginsberg’s later works is apparent, criticism of Ginsberg became common theme of his various letters. When Bukowski met Ginsberg, he said to him: “God, it’s good to see you Allen really. I don’t care if you are a fake. Did you hear that folks? Washed up. Everybody knows that after *Howl* you never wrote anything worth a shit.”⁴⁹ Bukowski did not compliment Ginsberg but one rare occasion was an exception as he proclaimed:

I’ve never said this before but I am now high enough as I write this to perhaps say that Ginsburg has been the most awakening force in American poetry since Walt. W. It’s a god damn shame he’s a homo. It’s god damn shame Genet is a homo. Not that it is a shame to be a homo but that we have to wait around and let the homos teach us how to write.⁵⁰

Bukowski purposefully misspells Ginsberg’s name, he could not give him his full admiration, and his ego was way too large for that. This one sole moment of appreciation towards Ginsberg did not last long, Bukowski in a letter to Tom McNamara on October 25, 1965, wrote:

They know that contact means the plague, this is what disgusts me with the Ginsberg/Corso mob. They suck to the human adulation bit and are soon swallowed. Corso died rather quickly because his only mainstay was a simplicity of purpose and some type of message that he thot important. It has taken Ginsberg a little long, but he is swallowing the same bloody bait.⁵¹

The adulation is what Bukowski criticizes the most. Their rise in the society put them on a pedestal and the attention of America was fixated at them, without the public scrutiny the Beast stopped evolving in terms of literature, Bukowski saw this as one of the biggest flaws with the Beats. According to Duval, Bukowski openly ridiculed the Beats before without knowing that he would also reach the same or even greater popularity, when Bukowski met Ginsberg for the first time, he wrote how he felt about him: “... Next day we hung around town testing bars....

⁴⁸ Bukowski, *Screams from the Balcony*, 90.

⁴⁹ Duval, *Bukowski and the Beats*, 59.

⁵⁰ Cherkovski, *Hank*, 167.

⁵¹ Bukowski, *Screams from the Balcony*, 218–219.

Ginsberg wall all right, he seemed a good sort.”⁵² Bukowski’s approach towards the Beat changed a lot, seems like he always reminded to the world that he should not be put in the same category as them. Literature was in its wild period, the social changes in the United States, and movements for equal rights, all of that gave authors an abundance of themes to write about. Bukowski wrote for the nonintellectual part of the society, his ability to capture the everyday life in the working United States remains unparalleled.

To conclude, Charles Bukowski was not a part of the Beat Generation. Bukowski choose different approach to his career, as previously mentioned in this thesis at times he gave up on writing for a long period of time, and went through America to experience the life of a person who just wants to survive, in those experiences Bukowski discovered his writing style and stuck with it for the rest of his literary career. Bukowski at various occasion put between him and the Beats an imaginary wall which separated them, when the wall began to crumble Bukowski built it up again and reminded everyone that the Beats were just some authors who wrote at the same time as he did. The content of his writings is not comparable with the Beats, his poems are depiction of despair, survival, and lust. His short stories stripped of vibrant language, short sentences with painful meaning hit the reader swiftly, each line of his texts live on its own. Another thing that separates Bukowski from the Beats is his apolitical stance, he purposefully avoided political commentary because he simply did not care about politics. That is why his works were popular among the working-class Americans, as it might seem strange, he was one of them, his friends and drinking associates were truly the beaten of the society. Bukowski observed the social changes in American from the bottom of society, as a literary theme the social revolution is mentioned couple time in his works, but it is not the central theme of his stories nor poems, it is used only to provide broader context to the background in which the story is set. Charles Bukowski as an author is in a dire need of his own category. Even when put to the category of dirty realism with Raymond Carver, it does not give him the credit he rightfully deserves. Bukowski was a literary phenomenon that won’t appear again. Literature nowadays is stuffed with many authors whose primarily motivation is just monetary gain. Western society is not allowing writers to just exist and write. Authors gaining the same popularity and celebrity status like the Beats did, but there is not a Bukowski to balance the scales. Charles Bukowski was probably the rawest force in the modern literature. Perhaps the literary evolution stopped in 1994 when Charles Bukowski left the realms of the living.

⁵² Duval, *Bukowski and the Beats*, 53.

5. Analysis of short stories in *Absence of the Hero*

Absence of the Hero is a collection of unpublished works of Charles Bukowski. The chapter mainly focuses on short stories compiled in the book to illustrate how Bukowski perceived reality in the United States, and it provides an outlook on his alcohol fueled life.

The Absence of the Hero

A short story with sexual theme present throughout the entirety of it. Bukowski finds a way to incorporate his poet side to a story that is about his stay in his flat and sexual endeavor with easy women. The part when a lady rang on his bell and want him to donate to the starving children ends with a small poem:

–the people are better than I
the stones are better than I
the dogturds on somebody’s lawn are
better than I.⁵³

The use of a text displays Bukowski’s ability to switch to poetry fluently without phrases that would set up the poem. He continues with almost diary like style writing, where he describes what happened at the exact time of the day. As it is known Bukowski was not interested in politics or social movements in the United States, in the story he shows it by a passage where he chases a boy who was hidden in his closet: “He began to cry and he still stank terribly. ‘Franky Roosevelt is dead,’ he wept. ‘Listen, ass, who gives a motherfuck?’ I asked. ‘I do, oh, I do!’ ‘You stink!’ I screamed at him, ‘Take a bath!’ I booted him in the ass and pushed him out the door.”⁵⁴ The perfect illustration of a dirty realism style in his writing, the situation depicts the environment in which Bukowski lived, urban area with borderline poverty, where it is not uncommon to have your flat broken into by the children who tried to steal money to survive in the streets. The subsequent description of his social values follows: “I look looked into the closet and there was this little pile of turds, fresh turds. I look at them and vomited. Then I took yesterday’s newspaper, some dull shit about men landing on the moon, and I gathered the whole mess together and threw it into the garbage can.”⁵⁵ The landmark of human history the Moon landing did not phase Bukowski, he only read the title and decided that it is not important to him and he used the paper to clean the mess that the young boy left behind

⁵³ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 64.

⁵⁴ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 64.

⁵⁵ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 65.

him. Bukowski did not need special conditions to write or express himself, in the following sequence its clearly described how he approached writing as he wrote on a blackboard:

This one has a clubfoot
This one wants to suck my dick
The third had a head-tick
The fourth wears a wig
The fifth is a communist
The sixth is a grandson of Hitler
The seventh reads Dick Tracy
The eight claims I owe him two packs of cigarettes
The ninth is a woman who once dance with a 9-foot cobra but she
won't fuck me. No, it was a boa constrictor! Anyway, she won't fuck me⁵⁶

Bukowski let his creative mind loose, seemingly random phrases stripped of any broader meaning served to Bukowski as a supporting point for his writings, their incorporation to this story illustrates his unique writing process, alone in a small flat surrounded by empty bottles of alcohol he created a style that fitted him perfectly and the style that brought him commercial success, especially in Europe.

The second part of the story concerns Bukowski and character of name “DeJohns”. They reminisce about Bukowski past alcohol fueled stories with easy women, DeJohns questions what Bukowski had become:

DeJohns looked at me: “What has happened to you, Bukowski?”

I don't know, man. Tired.

I was going to do a book on your life, Now you no longer interest me.

The things I did were things I had to do. I don't need those things anymore.

Fuck you, man! You're finished!

DeJohns got up and left.

My last change for immortality.

Maybe he was right.⁵⁷

This indicates that Bukowski was concerned about his legacy, he was concerned that his impact on literature would fade away with time, if there is nobody to share his thinking process and point of view. The story ends with a message that Bukowski writes on the black board in his apartment:

⁵⁶ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 65.

⁵⁷ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 67.

Why wash under the arms when the roach has conquered more than Alexandria?

Why ride a bicycle when Henry Miller rides a bicycle?

We've played at soul—not having any—we have fucked up the sacred atrocity of breathing.

We have brutalized the Earth more than any armies.

When the hero arrives we will find that he was always here.⁵⁸

In this context “Absence of the Hero” can be changed to human awareness of their actions, the destruction of the Earth by greedy capitalistic companies that use excessive force to collect the sources the Earth had to offer. At those times people were looking for a hero, they set eyes on literature to navigate them towards the hero, but they did not realize that everyone on its own is a hero. This story can be considered rare when compared to the other stories written by Bukowski. The nihilistic approach towards the future combined with a Bukowski's desire to leave something behind him. The story is too complicated to categorize because it was published in 2010, the broader context that could explain Bukowski's concerns about his legacy is missing. It is possible that it was written by the end of Bukowski's careers, when his life was consumed by the advanced stages of alcoholism, so it is entirely possible that Bukowski questioned what he had left behind. The other uncommon there of the story is the concern for the Earth. Bukowski did not try to entice changes in the society, he was just an observer who wanted to survive so he could drink and write. The sentiment in this story is unique because Bukowski is not often concerned with humanity.

⁵⁸ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 67.

Christ with Barbecue Sauce

For some it might seem morbid, its themes are cannibalism, hippie culture, and sexual freedom. Bukowski shows that he could write fiction story with elements that reflect the reality of the United States in the 1970s.

The story revolves around three characters traveling in a car throughout the United States taking hippie hitchhikers for a ride. The first two pages are used for setting of the environment in which is the story set in. As previously mentioned in this thesis, Bukowski referred to the Beats a lot and this story is not an exception:

... You like Ginsberg, Kerouac? 'Sure, but they were kind of from the Beat era. We [hippies] like rock and folk music, that stuff. I like Johnny Cash too. And Bobby Dylan, of course...' ⁵⁹

Though this part of the story only acknowledges the existence of the Beats, it is apparent that Bukowski was not against their use for his writings, in the story Bukowski mixes fiction and the reality, the use of the Beats in story is not unimportant, the reference at the Beats and popular musicians at that time gives his story momentum.

The development of the young hitchhiker is tragical, he is beat unconscious and when he wakes up, he is nailed to the cross. The hitchhiker is killed and eaten by the main characters in the story, Bukowski depicts the murder:

Murray walked over to the cross, pushed the kid's head back, and slit his jugular vein with the butcher knife. Then he picked up the claw hammer and began yanking at the nail of the left palm. ⁶⁰

Bukowski in the typical style of dirty realism strips the moment of any colorful description, his writing is short and strikes the reader as heartless. The use of crucifixion as the ritual murder gives a story spiritual depth, the barbecue sauce in the title represents a part of the story when the carcass of the hitchhiker is seasoned with the barbecue sauce. The detachment of feelings gives his stories a depth that might not be visible to the reader, but it is present. Bukowski had a unique talent to tell more with less, this passage perfectly illustrates the fact that he did not need detailed description of the situation, the brilliant use of language provides sufficient for the events Bukowski wants to describe. The next day when three characters went on the road again, they take another hippie hitchhiker and cycles continues.

⁵⁹ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 69.

⁶⁰ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 72.

This story is the example of the things that Bukowski overdid to make them crude and violent. The image of a young man nailed to the cross having his throat slit while begging for help seems Biblical. Also, the use of cross as a symbol for the murder functions as a shock value, religious themes are not common in Bukowski's writing, he himself was an atheist, but when he felt like it, he used religious imagery in his writing. The story also sticks out from the Bukowski's repertoire by not having Bukowski inside the story. Readers can usually experience the story through eyes of his alter ego Henry Chinaski, but not here. It is entirely possible that this story was supposed to be a part of a bigger text, but Bukowski had never finished it. His writing process is chaotic, he wrote about things that had entered his mind. As it is known about him, sometimes he wrote only poetry because he could not figure out the short story.

I just write poetry so I can go to bed with girls

A short auto bibliographical story in which Bukowski describes his travel to sponsored readings, and his sexual appetite towards the women at that reading. In this story, Bukowski travels to his public reading arranged by the university, which ended up being a student-sponsored, because Bukowski was a controversial figure and universities risked a lot by inviting him to do the public reading, at those time the readings often got out of control and required police interference to restore order.

Before the Bukowski makes it to the hearing, he portrays a scene in a local bar:

I walked out, slamming door.

“Let’s get out of here,” I said.

“What’s the matter?”

“I am paying for the sins of my glorious forefathers in American history”

“What happened?”

“Nothing yet. Let’s keep it that way.”

“A white guy was knifed on the steps last Friday night. But that was late at night. It’s only evening now.”

“Let’s make it,” I said. “It’s getting dark.”⁶¹

Illustration of social tension towards white people from minorities, with a growing power of a multicultural society, certain individuals proved to be rather dangerous to hang around, that is why Bukowski wants to leave the bar, before those Mexican-Americans start causing trouble. Bukowski was well aware of the racism in the American society, the theme of racism did not interest him, as mentioned in the previous part of this thesis, Bukowski was not a writer with the desire to challenge to the societal values, he only drifted through the United States. Bukowski uses in the story term “Chicano”; the term is used for people of Mexican descent born in the United States. Bukowski captures their behavior: “Chicano teenagers walked by and drummed on the windows. The dogs ran up and barked. ‘I think the kids rather like us,’ I said. ‘They just want us to know we’re in their part of the town.’”⁶²

From this short passage it is obvious how the growing acceptance for minorities changed the status in the American society.

⁶¹ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 100.

⁶² Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 103.

The story continues with a dispute about the publication of Bukowski's poems with other authors, when the dispute is resolved Bukowski travels to the hearing and presents his poem to eager students. Bukowski finished his readings and went to party with students. The following passage is the perfect depiction of Bukowski's values and desires: "... but I noticed a well-developed girl sitting next to me. I put my hand around her hip and kissed her. She had this easy smile and one tooth missing, it was very endearing. I couldn't keep away from her. She had long black hair, very long, and was splendidly put together."⁶³

How typical of Bukowski to shift his full attention towards women. Passages like these are very common in the works of Bukowski, it only shows that he was a man with an extreme sexual appetite. The sexual images that follows are the reflection of his dirty realism: "When I awakened I was pressed against some rump and my cock was still in the vagina. It was warm in there; it was hot in there. I pulled out."⁶⁴ Bukowski sacrificed only a couple lines to this experience, but the style in which is written proves sufficient enough to paint the picture without lengthy descriptions. Following passage of the story is dedicated to the Bukowski's meeting with Gregory Corso, Bukowski described his feelings before Corso arrived: "I was little nervous about meeting Corso. Although I was an older man, I had not begun writing until I was 35, and Corso's name had been household for some time—like Burroughs, Ginsberg, all that gang. Not that their writing overimpressed me; nobody's does."⁶⁵ All present Bukowski's relation with the Beats. As it is apparent Bukowski was somewhat polite to the Beats when he met them in person, compared this to his letters, quoted in previous chapters of this thesis, the difference in his tone is staggering. Also, it shows Bukowski's enormous ego, because he is hard to impress when it comes to writing, he also acknowledges the Beats' influential position in the American literary space.

When Corso approaches Bukowski for the first time he shook his hand and told him: "I am your peer. I want you to remember that"⁶⁶ Corso wanted to make an impression on Bukowski, and apparently it worked. Bukowski about meeting Corso: "There was something likeable about him, something quite likeable about him, and I was glad it was there"⁶⁷ From previously displayed letters, where Bukowski expresses his disdain towards the Beats his reaction in this meeting is quite polarizing. As mentioned the main medium for Bukowski's criticism were

⁶³ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 106–107.

⁶⁴ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 107.

⁶⁵ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 108.

⁶⁶ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 108.

⁶⁷ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 109.

letter he wrote to other authors or journalist at that time. When he met Corso in person he finally understood the fuss about him and the Beat Generation. Corso in Bukowski's mind was wild and unchained from the conventions. Bukowski in the story continues to describe Corso: "He was not wild as advertised."⁶⁸ Personal meeting was all it took for Bukowski to like Corso, same cannot be said about his relationship with Ginsberg.

The story in ends with Bukowski on a train, where he meets another young lady and as it might seem obvious he hits on her. The end passage perfectly summarizes Bukowski as a man: "The University of New Mexico, I thought, has been honored by an old wolf. I had 15 hours to score. There was no way I could miss. We kissed and I ordered two more drinks."⁶⁹ The story illustrates the life of Charles Bukowski. He went to countless readings and hit on every woman he could, the advantage of being recognized as a famous author. The women elements in his stories are omnipresent. His depiction of a raw human sexual act is violent and expressive, yet the words he used are not on academic level. Bukowski built his career on short stories like this, sex was a necessity to him, that is why most of the stories, columns contain depiction of Bukowski's sexual endeavors with women.

Bukowski's depiction on the most sacred human act is violent and shocking. The words described the exact reality of it and it showed that the depiction of the sexual acts was overly romanticized by authors in the past.

⁶⁸ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 109.

⁶⁹ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 111.

Notes of a Dirty Old Man

Notes of a Dirty Old Man are several short columns published in the underground newspaper. This column is from April 1972. Bukowski highlights the struggle of being an author: “Sitting with a bottle at the typewriter is not the easing way to cut through terror. I dreamed a lifetime of being a write and now the demons are upon me.”⁷⁰ Bukowski’s creative mind had entered the drought; at that time, he was a full-time writer and he felt the necessity to write a lot because he needed to make money from his writing, he left the safety of the post office, he decided to play the writer, and pressure got to him. Bukowski points out the nature of working as a write: “The average man puts in his 8 hours, comes home beaten and satisfied. With the writer there is never satisfaction; there is always the next piece of work to be done.”⁷¹ As previously mention in this thesis Bukowski was an older man when he became a professional writer, he could not afford to go on another extended time period of binge drinking and exploring the United States, he was chained to his job, and his survival depended on it. It seems quite ironic how Bukowski could survive all those years basically in the gutter of many cities, but when he finally started to write full time, he contemplated ending his own life under the pressure he was feeling. He wrote about attempted suicide:

Once I stood in front of the bathroom mirror with a razor to my throat. I looked at myself—dim little serious eyes—and I had to laugh. Another time I tried gas. I didn’t work. I was awakened by a most terrible headache. John Berryman, the poet, did it recently by jumping off a bridge into a river. Now that’s a style. I have a friend who writes. He has razor scars on both wrists⁷²

The suicide theme is not well known in Bukowski’s work, but Bukowski used the concept in his writing for some time. The popularity of the other fictional stories buried the more serious writings of Bukowski before they were compiled in a book as *Absence of the Hero*. His attitude towards suicide is odd, the description of the attempt is a form of typical dirty realism in his works, as he tried to kill himself, he wrote about it without lengthy statements about his presence of mind.

In the notes he captured the life of a writer: “Writing means creating and waiting. The mail is slow and the pay is low.”⁷³ The grim reality of writer’s life. It is important to note that Bukowski was mainly considered a poet in the United States, the poetry was his main financial

⁷⁰ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 144.

⁷¹ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 144.

⁷² Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 144.

⁷³ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 144.

income at the time, his novels were popular in Europe, but due to translation process it took a long time before his novels got published there.

Bukowski thought about settling down as it is apparent from his affection towards his gal friend, he rejects the offer of sexual intercourse with a girl at his reading with the line: “Pardon me, I’m taking this drink to my girl.”⁷⁴ Bukowski was in his fifties, which meant that he slowed down a bit, the wild crude drinker lost his edges, he wanted to write and make money.

Bukowski provided reflection on Louis-Ferdinand Céline and his rant about being an author: “Of course, he [Céline] got roughed up by the war, ran out of town, and his patients didn’t play their bills. But at least he was a doctor, he had something to go on beside a typewritten ribbon. Writers are nothing but beggars with a good line. Freelancing is slow; God is the mailman and God often doesn’t seem to care.”⁷⁵ Put at the mercy of the mailman Bukowski managed to survive his lowest points of professional career, when the flow of words stopped and he was forced to live from his savings. Bukowski knew it and he led a life with accordance to the mercy of the mailman. In the notes he described his lifestyle: “Luckily for most of use [freelance writers] we don’t have the habits of the masses. New cars bore us; television is insane; clothes don’t matter.”⁷⁶ He lived in the same way as he wrote, a simple flat with a fridge full of alcohol and a typewriter, the most important objects in his life. This is another thing that separated him from the Beats, the Beats wore fitted suits, they indulged in the fruits of their labor, Bukowski was different on a human level, as mentioned previously in this thesis, and he did not approve of the eccentric lifestyle the Beats led.

The column ends with Bukowski addressing the readers: “Meanwhile, I’ll see you guys and gals at the Olympic some Thursday night, my Bogart cigarette dangling, and beer in hand, and if I’m lucky, my love near me. If I’m unlucky I’ll be alone.”⁷⁷ The end passage captures the nature of Charles Bukowski, how he perceived the world around him, the nuances of his relationship with women, he accepted the life and he lived until this way until his bitter end.

Towards end of his life Bukowski settled down and embraced the life with wife Linda, the famous wild bum was forgotten and Bukowski with a glass of wine observed the life in the United States with peace.

⁷⁴ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 146.

⁷⁵ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 146.

⁷⁶ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 146.

⁷⁷ Bukowski, *Absence of the Hero*, 148.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has discussed the literary scene in the United States in the 20th century, together with an analysis of the works by Charles Bukowski.

In the first chapter, there was an introduction to the post-war United States to illustrate the evolution of the American society, with an emphasis on the Beat Generation, which was one of the most influential literary movement in the 20th century. One subchapter briefly introduces a literary style called “dirty realism”, the definition of the term is important before the introduction to Charles Bukowski is made. The second chapter concerns Charles Bukowski and his life before he became a full-time author, to understand Bukowski’s work it is important mention his early stages of life that formed him as a person. The subchapter describes the crudeness in Bukowski’s works and how it influenced his writing. The subchapter illustrates how was Bukowski’s writing and use of language was perceived by Harold Norse and Jean-Francois Duval. The chapter is used as a navigation in the wild of life of Charles Bukowski, the laid-out events are subjected to an analysis in the subsequent chapter. The subsequent chapter illustrates how Bukowski perceived his own writing.

The third chapter defined Bukowski’s relationship with the Beats, the chapter provides certain themes that are common for Bukowski and the Beats, and it delves deep into Bukowski’s correspondence with other prominent authors at the time. The analysis of the letters gives an outlook on the complicated relationship Bukowski had with the Beats, from recognition to disdain his attitude towards the Beats is complicated, the chapter concludes with an explanation on why Charles Bukowski cannot be considered a Beat author.

The fourth chapter provided the analysis of the selected works of Bukowski compiled in the *Absence of the Hero*. His literary style and content of the writings are subjected to the analysis, the aim of the chapter is to put his writing into the perspective and connect it to the reality of the American society in the 20th century. Several short stories are analyzed and their content is put into the context to draw parallels with the style of dirty realism. The analysis of works by Charles Bukowski should provide deeper understanding of Bukowski as a human and as an author.

In conclusion it is believed that this paper will provide concise image of the American literary scene after the Second World War, explain the main reason which led to Cultural Revolution and it provides the reader with greater understanding of life, and nuances in the works of Charles Bukowski.

Resumé

Cílem této práce je zanalyzovat vybrané povídky od Charlese Bukowské a přiřadit k nim literárně-historický kontext 20. století ve Spojených Státech Amerických. Analytická část se zabývá kategorizací Bukowského, která je komplikovaná a snaží se nastolit jasnost ve vztahu Bukowského k Beatíkům.

První kapitola tvoří teoretický základ práce, je zde vylíčena Americká společnost po druhé světové válce, pozornost je především věnována kulturním změnám, které probíhali v tehdejší společnosti. Změny amerických hodnot jsou vypsány pro lepší pochopení kulturní revoluce, která zde probíhala. Podstatná část je věnovaná vzestupu Beatníků, kteří patřili mezi nejdůležitější literární hnutí 20. století. Jejich existence začala zpochybňovat zažité americké hodnoty, které v té době byly pod těžkou palbou kritiky, hlavně co se týče postavení menšin ve společnosti. Je také zmíněna transformace Beatníků do hnutí Hippies, které převzalo určité hodnoty od Beatníků. Podstata hnutí a vyčlenění jejich hodnot je prezentováno, po Beatnících je představen literární směr špinavý realismus, které uvádí do práce její hlavní téma, a to autora Charlese Bukowského. Základní definice pojmu je představena a uvedena do kontextu děl Bukowského. Kapitola zároveň zmiňuje další dva literární směry, které také jako Beatníci pomohli zažehnout kulturní změny ve Spojených Státech Amerických. Následující kapitola byla sepsána za účelem hlubšího představení Bukowského, jeho života, který nebyl vůbec lehký, a proto je důležité zmínit určité události, které ovlivnily Bukowského vztah a přístup k literatuře. V kapitole je zmíněn jeho vztah s otcem, který nebyl příliš vřelý, dále je zde popsáno, jak se Bukowski stal profesionální autorem a proč se rozhodl opustit svoje místo na poště, kde pracoval s přestávkami téměř 11 let. Je zde začleněna podkapitola, která představuje Bukowského vulgaritu při psaní povídek, podkapitola také uvádí, jak se Bukowski proměnil jak člověk během 80. let, tyto změny zpozoroval Jean-Francois Duval při jeho rozhovorech s Bukowski a jeho ženou Lindou. Bukowski se zpočátku své kariéry snažil držet roli divoké hvězdy, aby na veřejnosti byl přímo jako jeho alternativní ego, které používal ve svých povídkách, Henry Chinaski. Jako autor měl nezaměnitelný styl a dokazoval, že mu stačí pár řádků na to, aby vytvořil obraz příběhu, na který by jiní potřebovali několik stránek, právě tento jeho literární talent je podroben drobnohledu v analytické části této práce. Bukowski je komplikovaná postava, až Duvalova kniha *Bukowski and the Beats* pomáhá odkrýt člověka, kterým Bukowski skutečně byl. Dále je zde zmíněno Duvalovo porovnání Bukowského s Quasimodem, obě postavy představují něco ošklivého, akorát v případě Bukowského je to ošklivost reality, v níž existoval. Čtvrtá kapitola seznamuje čtenáře se vztahem Bukowského k Bítníkům, v kapitole je rozebrána klíčová korespondence Bukowského s ostatními autory této doby, Bukowski se v některých ostře vyhrazuje proti myšlence a účelu Beatníků, v dalších ukazuje, že je schopen projevit i uznání, a to především na adresu Allena Ginsberga. Moment uznání však netrvá dlouho, Bukowski dalšími dopisy podkopává svoje získané uznání pro Ginsberga a jeho tvorbu. Bukowského alkoholismus hrál velkou roli v korespondenci, některé jeho dopisy si přímo protirečí, a proto tedy existuje nutnost přistupovat k jeho myšlenkám a vyjádřením s rezervou,

zmíněná korespondence by měla být dostačující, aby pomohla ilustrovat definici spisovatele podle Bukowského. Celá kapitola má za úkol představit argumenty proč Charles Bukowski nemůže být zařazen to generace Beatníků. Jeho styl psaní se mohl zdát podobný, ale po rozebrání a porozumění je jasné, že Bukowski nikdy netoužil potom, aby byl do generace Beatníků zařazován, sám sebe považoval spíše za punkového autora, ale pro Bukowského neexistuje kategorie, do které by se mohl zařadit, jeho styl je až příliš unikátní na to, aby ho někdo napodobil nebo dokonce replikoval.

Poslední kapitola je věnovaná analýze vybraných krátkých povídek z knihy *Absence of the Hero*, analýza těchto povídek má seznámit čtenáře s pohnutkami s jakými Bukowski tvořil svoje příběhy a jak je stylisticky upravoval, aby zachytil čtenářovu pozornost. Jsou zde rozebrány povídky *The Absence of the Hero*, což je autobiografická povídka, jenž vypovídá o způsobu života Charlese Bukowského, a o jeho přístupu ke psaní, nikdy se netajil tím, že ke psaní potřebuje pouze čtyři zdi a psací stroj. Následují analyzovaná povídka je nazvaná *Christ with Barbecue Sauce*, povídka je rozebrána z důvodu předvedení Bukowského špinavého realismu, povídka sama o sobě je neobvyklá, protože v jejím příběhu Bukowski nefiguruje jako postava, nýbrž jako pouhý vypravěč. Analýza je provedena s důrazem na jazykovou stránku, aby bylo prokázáno Bukowského nadání. Třetí rozebraná povídka nese název *I just write poetry so I can go to bed with girls*, její analýza se zaměřuje na sociální situaci ve Spojených Státech Amerických, které v té době zažívaly změny především v pohledu na menšiny zde žijící. Povídka vyobrazuje Bukowského na studentském čtení, které se málem nekonalo, protože Bukowski jako postava představovala riziko, které se nemusel vyplatit. Jeho veřejná čtení byla pověstná tím, že se Bukowski nelidsky opil a čtení se někdy zvrhlo takový způsobem, že musela být přivolána policie, aby uklidnila bujaré studenty a samotného Bukowského. Povídka navíc vyobrazuje Bukowského sexuální touhy a jeho chování kolem žen, pro které je nechvalně známý. Jako čtvrté dílo je rozebrán novinový sloupek s názvem *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, Bukowski napsal těchto sloupků několik a pro analýzu byl vybrán sloupek z roku 1972, kde Bukowski popisuje nevýhody toho, že je spisovatel na volné noze, podle jeho slov je vydán na milost a nemilost pošty. Sloupek také obsahuje pasáž, v níž Bukowski píše o pokusu o sebevraždu, která mu nevyšla. Téma sebevraždy se objevovalo v Bukowského psaní jen zřídka, Bukowski dále ve sloupku popisuje klasické autory literatury, kteří podle něho jsou zveličeni jen proto, že se jim podařilo napálit čtenáře, hlavní výhrady má k jejich stylu psaní, který je podle něho nezáživný. Tato kritika klasických autorů jako Shakespeare nebo Faulkner je typická pro Bukowského osobu. Jako autor měl přesně danou definici toho, jak by text od spisovatele měl vypadat, ani jeden z výše zmíněných autorů podle něho tuto definici nesplňoval. Práce by měla přiblížit pohnutky a myšlenkové pochody Bukowského při psaní, zaměřuje se především na pojetí špinavého realismu tak jako ho viděl Bukowski, dále by měla rozšířit povědomí o Bukowském jako člověku, které žil v těch nejspodnějších částech společnosti. Jeho pobytí v nejnižší sféře ovlivnilo jeho styl psaní a náhled na svět.

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