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Representations of the Female in the Work of Charles Bukowski

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Praha, 2.6. 2008 Michal Mecner

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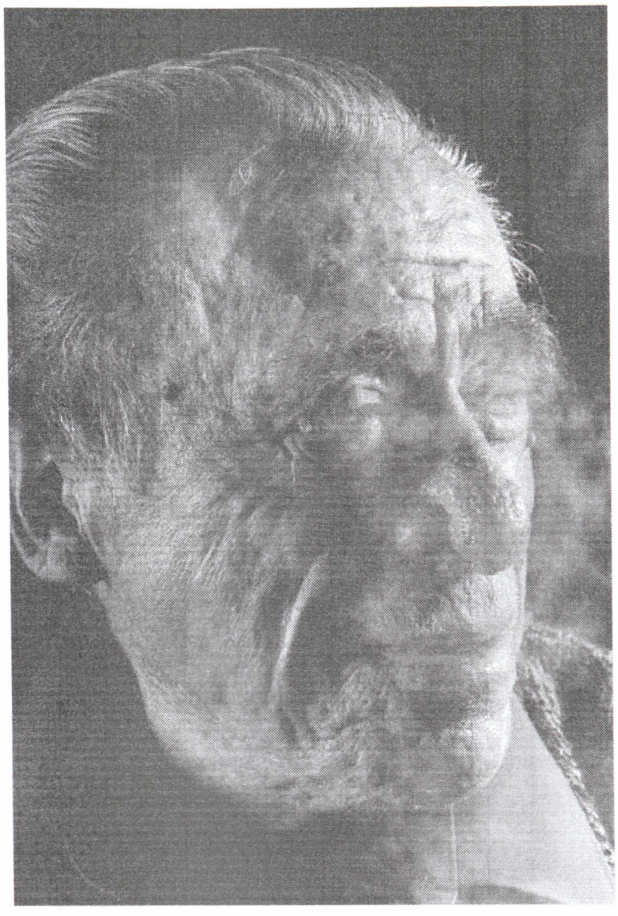

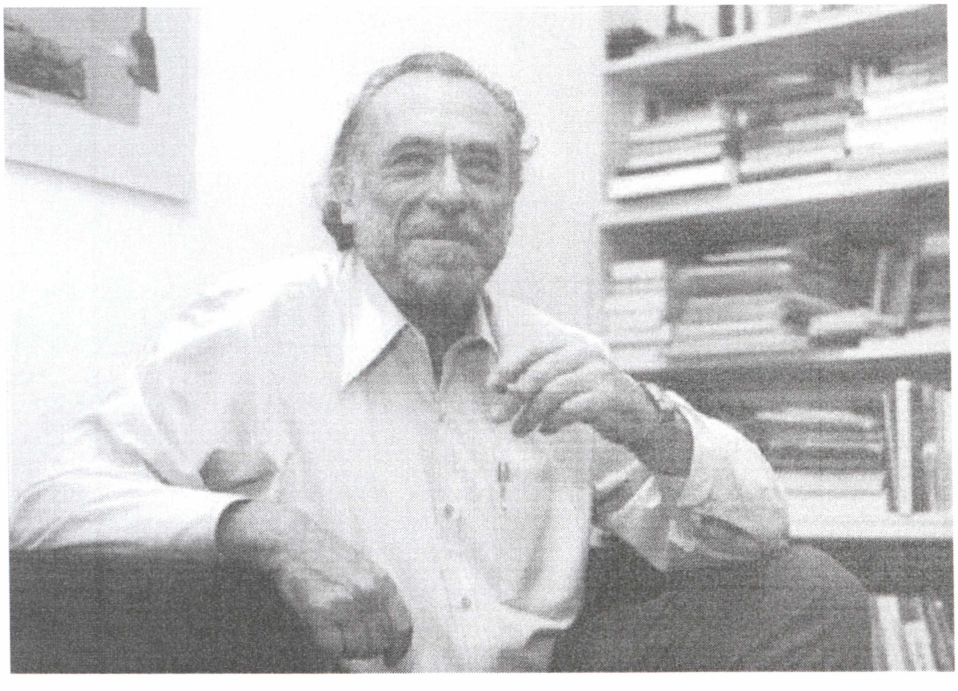

Above: *Charles Bukowski 1991*, photograph by Gottfried Helnwein, property of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.
To the Right: *Charles Bukowski*, photograph by Eckhart Palutke, 1980, property of AP Photo.

Publication Dates of Primary Texts and List of Abbreviations

The Days Run Away like Wild Horses over the Hills (1969)	'the Days'
Mockingbird, Wish Me Luck (1972)	'Mockingbird'
South of No North (1973)	'No North'
Love Is a Dog from Hell, Poems 1974-1977 (1977)	'Love'
Women (1978)	
Play the Piano Drunk Like a Percussion	
Instrument Until the Fingers Begin to Bleed a Bit (1979)	'the Piano'
Hot Water Music (1983)	'Water'
Hollywood (1989)	
Septuagenarian Stew (1990)	'Stew'
Pulp (1994)	
Betting on the Muse (1996)	'the Muse'

Introduction

"Death to all whores who keep their legs closed against mine!"
Henri Chinaski

Women. Coincidentally and yet not coincidentally the title of a Charles Bukowski novel and the main subject of this thesis. Charles Bukowski (1920 - 1994) was a German-born prolific American writer whose poetry and prose revolve about the underground life of Los Angeles. His characters were drunks, hustlers, prostitutes, losers, and social misfits. As inspiration he had countless dead-end factory jobs, love-hate relationships, or afternoons spent in the racetrack. After a hard day's work he cracked open a beer, put on a classical record, and began composing poems until his fingers "began to bleed" from typing or until the police came on account of the neighbors' complaint about his disturbing the peace. Bukowski's work in general is centered around the antithesis of the traditional American dream but to be more precise we should say that Bukowski was largely ignorant of the conventional way of living and the American go-getter ideal. Among the low class which became the most frequent subject of Bukowski's writing there is no such thing as daydreaming and the nights are too wild to be spent on dreaming either. There is simply no place for dreams in the lives of lower classes; there is only the rough reality of life at the bottom of everything. No wonder the author chose "Don't try" as his epitaph, often boasting that it was his lifelong philosophy. On the other hand, even the miseries and hardships of low life have no power over the primal need of human spirits to interact. And human interaction is the core of Bukowski's writing, that is, the relationship between man and woman. Apart from the calamities brought by excessive drinking, apart from the frustration with a neverending struggle for economic security, and apart from the infuriating disillusionment with the American nation, Bukowski devotes most of his verses and lines to the female. The reason is simple, women are something to write about: "Women? Oh, yes, women, oh yes, of course. You can't write about fireplugs and empty India ink bottles."[1] Basically, women in Bukowski's work mean trouble and two women are said to mean twice as much trouble as one woman.[2]

1 Charles Bukowski, *Hot Water Music* (New York: Ecco, 2002) 126.
2 Charles Bukowski, *Pulp* (New York: Ecco, 2002) 147.

In our text we will attempt to find out what kind of "trouble" women present and how they are represented. For one thing, there is a difference between what the poet is saying about women, and between the way it is narrated. Most of the time we will see that what he writes about women does not really say much about women themselves but rather about the persona of the author – the pose of a chauvinist and misogynist at that. We will also make an effort to examine what lies behind this pose. Our work is structured in four parts. The first chapter deals with misogyny and chauvinism, and in general with the way women are viewed by male characters. In the second chapter we will examine the imagery of woman, the symbolism of the female body, and some recurring literary figures. The third chapter focuses closely on erotica, sexuality, and some major sexual-oriented specialties of Bukowski's texts. In the last chapter we will venture to look at the institution of marriage and at woman's social situtation. In our debate we will refer to significant cultural and social changes brought by various revolutions, mainly the female movement and the sexual liberation following the tumultuous, free-thinking period of the 1960s, with its currents of Hippies, Beats, and New Agers. For theoretical background we will refer to the works of writers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Germaine Greer. For discussion of the role of woman in poetry we chose to include the opinions and insights of Alicia Suskin Ostriker.

Chapter 1

"The Misogynist who Wrote These Poems"

You can say what you like,
woman is something di,ferent, boss ...
something di,ferent. She's not human!
Why bear her any grudge?
Zorba the Greek

Our objective in this chapter is to expose misogyny, chauvinism, and verbal as well as physical violence running through Charles Bukowski's work as related to the representation of the female. Almost all of the author's texts contain at least one of these attitudes or beliefs but mostly they come in many varieties and in unusual abundance. Our point of interest lies in the systematical drawing of a general profile that is inherent to all Bukowski's typical male heroes. We will see that the individual diversity of these uncongenial expressions has a lowest common denominator stemming from sex-related bigotry and prejudices but also from fears and uncertainty on the male's part. Once we uncover what lies at its roots, we will contrast our observations to the theories of Simone de Beauvoir and Germaine Greer. In the first part of this chapter we shall concentrate on instances of misogyny that are universally distributed among male characters in Bukowski's work. In the next part then we will focus more on particular prejudicial notions and attitudes of the author's alter ego.

1.1 Misogyny

The majority of misogynistic sentiments can be summed up in the statement which refers to women as "something to screw and rail at."[3] We will for the moment leave aside the strong tendency to objectify women and concentrate only on verbal assaults and prejudices in the male's thinking patterns. The female is generally regarded as inferior to the male in all respects. This begins by mildly belittling her existential situation as Musso does in the story 'The Winner': "The hardest thing [a woman] ever did was get a sun tan."[4] This disregard for female capabilities is further brought to a more sneering attitude towards women in general. Henry Baroyan in 'Action' accuses people of "not even looking like themselves.... Even the women. *Especially* the women."[5] This gradually becomes plain misogyny, where for example Larry in 'Buy me some peanuts and

3 Charles Bukowski, *Betting on the Muse* (New York: Ecco, 2004) 378.
4 Charles Bukowski, *Septuagenarian Stew* (New York: Ecco, 2003) 340.
5 Bukowski, *Stew* 123.

crackerjack' addresses a waitress in a most disrespectful manner: "that whore's got brain so small, if you x-rayed it it wouldn't show up."[6] We should bear in mind that while this is an example of an individual misogynistic remark, the same sentiment runs through all Bukowski's texts. It is interesting to notice that the males are particularly hostile towards several groups of women. One group consists of "ugly" women, another group of matrons whose "asses have grown bigger than the national debt,"[7] and yet another group is made up of *all* old women whose debasement reaches an extreme in the poem 'one of the hottest': "I'm fucking the grave, I thought, I'm / bringing the dead back to life."[8] Another channel of misogyny is aimed at the average American female. Henri Chinaski, who we are led to believe to be Bukowski's alter ego, said that "It felt good to be out of the U.S.A., there was a real difference. The women looked better, things felt calmer, less false."[9] The American female is pictured in such a manner repeatedly, as will be seen in a more specific context later in Chapter 3.

Once we move on from discussing intellectual stereotypes, we arrive at their materialized form and we particularly wish to point out two instances. The first one is actual physical violence, a rather common element in Bukowski's texts. In some cases it is used as a means of preserving the male's feeling of superiority when the female seems to be taking over. In other cases it is merely a manifestation of brutality and bestiality. Though less common than the former, it is there nonetheless. To summarize the male's sentiments on beating the weaker sex, let the poet's alter ego speak: "...he usually only beats her at / night. it takes a man to beat his wife night and / day. although he doesn't look like much / he's one of the few real men around / here."[10] We see that what Bukowski attempts is the creation of an archetypal, ideal male figure, the *real* man. This product of poetical fancy is in fact an effort to sustain the popular patriarchal model, to deny the female the freedom to act as she chooses, and to prevent her from possibly taking over one day. The poet states his vision explicitly in *Hollywood*, where he discloses his admiration of Victor Norman:[11] "What I liked best about him was that he had no fear of the Feminists. He was one of the last defenders of maleness in the U.S."[12] Greer has a lot to say about this, specifically her observation of two special types among women, that is, the "Great Bitch" and the "Poison Maiden" of whom the former is predominantly to

6 Bukowski, *Stew* 325.
7 Bukowski, *Stew* 352.
8 Charles Bukowski, *Love Is a Dog from Hell: Poems 1974-1977* (New York: Ecco, 2003) 134.
9 Charles Bukowski, *Women* (New York: Ecco, 2002) 232.
10 Charles Bukowski, *Mockingbird. Wish Me Luck* (New York: Ecco, 2002) 27.
11 This character is alluded to several times through Bukowski's work. "Perhaps the best novelist in America" and "one who [together with the poet], is a tough guy, because tough guys drive black BMWs" can be no one else but the American writer Norman Mailer with whom Bukowski was acquainted.
12 Charles Bukowski, *Hollywood* (New York: Ecco, 2002) 107.

be found in Bukowski's work. Greer holds it that the Great Bitch is the deadly female, a worthy opponent for the omnipotent hero to exercise his powers upon and through. She is said to be "desirous, greedy, clever, dishonest, and two jumps ahead all the time." The explication of the hero's dilemma "to either have her on his side and like a lion-tamer sool her on to his enemies, or to have to battle for his life at her hands"[13] is further mentioned by Greer and it is at the same time often put in practice by the poet, especially when handling break-ups and relationships that are difficult in some way.

The other point we wish to stress is a shade more subtle than physical assaults but is also much more dreadful and incomparably more devastating to the female in the end. The harsh, male-dominated world more often than not renders the female powerless and degrades her to the status of an object. To Musso, women are just "something you marry."[14] Chinaski views women in a more positive light but still they are a mere commodity to him, "a prize of some sort."[15] It will not surprise us, then, to note the delusion of grandeur of *Pulp*'s protagonist, namely his conviction that "the winner writes the history books, surrounded by lovely virgins..."[16] What we have going on here, though, is that the male is hopelessly agitated by the failure to find the "answer to it all", as Greer would have it.[17] In other words, men hope to find neither daughter nor a mother in the way women hope to find a new father. Instead – and especially in Bukowski's works – men tend to be on the lookout for the exciting women of their fantasies. Their misogynistic and chauvinistic attitudes are thus partly explained by the disillusionment they suffer when encountering real women.

Of all possible forms of objectification of a woman, to become a *whore* is the worst and it is also the ultimate form of degradation. This scenario nevertheless recurs in Bukowski's works and we feel that a brief commentary should be given. As in reality, in Bukowski's texts a woman may be compelled by fate or necessity to take the road of prostitution. While in the everyday world she tends to do so for financial reasons, in Bukowski's world she makes this decision largely in order to gain independence from the male. As de Beauvoir points out,[18] by lending herself to several men, the woman belongs definitely to none and thus achieves some degree of freedom. This is typical of Bukowski's females who threaten their partners with "going whoring" simply out of vengeance, or to make them work harder to bring home more money so that "[she] doesn't have to cruise the

13 Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: Paladin, 1972) 190.
14 Bukowski, *Stew* 341.
15 Bukowski, *Mockingbird* 50.
16 Bukowski, *Pulp* 113.
17 Greer 196.
18 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 567.

streets." On the other hand, men often abuse their partners by calling them "whores" without any apparent justification, being perfectly aware of the power of this pejorative term. In the everyday world, when a woman is called this, she feels it to be a very strong insult, but the actual, realized fact of her *being* so is a sad reflection of the darker nature of the world that would allow such a thing to happen. It is perhaps this bitter observation that the poet tried to mock in his excessively chauvinistic remark that "[these ladies] offer a service that keeps mankind content."[19] Needless to say that the poet meant the male half of an otherwise male-centered universe.

We have mentioned earlier that this chauvinistic attitude is partly explained by the male's disillusionment. Now we can add that there is another factor that lies at the root of all trouble, as the poet admits himself. It is nothing other than the "Tower of Power,"[20] i.e. the penis, a true instrument of power as will be seen in Chapter 3, and at the same time the bane and undoing of the male, as Chinaski self-critically confesses in a weak moment of reflection: "*you dirty son-of-a-bitch*! Do you know all the heartache you cause with your dumb hunger?"[21]

1.2 The Poet, the Alter Ego, and Women

Bukowski is conscious of the misogynistic and chauvinistic tone underlying his work and he does not seem to be particularly concerned about it; in fact, he appears almost proud of these qualities. At times he admits to being called "chauvinist pig", "child-hater", "woman-hater" and so on. When criticizing this particular character of Bukowski's works, the critics should take care not to address the author but his alter ego, Henri Chinaski. He is really the "misogynist who writes these poems,"[22] though it is not so easy to tell Bukowski and Chinaski apart. For example, Chinaski explains his attitudes and the tune of his writings as thus: "people hated me for the way I wrote about women but these people never met the women I lived with, I was only photographing in words the reality of it all."[23] This statement clearly exhibits some autobiographical outlines. Yet because any attempt to differentiate the two is beyond the scope of this text, we will ignore this distinction as it has no real impact on the depiction of women. Ultimately, Chinaski concludes that: "Gentlemen, there is no way to make it with the female. There is absolutely no way," in the story 'This is what killed Dylan Thomas.'[24] But why would that be so? What makes him think so? We will look at this

19 Bukowski, *the Muse* 151.
20 Bukowski, *Pulp* 136.
21 Bukowski, *Women* 237.
22 Bukowski, *the Muse* 213.
23 Bukowski, *the Muse* 312.
24 Charles Bukowski, *South of No North* (New York: Ecco, 2003) 132.

in the following paragraph.

Firstly we should note of the poet's bitter balancing tone when assessing that "all that was left for [him] were / the leftovers, the uglies, / the divorced, the mad, the / ladies of the / streets."[25] On the other hand, he craves women constantly, the lower the better. And yet "good women" frighten him because they "eventually want your soul" and that "what is left" of his the poet prefers to keep for himself. Basically, he craves "prostitutes, base women" because they are "deadly and hard and make no personal demands."[26] There is no feeling of loss on the poet's side when they leave. Later we will deal with the poet's conception of a "good woman" but for the time being there are several aspects deserving of more detailed discussion. The poet justifies his way of thinking and the expression thereof in written form by reasoning that he has to taste women in order to "really know them" and "to get inside of them." He claims he can invent men in his mind because he is one but women are for him almost impossible to fictionalize without first knowing them, so he takes to exploring them as best as he can, and – perhaps surprisingly – he finally figures that "there are human beings inside."[27] With this approach, no wonder that Chinaski is accused several times – exclusively by females – of writing about women "they way he does" without knowing "anything about women at all."[28] At least he does not feign any superficial knowledge and he honestly nods in the affirmative to this statement. What we have here is a remarkably sincere writer's confession; however, this confession is perhaps too sincere at times. But is the poet not a hypocrite when he claims to like the lower types and upon coming among better class says: "the women seem all younger... why do the women of poor have to look so bad?"[29] He tells us that he "wants a whore" because he is "afraid of love."[30] "Whores" are moreover "easy to write about, but to write about a good woman is much more difficult."[31] Earlier we have posed the question of what is this good woman, let now the poet answer: "She was plain but not homely. Just a good family woman of around 35, fairly intelligent, perhaps a little overweight, perhaps a bit stocky, but clean: just a good woman."[32] Similar remarks are generally rather scarce in Bukowski's work but the definition of "a good woman" is principally stable and so is the definition of the opposite. The only difference is the weak characterization of the former, in contrast to the positive characterization of latter. While the female characters are thus quite static and unchanging, the attitude and dispositions of the male are subject to change and are

25 Bukowski, *the Muse* 279.
26 Bukowski, *Women* 77. Also cf. Greer's deadly female above.
27 Bukowski, *Women* 227.
28 Bukowski, *Women* 11.
29 Bukowski, *Stew* 126.
30 Bukowski, *Women* 64.
31 Bukowski, *Women* 101.
32 Bukowski, *Stew* 248.

for the most part confusing, full of inconsistencies and contradictions. While imagining himself in bed with each woman he looks at and accusing them of "doing what they do / looking like that" the male asserts that he prefers lower types but complains of the inadequacies in their characters and physique when he gets one.[33] At the same time he is afraid of the good woman or of falling in love, but when he ends up with one and in love – as Chinaski does with Sara near the end of *Women* – he feels pleased with both. It may be a sign of hypocrisy, as suggested above, or just a sign of the poet's reaching maturity. On the whole, when the poet positions himself in roles of older characters, he tends to treat women more kindly and in a less prejudiced, more appreciative way. At worst he declares that: "Every woman is different. Basically, they seem to be a combination of the best and the worst – both magic and terrible. I'm glad that they exist, however."[34]

1.3 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, we shall present the poet's stance to the feminist movement. Basically he expresses strong inclination to a system where the male dominates the female, to the point of even proposing to reinforce it by starting a Men's Liberation Movement:

> I want a woman to hand *me* 3 of her
> paintings after I have
> made love to her,
> and if she can't paint
> she can leave me
> a couple of golden earrings
> or maybe a slice of ear
> in memory of one who
> could.[35]

The poet does not entirely resent the ideas and benefits of feminism, however, provided that:

> Any time they're willing to work the car washes, get behind the plow, chase down the two guys who just held up the liquor store, or clean up the sewers, anytime they're ready to get their tits shot off in the army, I'm ready to stay home and wash the dishes and get bored picking lint off the rug.[36]

The tone suggests that the poet does not really embrace feminist ideology; he may have misunderstood it or he may have encountered a more radical, orthodox branch of feminism. From our reading of his texts, however, we believe that his is a deliberately mocking tone aimed against the fem-

33 Bukowski, *Women* 241; Bukowski, *Love* 221.
34 Bukowski, *Women* 188.
35 Bukowski, *Love* 291.
36 Bukowski, *Water* 33.

inist movement. The novel *Women* was published in 1978; *Love Is a Dog from Hell* in 1977. Other works cited here are of a later publication date but sometimes they are comprised of stories and poems written in earlier periods, previously unpublished or only in poetry newsletters and magazines. It is important to bear in mind that the 1960s and 1970s were periods when the sexual revolution reached its peak and the feminist movement was gaining momentum. There were many junctures of the two cultural phenomenons but there were also points where they diverged. The sexual revolution in America was directly related to the Hippie movement and its ethos; it was a time of free-thinking attitudes, of taboo-breaking, of "make love, not war" slogans, and of sexual liberation. Women began to explore their sexuality and they abruptly refused to be subordinate to men in the matter of multiple sex-partners, for instance. Birth control pill became available and with it came a previously absent possibility of reproductive control on the female's part; this enabled women to increase considerably their independence from men, both economical and social. While agreeing unanimously with the liberation of women from certain historical bonds, the feminist movement did not wholly approve of the sexual revolution. For one thing, there was the rise of the pornography industry which led to an even greater objectification of women. Contrary to erotica, which was not scarce in American women poetry as Alicia Suskin Ostriker describes in her book, pornography leads to the demeaning, coercion, and humiliation of women. And in this atmosphere we have Bukowski's work to consider, whose literary output includes stories written for porn magazines. From what has been so far said in this chapter we may assume that his writing was willfully aimed against the feminist movement. Bukowski mocks their efforts and the objectification of women in his work is extreme. To an educated reader familiar with the ongoing cultural changes and liberations, Bukowski's texts must have seemed intentionally derisive, as they do to us today. Be it as may, with the spread of AIDS in the 1980s the sexual revolution was in decline, but Bukowski continued to write in chauvinistic and misogynistic mood so characteristic of him. Feminist ideology still flourishing, there was much left to be ridiculed. In his later work, the male characters become more passive, as for example in short-story collection *Hot Water Music* published in 1983. This may be interpreted as a reaction to the decline of a macho-prototype of man; the male is no longer the strong, patriarchal, dominant individual. Much of what had been his domain was taken by the female and he gives way to apathy. In other words it sounds as if the males were saying 'take it from us, we have had it long enough, show us how good you are.' This is the true gist of the above printed excerpt. If we consult de Beauvoir's book, we can classify Bukowski as one declaring himself antifeminist, on the ground that "women are already bad enough as it is";[37] we have seen plenty of statements of this kind above already. De Beauvoir offers a solution to this problem, when

37 de Beauvoir 482.

she suggests that "by freeing the female, the male will also free himself" but within the context of Bukowski's work this would mean that the male would have to accept the female's position as equal to his own, to put a stop to objectifying her, to beating her and above all, to quit accusing her for being "a woman without having been consulted in the matter."[38]

38 de Beauvoir 606.

Chapter 2

Woman: the Body and Physical Imagery

A woman would rather visit her own grave
than the place where
she has been young and beautiful
after she is aged and ugly.
Thomas Hardy

In the previous chapter we saw the full extent of misogyny in Bukowski's work. Now if we wish to see what lies beneath we must first take a close look at the surface, begin with the body to understand the body politics. In this case, we mean the body and body politics as the poet perceives them. While for some the dominant experience of life in the flesh is suffering, for other writers the relation between private and public means a conflict between what used to be called appearance and reality.[39] The question is, then, to cosmetize or not to cosmetize? Reading Bukowski, the answer is not as clear as it might at first appear. But either way, in Bukowski's work the presence of the body is felt very strongly and half of his writing is a record of body language. In some sense, the body is a kind of connective or repulsive tissue, uniting human beings at a level beneath the particularities of individual egos or circumstances – and within the context of Bukowski's work also the difference between the sexes – while in the other case a mutual physical repulsion is a complete obstruction to making as simple a thing as social contact. That is why de Beauvoir regards flesh as a "prison."[40] She believes that the goal of civilization is to release us from our bondage to nature. But this level of consciousness may be too difficult to achieve, as the poet reminds us, because we are physical beings, after all. Let us now progress in chronological order.

2.1 Girl

Those familiar with Bukowski's work will know that even girls are presented in a fairly highly sexualized context. By and large there are three essential elements in this representation. The first is plain observation of body parts. One example is the excerpt from the poem 'panties': "she was, maybe 6.../ and she looked at me / and lifted her dress and showed / me her panties."[41] These observations are usually accompanied by the second element – the poet's vision of the girl's future,

39 Alicia S. Ostriker, *Stealing the Language* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986) 119.
40 As quoted in: Ostriker 93.
41 Bukowski, *the Muse* 35.

as in the following two excerpts:

> It was a little girl, about 5, dressed in a cute blue dress, white shoes. She was blonde with a red ribbon in her hair.... She was really a cute little thing. But she'd probably grow up to be a ball-buster. [42]

> I liked Lisa. She was going to be a sexpot some day, a sexpot with personality.[43]

In these and similar passages, the poet envisions the girl as a future shark to-be, as the Great Bitch to-be.[44] What is worse, according to him, the process of transformation will take place with *full* consciousness on the girl's part. "The girls in pantyhose," then, are just larvae "awaiting the proper time and / moment, and then they will move / and then they will conquer."[45] This may reflect the male's fear of the feminist movement, slowly but steadily gaining supporters and momentum. The third constitutive element of the physical imagery of girls reaches a greater symbolic height, however, because it deals with a more metaphysical theme. The young girls, "those great momentary decorations, so bright, so fresh," fail to maintain their excellence, because they turn out to be "the promise that never lasted."[46] The once "great momentary decorations" become the feared "sharks" and "sexpots," only to finally become "crones jamming their shopping carts into people's backs."[47]

2.2 Mature Woman

The portrait of mature women in Bukowski's work can be summarized by a strong tendency to depict the female in anything but the traditional lady-like image of woman. On the one hand, the poet devotes much of his writing effort to portray women in extremely sexist colours, stressing bodily factors that are generally viewed as desirable by males. In short, such a woman wears a wig or has loose dyed blond hair, is 30-odd years of age, has dirt under her fingernails, has false eyelashes, excessive makeup, and her lips and her breasts were done over to twice the size.[48] Or the woman is said to be "high in heels, spirits, pills, booze" and as a whole is regarded as "a glorious dizziness of flesh."[49] By and large the tone of depiction depends on the stance the poet takes. If he likes the woman, then her qualities are uncritically adored and exaggerated. In the other case any single bodily

42 Bukowski, *Stew* 246.
43 Bukowski, *Women* 36.
44 We will discuss these symbols in greater detail below.
45 Bukowski, *Love* 203.
46 Bukowski, *Stew* 162.
47 Bukowski, *Women* 214.
48 Bukowski, *Hollywood* 185.
49 Bukowski, *Love* 15.

imperfection is subject to unmerciful resentment and is blown up to ridiculous proportions.

Although some special metaphors will be dealt with later, we feel it proper to remark here on one which is quite frequent in Bukowski's work. It is closely related to the objectification of woman, to the point of view from which the female is seen as an abstract entity; not so much a being as a substance instead. As the poet keeps "passing safely through," she is listed in between the "wars, / the hospitals, the jails /..decades of nothingness."[50] As we noted in the introduction, woman above all means *trouble* and mature women bring the worst kind of it. Moreover, we have only encountered the objectification of mature women; neither the girl nor the old woman is objectified in any form whatsoever.

All in all, the poet is clear on what eventually happens when a woman feels she is growing old. This process is – considering expressions used elsewhere in Bukowski's work – narrated surprisingly poetically in a poem named 'the ladies of summer':

> the ladies of summer will die like the rose
> and the lie
>
> the ladies of summer will love
> so long as the price is not
> forever
>
> [...]
>
> they might even love you
> as long as summer lasts
>
> yet winter will come to them
> too[51]

2.3 Old Woman

While both the girl and the mature woman are represented in a sexualized context, the old woman is depicted as a practically sexless being. In the previous chapter we have seen that the old woman receives the most generous share of misogyny, and now we will show that this misogyny is delivered in richly colorful verse. The poet employs all possible means to bring disgrace on the old

50 Bukowski, *the Muse* 342.
51 Charles Bukowski. *Play the Piano Drunk Like a Percussion Instrument Until the Fingers Begin to Bleed a Bit* (New York: Ecco, 2003) 56.

woman or at least to ridicule her:

what is it?
an old woman, fat, yellow dress,
torn stockings
[....]
it seems obscene[52]

old dolls, once beautiful
now toothlessly munching
soft toast, poking at
peaches[53]

a grandmother who sits somewhat like
a flowerpot [54]

For the most part, the old woman is "the crone jamming her cart into your back and whacking you with her cane."[55] Concerning the process of growing old, Bukowski does not deny that it may be difficult and often painful for women – especially for those who were once "beautiful" – to get old. But then he finishes his poem about the ladies of summer in the following manner:

white snow and
a cold freezing
and faces so ugly
that even death
will turn away–
wince–
before taking
them.

Despite all extremities and fraudulent figures here, Bukowski does sometimes get perhaps the closest to metaphysical themes when dealing with old women and aging. In the poem 'the proud thin dying' he meditates on the nature of human life: "it's the order of things: each one / gets a taste of honey / then the knife"[56] and we feel that he *means* it, that what he says is valid on a larger scale, for the male and female, for the young and old, for the ugly and beautiful alike.

These comments require a broader context. Various liberation movements proclaimed through the latter half of the 20th century each their own ideals and tried to make society respect

52 Bukowski, *Mockingbird* 117.
53 Bukowski, *the Muse* 367.
54 Bukowski, *the Piano* 30.
55 Bukowski, *the Muse* 277.
56 Bukowski, *the Piano* 98.

their members. Bearing this in mind, the above description of the mature woman goes against the traditional image of a desirable American female. With regard to young girls, the poet mocks taboo-breaking tendencies characteristic of the sexual revolution. He consciously puts a foot on the threshold of what might be – or what actually *is* – considered pederasty. And for the "old ladies" he has in store an enormous bulk of misogyny. In the post-modern era, when the nuclear family no longer includes the grandparents, old people receive less respect. In the field of literature, the feminist stream employed anatomical imagery both more frequently and far more intimately than male poets. American women poets were writing about their bodies, about sensations of making love, about sitting on the toilet, about their menstrual periods, and many more.[57] It as if Bukowski deliberately mocks this trend, when he includes in his writing remarks of his ladies' "pissing in the elevator" or "farting gently." But it may equally well be an affirmative nod to the Nietzschean sigh "human, all too human!"

2.4 Some General Metaphors and Symbolism

By and large, the female is generally not described through elaborate literary figures, rather she is presented and treated simply as an object. Although from a literary perspective this may be considered substandard, the poet possibly goes deliberately against the literary tradition. Women are portrayed with the use of colors from outside the classical literary palette. Allusions and references to the ordinary, well-established, and traditional image of the female are lacking. Bukowski, the so-called "skid-row poet laureate," is certainly not the first low class poet but the space and attention allotted to the female in his work is unusual for this literary class. Ostriker identifies several basic types of metaphors and similes usually associated with the imagery of woman. The identification of woman with a flower is not so uncommon in Bukowski's work; for him it serves as a distinguishing mark of old age, of wrinkled faces, of unfulfilled promises. Direct woman-water identification is largely absent, if we do not count various water-sports and the inclination of the female toward alcoholism. Thirdly, there is a most compendious image for woman's body – the earth – and again, this type is missing in Bukowski's work. Only rarely does he address the female in terms of earth-based imagery and then only pejoratively: "she lays like a lump / I can feel the great empty mountain / of her head,"[58] or when he emphasizes the contrast between the female's physical appearance and her spiritual qualities: "beautiful bodies and cement hearts."[59]

57 Ostriker 92.
58 Charles Bukowski, *The Days Run Away like Wild Horses over the Hills* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989) 16.
59 Bukowski, *Love* 195.

2.5 Mrs. Death, the Shark, and the Great Bitch Again

Only later in his writing career did Bukowski develop a more elaborate technique of symbolism. In this thesis, we have included a selection of novels and collections gathering texts from this period, namely *Pulp* and *Betting on the Muse*, in which this symbolism is particularly prominent and reaches beyond plain misogyny. In our reading of Bukowski, the fact that death and its physical presence is repeatedly associated with and symbolized by the female is clear. This symbolism is gradual, ranging from rather incidental, brief remarks while addressing a particularly good-looking female: "she was dressed to *kill*" or when exaggerating the male's feelings of fear of the female: "why am I being threatened / with death by / a woman?"[60] to the deliberate identification of death with the female. To the poet, then, death materializes as the figure of 'Mrs. Death'. This symbolism is central to Bukowski's last novel *Pulp*, where Lady Death is actually described as superior to the male protagonist. The detective's first thought on seeing Mrs. Death is "Now there is a whore, I mean, what else could you call her?"[61] Over the course of the novel he tries to play the game with her, using tricks and armaments from the powerhouse of patriarchy, misogyny and chauvinism, but in the end we see that it is to no avail, that the only way is to surrender. This, however is not the path a Bukowski hero is going to follow. He prefers death, which ironically also means to surrender to the lady, and indeed at the very end when he faces death, he has the opportunity to learn whether death is really "like this old gal...ugly... uglier than [himself]."[62] There is an important connection to the image of the old woman, but before we delve into it in greater detail we will look at the shark and other yet more exotic species.

Besides the purely destructive metaphor of death, there is a powerful symbolism at work in the representation of women as sharks, or more generally, any similar aggressive species. This type of imagery is found both in prose and poetry and we think it worth while to list several examples:

> they had bodies, hair, eyes, legs
> parts
> and often it was like
> sitting with a shark dressed in a
> dress, high heels, smoking, drinking
> swallowing pills[63]

60 Bukowski, *the Piano* 16.
61 Bukowski, *Pulp* 81.
62 Bukowski, *Pulp* 99.
63 Bukowski, *the Muse* 192.

when the young girls with mouths
like barracudas
bodies like lemon trees
bodies like clouds
bodies like flashes of lightning
stop knocking on my door...[64]

shark-mouth
grubby interior with an
almost perfect body,
long blazing hair –
she speaks of love
then breaks each man
to her will[65]

She looked electric that morning.... Tammie was hard like so many women in their early twenties. Her face was shark-like.[66]

Behind the symbolism of carnivorous fishes and behind the similes of sparkling electricity resides the deadly female. It is interesting to note that this imagery is associated with younger, even non-adult women.

Then there is the image of woman as a space alien. In *Pulp* Jeanie Nitro, an omnipotent being of the female sex, arrives on Earth in order to house her colony of space aliens there. The next time the detective is talking with Jeanie, she "is sitting on [his] desk, legs crossed, kicking her heels...what does it matter if she is a space alien? The way she looks, you'd want more of them around."[67] Firstly, this description is exclusively physical, which is not surprising as the poet largely focuses on the bodily dimension when writing about women. Secondly, we can see here a more generalized parallel to the poet's disdain of the American female as inferior to non-U.S. women. In this context – and this is a key observation – we may claim that the poet rejects the female of the human species and prefers the extraterrestrial woman.[68] In his opinion – and according to what Jeanie has to say – these are going to take over the Earth. It would be strange, however, if Bukowski constructed the plot entirely without obstacles. Although Jeanie maintains a strict policy of "no sex with Earthlings,"[69] among her alien forces, she herself does not resist bodily pleasures of this world.

64 Bukowski, *Love* 90.
65 Bukowski, *Love* 179.
66 Bukowski, *Women* 108.
67 Bukowski, *Pulp* 119.
68 Or at least he settles up with a mannequin as will be seen below.
69 Bukowski, *Pulp* 140.

Now in conclusion to these specific literary figures, we may draw a parallel to the three female archetypes we discussed in the beginning of this chapter, namely the girl, the adult woman and the old woman. It is interesting that there is a correspondence between the girl and the shark, the adult woman and the space alien, and finally the old woman and Mrs. Death. In fact, these pairs consist of mirror images. Even though earlier we observed that the girls and young women will one day grow up to be sexpots, they *are* sharks and barracudas at the moment. Because they are waiting, they are patiently waiting until the time comes for them to move and conquer. Further on, the following paired representation of the female possibly best characterizes Bukowski's work as a whole. The identification of the adult female with the space alien is essential to our understanding of how the poet himself understands women. Although man and woman share a mutual interest, e.g. that of procreation, there are too many other issues the two will be arguing constantly about and there will be many misunderstandings along the way. Bukowski takes an extreme approach by not giving the woman a full recognition, but regarding her as a different species altogether. Instead of trying to find a way to go along with the female, to make an attempt at harmonic integration of her existence in his world, the typical Bukowski hero defines himself against her and declares himself superior to her. This process is closely linked to objectification, which is but a hallmark of egoistic pride. Once the female is made thus completely powerless, the male takes the liberty of exploiting her. This will be the subject of the next chapter. Now there are several interesting remarks in *The Female Eunuch* that are closely related to our debate. Greer predicted one of the side-effects of the feminist movement, the appearance of the Great Bitch as she calls her:

> We are not far from those extraordinary springing women with slanting eyes and swirling clouds of hair who prowl through comics on the ball of their feet, wheeling suddenly upon the hero, talons unsheathed for the kill. Their mouths are large, curved and shining like scimitars: the musculature of their shoulders and thighs is incredible, their breasts like grenades, their waist encircled with steel belts as narrow as Cretan bull-dancers... [70]

The usual fate of such a woman is to be tamed and made to submit to "the hero's iron cock";[71] this has been suggested in the previous chapter and will be dealt with in greater detail in the following one. But since the female has not yet submitted her will to him, it is, as Greer says, the hero who should worry about his life! Because we are no longer dealing with a charming, traditional woman anymore. The hero is engaged in duel with a learned, enchanting female conscious of feminist theories and of the new role of women in society. While men may venture as far as to attack the female physically, there is a barrier in Bukowski's work: the woman is never killed. The only option avail-

70 Greer 192.
71 Greer 192.

able to the male, then, is to keep at a safe distance from the shark and banish the old lady – possibly an allusion to death according to our interpretation – from his sphere of existence. This the typical Bukowski hero manages fairly well, so there is only the vast class of middle-aged women remaining and with them the troubles and hardship come.

2.6 Mannequin as the Ideal Female and the Imagery of Decomposed Whole – Affinities to the Work of Sylvia Plath

Sylvia Path, one of the most prominent voices of poetry from the 1960s onwards, later lionized by feminists, and Charles Bukowski, the radical chauvinist poet, are perhaps the least likely authors and human beings to share a common interest. Plath is considered to be a confessional poet but she takes the reader yet a step further in the creation of a myth – a myth of the female's earthly and transcendental experience – by rearranging and exalting her own experiences. Bukowski has clear (auto)biographical tendencies[72] and also can be said to have been writing in confessional mode, though his form lacks a more concise and sophisticated style and diction as we can trace in Robert Lowell's work, for example. Bukowski does not create myths that would reach outside of his personal experience. The allusions to history, so typical of Plath's later work, are not too frequent nor are substantially developed in Bukowski's poetry; in prose they are entirely absent. On the other hand, Bukowski does include allusions to other writers and works of literature, especially to texts dealing with manhood and to works that celebrate it or disclose its decline, of which the works of John Fante or Ernest Hemingway are good examples. On the whole then, Bukowski has created a sexist myth of the female, along with the myth of a macho-man, of which the former is a logical by-product. As far as the methods of Plath and Bukowski are concerned, they could not be more different and yet we claim to have found a mutual inclination in their works. The metaphor of a cat is only a curtain-lifter in our debate. While Bukowski employs the imagery of a cat largely in order to emphasize physicality, Plath works with a deeper concept of a cat – the phenomenon of cats having nine lives.

Of interest here is the image of a mannequin. In Plath's work, the mannequin functions symbolically so as to point out that "perfection is terrible" because "it cannot have children."[73] There are two causes of the sterility of perfection. The first is more concrete and resides in the fact that many women deny their maternal instincts in favor of being trendy, looking chic, having a slim waistline,

72 Needless to say here that many of the stories are based on experiences of the poet's friends.
73 Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems* (Pössneck: Everyman's Library, 1998) 222.

and in general trying to accommodate themselves to the totemic, idealized image of the female. The second cause reaches deeper, to an abstract level where perfection is of itself sterile, because the pains of child-bearing and birth-giving are inconsistent with the existence of a perfect entity, the would-be child-bearer. Imperfection may not be exactly a virtue but, by applying reverse logic, enables the wonder of procreation to occur among human beings.

Bukowski is largely ignorant of abstractions of any kind, so what remains in his poetry is the totemic and idealized body of a mannequin. Contrary to Plath's disparaging tone, the model is praised and celebrated by Bukowski as something above the ordinary female, namely due to the lack of a myriad of characteristics perceived by the poet as defects. In this the poets differ but the conclusive tone is surprisingly similar. Both Plath's and Bukowski's mannequins demand sacrifice from their "lovers" and once this is done, there are "no more idols" except the one that has just been avowed obedience to. In the story 'Love for $17.50'[74] the male protagonist eventually breaks up with all girl friends because he has idolatrized the mannequin as the effect of a special erotic fetish, and is unable either to love any real female or make love to her. What attracts the poet most to the mannequin – indeed that which Plath so zealously criticizes – is its static, passive, objectified characteristics. This thinking pattern is mirrored by the poet's obsession with the importance of physical appearance, stressing the superficial belief that "what you call a better woman – well, she just has a better facade,"[75] while Plath rejects the flesh resolutely in aspiration toward transcendence. Both exemplary poems 'The Munich Mannequins'[76] and 'Trapped'[77] are reproduced in full below:

74 Bukowski, *No North* 37.
75 Bukowski, *the Muse* 180.
76 Plath 222-223.
77 Bukowski, *Love* 35.

The Munich Mannequins (Sylvia Plath)

Perfection is terrible, it cannot have children.
Cold as snow breath, it tamps the womb

Where the yew trees blow like hydras,
The tree of life and the tree of life

Unloosing their moons, month after month,
to no purpose.
The blood flood is the flood of love,

The absolute sacrifice.
It means: no more idols but me,

Me and you.
So, in their sulfur loveliness, in their smiles

These mannequins lean tonight
In Munich, morgue between Paris and Rome,

Naked and bald in their furs,
Orange lollies on silver sticks,

Intolerable, without mind.
The snow drops its pieces of darkness,

Nobody's about. In the hotels
Hands will be opening doors and setting

Down shoes for a polish of carbon
Into which broad toes will go tomorrow.

O the domesticity of these windows,
The baby lace, the green-leaved confectionery,

The thick Germans slumbering in their
bottomless Stolz.
And the black phones on hooks

Glittering
Glittering and digesting

Voicelessness. The snow has no voice.

Trapped (Charles Bukowski)

don't undress my love
you might find a mannequin;
don't undress the mannequin
you might find
my love.

she's long ago
forgotten me.

she's trying on a new
hat
and looks more the
coquette
than ever.

she is a
child
and a mannequin
and death.

I can't hate
that.

she didn't do
anything
unusual.

I only wanted her
to.

The imagery of mannequins also suggests an array of limbs, torsos, crape hair etc. In short, although the figurine is put together to give the impression of a whole, we cannot overlook this fact in our minds so easily. And moreover this is another feature evident in the poetry of both authors – the dissociation of the body in limbs and bodily parts. Plath's work is filled with body images: skulls, skin, feet, bones, hearts, legs, arms etc. According to Ostriker, the female poet thus projects human anatomy into the natural world and does so in order to emphasize the connection between

physical vulnerability and also to refer to the condition of a woman – her being "fatally imprisoned and stifled by her body."[78] In contrast with Bukowski, however, Plath writes in this manner of both sexes. The poet concentrates on the female only and for the most part the physical description has the following tone: "She was trying her damnedest to burst and pop out of her clothes, and you stood there watching her, wondering which part would pop out first."[79] In addition to this, Bukowski is highly selective in the choice of body parts that are described. Normally he chooses typically female parts – especially when the description is going to be a favorable one – but at other times he focuses on atypical body parts so as to stress out a defect or physical monstrosity of the particular female. Generally, Bukowski employs the imagery of dissociated body parts in order to give a most fitting characterization, one that is inevitably based on observing the external appearance exclusively. On the other hand, in Plath's writing this imagery serves the purpose of achieving transcendence over the limits of the human body and it is precisely this barrier Bukowski never surmounts.

2.7 Conclusion

Throughout the above sections we have seen a strong tendency towards sexist and exclusively external description underlying Bukowski's work. It has been pointed out that the main three archetypes of the female, i.e. the girl, the adult woman, and the old woman, are correspondingly represented by three major symbols, viz., the shark, Mrs. Death, and the space alien. The symbolism is in harmony with the misogynistic flavor of Bukowski's texts but while the latter is usually expressed by characters, the author informs us of the former himself. The characters in Bukowski's work are not throughly worked out and this applies especially to earlier works. As far as the language of poetry, poetic diction, figures, and schemes are concerned, these are also not developed to any higher degree of sophistication. The imagery, similes, and metaphors that are there are mostly against the traditional representation of the female. As will be seen in greater detail in the next chapter, the female is usually sexualized, objectified, and humiliated.

In the poet's world, the Great Bitch cannot be disposed of by killing her. This is not an option. She is a vital part of the world but mostly she represents something the poet cannot quite define so that he at least defines himself against it. Ostriker insists that male poets take this attitude largely because flesh is both corrupt and corruptible. They are both fascinated and repulsed by it;

78 Ostriker 100.
79 Bukowski, *the Muse* 102.

and sometimes they are afraid of it. On the other hand, in youth the flesh is a source of pleasure.[80] This is why the aged woman is depicted in the worst colors, but not the men because according to de Beauvoir, it is in the woman's body that man really encounters the deterioration of the flesh. Unmistakably, the old woman arouses hatred mingled with fear.[81] Later, in Chapter 4, we will see the consequences that follow once the charms of the wife have vanished. The best answer to Bukowski's prejudices and the fear from which they stem seems to be Erica Jong's verse:

> the belly may be kept firm through numerous pregnancies
> by means of sit-ups jogging dancing (think of
> Russian ballerinas)
> & the cunt
> as far as I know is ageless possibly immortal becoming
> simply
> more open...[82]

We have also ventured to trace similarities between the works of Bukowski and Plath. Although there are some mutually convergent features of their work, for example the use of mannequins and dislocated body imagery, the writers employ these for different ends. In Plath's case the goal is to defeat the limits of flesh by arriving at a state of transcendence. Bukowski instead merely uses them to buttress a male-dominated world in which there is room only for the desirable parts of the body and these, of course, of desirable proportions. Only rarely does Bukowski manage to include a touch of metaphysical thought in his descriptions. In *Women*, he meditates on the existence and the nature of woman:

> Where did all the women come from? The supply was endless. Each one of them was individual, different. Their pussies were different, their kisses were different, their breasts were different, but no man could drink them all, there were too many of them, crossing their legs, driving men mad. What a feast! [83]

In this "endless supply of women," there appears every now and then a woman who prompts the poet to say that nature "has pulled a wild trick" and "put together a special woman, an unbelievable woman,"[84] as is the case with Edna: "[she] had it all. They'd made no mistake when they put her together."[85] Notwithstanding the apparent objectification of the female and the reverence of the special ones only, the poet raises a question by asking who invented woman? To what ultimate pur-

80 Ostriker 97-98.
81 de Beauvoir 160.
82 As quoted in: Ostriker 106.
83 Bukowski, *Women* 108.
84 Bukowski, *Pulp* 73.
85 Bukowski, *No North* 116-117.

pose? From our reading of his texts, we see that Bukowski does not create a God-ruled universe but again a male-dominated world where woman serves to amuse the male, to give him excitement, to annoy him, to play her tricks on him, to give him trouble. And for all that we know, the poet realizes only too well that without women his world would fall apart.

Chapter 3

Woman's Sexuality and Eroticism

Love ain't nothing but sex misspelled.
Harlan Ellison

Here's a cock / and here's a cunt / and here's trouble."[86] The opening stanza of a Bukowski poem from *Love Is a Dog from Hell* clearly demonstrates that the poet is straightforward, explicit, and vulgar when discussing sex and eroticism. In this chapter our task is to examine these matters. We wish to comment on the representation of various forms of sexual activities, on different degrees of eroticism, and particularly how both sexes approach the act of love-making. The poet's representations will be then contrasted with what de Beauvoir, Greer, and Ostriker have to say about the subject. Let us start with the poet's attitude towards sex in general.

3.1 Attitude Towards Sex

The male's attitude towards sex is easy to characterize, he is ready and willing to "copulate whenever possible."[87] It is not really important with whom, where, or when because in Bukowski's world the primal force driving men does not distinguish between individual females; as long as it is a female she is desirable. Of course, the more attractive a female is, the better, but on the whole males are emotionally limited in Bukowski's novels. That is why they do not care, or do not seem to care very much, if it is their spouse, a lady friend, or a prostitute from skid-row that they find themselves a-bed with. When the male desires a certain woman, then there are several methods he can use. When he is pursuing the first of the three mentioned types – that is, his spouse – he feels that merely her being his spouse entitles him to sex with her any time he pleases. Concerning the next type, a lady friend, the situation is only slightly more complicated. She must be talked and coaxed into it, and we include a short dialogue to clarify the male's attitude to sex in general:

"Your wife trusts you," said Meg.
"Yeh," said Tony.
"I wonder if I can trust you?"

86 Bukowski, *Love* 134.
87 Bukowski, *the Piano* 55.

"Don't you like to be fucked?"
"That's not the point"
"What's the point."
"The point is that Dolly and I are friends."
"We can be friends."
"Not that way."
"Be modern. It's the modern age. People swing. They're uninhibited. They fuck from ceiling. They screw dogs, babies, chicken, fish...."[88]

As for the last type, a prostitute or a call girl, they are actually most difficult ones to be cajoled. A man must pay for their sexual services and this is something which Bukowski's characters usually resent.

This brief analysis shows one important result: the world of Bukowski's novels is inverted compared to the ideal world where humanity and love are the most sacred values. In fact, Bukowski's depiction of females is a kind of wishful thinking. It is a world of male fantasies, while the real world we experience is somewhere in between these two extremities. Men have real needs, and as long as there are women – or certain types of women – men's needs are likely to be met, one way or the other. Broadly speaking, the attitude of Bukowski's male characters to sex and love-making is one of routine. To Carl, the hero of 'The Unaccommodating Universe' story, "fucking is like shaving...it's something [he] has to do now and then."[89] For women, this sex routine presents another issue: a whole set of difficulties including unwanted pregnancy and STDs arises. In the poem 'trying to get even', a female character says:

"look, I've had 3 abortions
in a row, real fast, and I'm sick of
abortions, I don't want you to stick that
thing in me!"[90]

The trouble is that both sexes have each their own needs: they want sexual gratification, but more often that not they cannot get along easily. De Beauvoir identifies two elementary constituents of man's need, namely sexual desire and the desire for offspring, and through those the male is dependent for satisfaction on the female.[91] However, the latter type of desire is practically non-existent in Bukowski's novels, and this holds true for the female also. On the other hand, de Beauvoir observes that although man is dependent for sexual gratification on the female, coition cannot take place

88 Bukowski, *Water* 67.
89 Bukowski, *the Muse* 150.
90 Bukowski, *Love* 69.
91 de Beauvoir xxvi.

without the male's consent, and at the same time male satisfaction is its natural termination.[92] The expectations on the male side are clear, but less so with the female: she desires sexual excitement and pleasure in general, but her body promises no precise conclusion to the act of love.[93] This may, in some cases, prove profoundly frustrating.

Sometimes in Bukowski's works a woman does not feel like satisfying her partner's urges and finds excuses. She may pretend to be asleep, or complain of a headache, or say that she has other things on her mind. However, the male characters almost never heed their partners' feelings, as for example in the following dialogues:

> "Think of all the women who'd like to have this thing!"
> "Barney, I'm just not in the mood."
> "What do you mean, you're not in the mood?"
> "I mean, I just don't feel sexy."
> "You will, baby, you will!" [94]

> "Billy, let's not rush it. I want to talk a little first."
> "We can talk afterwards. I got this ramrod here and I got to do something with it. I need flesh, no words!"
> "I want to shower first, Billy."
> "Shower? What ya been doin', working in the garden?" [95]

Both conversations are brought to end by the males using force on their partners. Bukowski describes the action in terms of "forcing them in" or "nailing them down." Inevitably, as Greer points out, sex like this becomes just a masturbation of the penis in the vagina.[96] This type of conduct could be – at best – called making love to women's organs, i.e. precisely that of which Greer accuses the male population, for "making love to organs, not people."[97] But she also sees a possible solution which lies in changing the attitude towards sex. If both partners are consenting in the act of love, then women ought to try "stimulating the penis instead of just taking it,"[98] because when the male takes his pleasure with her, when he gives pleasure to her, the very words imply lack of reciprocity. And the ordinary female in Bukowski's world seems to know this very well already and they are correspondingly active, though it is all still one degree removed from reality, as the poet sees the world through the distorted lens of a male's feeling of absolute superiority.

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92 de Beauvoir 374.
93 de Beauvoir 394.
94 Bukowski, *Water* 121.
95 Bukowski, *Pulp* 134.
96 Greer 44.
97 Greer 46.
98 Greer 42.

We have discussed the general attitude towards sex as depicted by Bukowski and now we will look at several other extreme perspectives. One, which is not uncommon throughout Bukowski's work, is that of comparing love-making to the copulation of animals. The parallel runs from noticing animals copulating: "I watched two flies fucking, then decided to call [her],"[99] to the introspection of Henri Chinaski where he comes to terms with his animalistic, beastly side in *Women*: "She was mine. We were two animals in the forest and I was murdering her,"[100] and finally to regarding sex as essentially a mere physical, carnal thing: "Sex is a trap for animals,"[101] which none the less men are prone to practice. It is no wonder, then, that women loathe being thus barbarously used and hate men accordingly. But the feeling on woman's part is curiously ambivalent. She is both repulsed by the idea of forceful intercourse and strangely aroused and attracted to it at the same time. The situation of a woman who finds herself under such conflicting circumstances is accurately described in a story from *South of No North*:

> "Christ," said Sally, "I can hardly walk! He's an animal!"
> [...]
> "I hate men!" said Sally.
> [...]
> "You know, though..." she said.
> "What?"
> "It wasn't so bad. On a strictly sexual basis, I mean. He really put it to me. On a strictly sexual basis it was quite something."
> "What?" said Dale.
> "I mean, morally, I hate him. The son of a bitch should be shot. He's a dog. A pig. But on a strictly sexual basis it was something..." [102]

Sally, the female protagonist of the story, was sexually abused by a stranger. And when Bukowski ventures to describe her emotions, we clearly see that they are mixed rather than unambiguously hateful toward the rapist. Her male friends are puzzled by the peculiar notion of how good the physical aspect of the act felt. Our conclusion then is that women in Bukowski's work have no problem keeping sex and love separated. If their partner is too loving and sensitive, they complain that they come short of "real" sexual gratification. If on the contrary the partner plays it too "rough," then they say he does not fulfill their emotional needs and that he is a brute. We should also like to note that sexologists and psychologists say that rape fantasies are not uncommon among women of all ages and through all social backgrounds.[103] Only Bukowski's rape scenarios are not psychologically

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99 Bukowski, *Pulp* 20.
100 Bukowski, *Women* 260.
101 Bukowski, *Pulp* 37.
102 Bukowski, *No North* 76.
103 Davis et. al., "Rape-Myth Congruent Beliefs in Women", *The Kinsey Institute*, January 2008 <http://kinseyinstitute.org/publications/PDF/Davis%20et%20al%202006.pdf>

crafted in great detail, since they encompass the sexual aspect of a rape alone. And, moreover, while the Kinsey studies have shown that some women do include rape scenarios in their fantasies, there is a vast difference between indulging in the world of fantasies and between actually enjoying rape, as the poet would have us believe. In general, what we see here is the fact that females in Bukowski's works do not exhibit features typical of real women. Instead, the poet conjures primitive images that stem from the male's world of fantasies. Earlier we saw an embodiment of such imagination already in the form of a mannequin. The mannequin – in principle a doll – was the perfect female the world has to offer that the poet presented to us; both Sally and the figurine are objects by means of which the male can satisfy his lust.

The other extreme approach, plentifully exhibited in Bukowski's work, is concerned with the association of death and sex. Sex and death have always been related to each other, like the life-bringer, lust-giver Eros and its shadowy, eerie counterpart Thanatos. In the previous chapter we discussed the identification of death with the female, personified as Lady Death. Presently we wish to look at how Bukowski employs the concept of death in sex scenes and in depicting sexual attitudes of his literary characters. Henri Chinaski explains his attitude towards sex in *Women* as follows:

> They took all the joy out of fucking by talking about it all the time. I liked to fuck too, but it wasn't my religion. There were too many ridiculous and tragic things about it. People didn't seem to know how to handle it. So they made a toy out of it. A toy that destroyed people.[104]

Here death itself is not explicitly mentioned, but the terms Chinaski coins are interesting in the context of our debate: joy, religion, tragic, toy, destroy. These expressions are mixed analogously to the Eros-Thantalos duality, and perfectly hint at what comes later in the book:

> The sex had been fine; there had been laughter. I could hardly remember a more civilized time, neither of us making any demands, yet there had been warmth, it had not been without feeling, dead meat coupled with dead meat. I detested that type of swinging, the Los Angeles, Hollywood, Bel Air, Malibu, Laguna Beach kind of sex. Strangers when you meet, strangers when you part – a gymnasium of bodies namelessly masturbating each other. People with no morals often considered themselves more free, but mostly they lacked the ability to feel or to love. So they became swingers. The dead fucking the dead. There was no gamble or humor in their game – it was corpse fucking corpse.[105]

Henri Chinaski's honest self-reflection is surprisingly soft and reveals the sensitivity of the author's alter ego. On the other hand, his obsession with other people "not doing it right" injures the credib-

104 Bukowski, *Women* 83.
105 Bukowski, *Women* 250.

ility of the declaration given here. A man who is truly happy does not feel the need to make bombastic proclamations of his joy to the world. A writer, however, is by nature apt to write and comment on anything and everything. It is perfectly fine if Chinaski wishes to comment on other people's affairs, only the manner in which he does so is in conflict with, and betrays what he is saying.

3.2 Techniques and Woman's Sexual Organs

"Women's sexual organs are shrouded in mystery,"[106] Greer concludes neatly in *The Female Eunuch*. Our concern now will be to see how Bukowski in particular viewed and characterized women's sexual parts and erotic dispositions but first of all let women speak for themselves. We have seen in the previous section how much more complex woman's situation and sexuality are in comparison with those of the male. Hélène Cixous poetically summarizes this difference between sexes, as "[her] libido being cosmic, just as [her] unconscious is worldwide."[107] Or, to speak more plainly, Luce Irigaray asserts that "woman has sex organs just about everywhere."[108] Woman's eroticism is much more intricate and reflects the complexity of the feminine situation. According to de Beauvoir, the female is the prey of the species whose interests dissociate from her interests as an individual. A significant factor in this issue is that the female is endowed with the clitorid system.[109] This is where our discussion of Bukowski's literary exploration of the female erotica will begin.

Basically all female characters in Bukowski's work take immense delight in their partners' conducting cunnilingus on them. Here we should mention an important non-literary circumstance, that is, the period of sexual revolution which brought about a set of new sexual standards and stirred up the sexual mood of the population. The sexual world was changing dramatically in the 1960s: discussion of female desire became more common, as did some unusual practices and sexual experimentation. In this context, Bukowski presents an antithesis to this tendency; his literary works are a display of forceful, primitive, and brutal male fantasies, which is in striking contrast with the general disempowerment of men in the 1960s. For example, if a man performing oral sex on his partner was considered debased centuries ago in the East, he is – in Bukowski's work – practically obliged to do so for his partner. Lydia, the chief female figure in *Women* confronts Henri Chinaski about this issue early on in the novel:

106 Greer 39.
107 As quoted in: Ostriker 96.
108 Ostriker 96.
109 de Beauvoir 372.

"Well, I mean for a man to interest me he's got to eat my pussy. Have you ever eaten pussy?"
"No."
"You're over 50 years old and you've never eaten pussy?"
"No." [110]

He reluctantly consents to do as his partner pleases and at once falls short of that woman's mental list of potential lovers. He simply does not meet her criterion in regard of cunnilingus. To many male characters – Chinaski being a good example – this practice is an utter novelty, while for others it is just another routine, as it is for Rich in the *Hollywood* novel, who tells his comrade: "I have to eat Nadine every night," and meets with a sympathetic response: "Jesus..."[111] We see that the female thus often uses her private parts in a way that yields her a certain amount of power over her male counterpart or at least reduces that of his over her. She can decide to offer a favor in return for being pleased in this special way, as we see in the following example, where a landlady questions the character of a man who has come looking for a place to rent:

"Are you a good lover?"
"Most men like to think they are. I'm probably good but not great."
"Do you eat pussy?"
"Yes."
"Good."
"Your room still available?"
"Yes, the master bedroom. Do you really go down on a woman?"
"Hell yes."[112]

Women in Bukowski's work clearly show signs of obsession on the subject, why else would they ask the same question twice as in the examples above? And in the latter case the process of exploitation is evident, only – surprisingly enough – the male is on the receiving end of it. The next example will serve as an illustration of how the exploitation can turn into an act of aggression, of which the sex organ becomes the instrument. After having taught Chinaski what he had not known before, Lydia threatens him as follows:

"It's magnificent. I want to destroy your face with my cunt."
"It might be the other way around."
"Don't bet on it."
"You're right. Cunts are indestructible." [113]

110 Bukowski, *Women* 21.
111 Bukowski, *Hollywood* 208.
112 Bukowski, *Water* 64.
113 Bukowski, *Women* 31.

It is interesting to note two facts here. Firstly, from what has been said so far we conclude that women in Bukowski's work are active and this particular female is perfectly self-confident. Secondly, we can observe here, as was already outlined in the conclusion of Chapter 1, a tendency of the male – the former macho – to become more passive in reaction to the cultural changes that threw off what he would with a sigh call "balance" between the sexes.

To complete our discussion of the role that women's sexual organs play in Bukowski's work, we turn to what Greer has to say. Her point of view, much more expert and competent in the field, is quite contrary to that of Bukowski's. She does not deny the fact that many a woman derives pleasure from this practice, but Bukowski's viewpoint lacks one important aspect, that is, hygiene. Greer insists that "[some women] would not require it of any man who was making love to them. Other women are too embarrassed by cunnilingus, and feel sure that men must find it disgusting."[114] This contradiction between how women feel about oral contact with the vagina as depicted in Bukowski's novels and as Greer explains it, is resolved once we take into account the fact that the former's literary efforts are again a projection of the masculine mental make-up on the real world, as we have seen earlier. Let us now turn our attention to some other techniques and issues.

Male characters in Bukowski's work masturbate frequently, of which the author keeps us well informed. This type of erotic solo activity is deemed perfectly healthy and advisable. So is the case with the female, for instance in the following passage:

> Lilly was at home looking at an old Marlon Brando movie on television. She was alone.
> She'd always been in love with Marlon.
> She farted gently. She lifted her robe and began to play with herself...[115]

Thus far the author's approach to both sexes is altogether equal as far as masturbation is concerned. It is not so with his male literary heroes, however, who view the issue differently. They take great offense at this female solo practice, as seen in the 'Head Job' story, where Marx wishes to take advantage of his lady neighbor:

> "Listen, don't you ever get hot pants?"
> "Of course."
> "What do you do?"
> "I masturbate."
> Marx drew himself up. "Madam, that's a crime against nature, and, more importantly,

114 Greer 258.
115 Bukowski, *Water* 40. Note also the non-traditional, unlady-like tone of depiction.

against me." He closed the door.[116]

Indulgence in self-pleasure had at times been regarded as transgression of a serious kind, but it is Marx's chauvinistic, ego-injured notion of a crime against him, which we find here particularly interesting. In other words, the average egoistic male is supremely confident of his superior importance over that of nature's. That is why he cannot handle the lady's refusal. There is another good example closely connected to this mind pattern of the male, this time it is delivered by Henri Chinaski himself:

> I was astounded and dismayed to find she had a large pussy. An extra large pussy. I hadn't noticed it the night before. That was a tragedy. Woman's greatest sin.[117]

There is something beyond Chinaski's being merely disgusted by the genitals' largeness, for it also indicates that most likely there have been many fellows before him; this is what really outrages him. On the one hand, he prefers a woman who is sexually active but when he meets one he is actually repulsed. On another level, this kind of reasoning about the woman's vagina betrays also a kind of misogynistic fear of the organ. We should also note the tone and choice of words, e.g. "tragedy," "sin," viz., compare these to the poet's reflections on sex and death above.

3.3 Fetishism and Subjectification/Objectification of the Sexes

In this section we wish to comment on certain types of fetishism and unusual sexual preferences exhibited by both sexes, and on de Beauvoir's insights on gender-based subjectification/objectification. We shall begin with the latter and use the theory on the former accordingly.

In the first part of this chapter we have seen that the female is often treated as an object. The male uses her, gives her pleasure, and takes pleasure from her. When a spouse no longer satisfies him, he simply "passes her around" and looks for fresh experiences and excitement with his friends' wives.[118] The woman plays the role of an object, while the male is the subject; de Beauvoir explains the mechanism of this distinction as follows:

> For a man, the transition from childish sexuality to maturity is relatively simple; erotic pleasure is objectified, desire being directed toward another person instead of being

116 Bukowski, *Water* 118.
117 Bukowski, *Women* 78.
118 Note that from the beginnings of the sexual revolution onwards the practice of "swinging" became more and more widespread.

> realized within the bounds of self. Erection is the expression of this need; with penis, hands, mouth, with his whole body, a man reaches out toward his partner, but he himself remains at the center of this activity, being, on the whole, the subject as opposed to the objects that he perceives and instruments that he manipulates; he projects himself toward the other without losing his independence; the feminine flesh is for him a prey, and through it he gains access to the qualities he desires, as with any object.[119]

De Beauvoir further makes an effort to place the female in this subject/object scheme. In section 3.2 we saw that women's sexuality is more complex and so is the ambivalence of her position during the act of love:

> She would abolish all surroundings, abolish the singularity of the moment, of herself, and of her lover, she would fain be lost in a carnal night as shadowy as the maternal womb. And more especially she longs to do away with the separateness that exists between her and the male; she longs to melt with him into one...she wants to remain subject while she is made object.[120]

This is precisely what Chinaski fears in the excerpt at the end of the previous section. We now have a better understanding of the process of objectification as well as of certain types of fetishism. In our debate we will omit the technical and medical details about the development of a fetish in an individual.[121] We also should note that characters in Bukowski's work present cases of rather mild fetishism, not of exclusive paraphilias; the literary characters are simply open to alternative routes to sexual arousal. There are two types of fetishism worthy mentioning. Firstly, the body of a mannequin is occasionally the object of the male's passion, as we saw in the poem 'trapped'. Or, in the story 'Love for $17.50' the male character creates a fantasy world centered around the mannequin he bought in a sale. This inanimate model is the foremost object of his passion; it is the only case in Bukowski's work that the male is incapable of any sexual contact with the real female. The mannequin once again represents the ultimate, totemized image of the ideal female in Bukowski's world.

Secondly, there is the foot and leg fetishism, which is considered fairly acceptable by society, but in Bukowski's work it is carried to extremes. Comments on a lady's legs are the universal compliment and a method of courting her. In *Pulp* the protagonist confesses, while staring at a lady's legs, that: "[he] has always been a leg man," and hastens to explain: "it was the first thing I saw when I was born."[122] Women are conscious of this leg-fetishistic weakness of their counterparts

119 de Beauvoir 371.
120 de Beauvoir 397.
121 E.g. Freud's theory that the fear of castration leads to the objectification of sexual desire towards a non-living object. Hence fetishism is to be found (almost) exclusively in males.
122 Bukowski, *Pulp* 11.

and they know well how to profit from it. This in turn leads to an obsession in women, which is not at all unlike a struggle for power. They may worry if their legs are good enough and so on, because otherwise they have fewer means of exerting influence over the male. An extreme example is the case of the actress Francine, who wants an extra scene with her legs to be shot for the movie:

> "Also, Francine wants a scene where she can show off her legs. She has great legs, you know."
> "All right, I'll write in a leg scene..."[123]

Later, she asks the author if he has not accidentally neglected her demand:

> "Did you write in that leg scene for me yet?"
> "Francine, it's in there. You get to flash them."
> "You'll see. I have great legs!"[124]

Again, it is evident that the female is perfectly self-confident, very active, and knows how to use her potential.

3.4 Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter that in all aspects of sexuality and eroticism women in Bukowski's work cannot be understood as an attempt to represent reality. The poet takes into account only some features typical of the real female and adds a handful of other attributes that exist exclusively within the sphere of male imagination. The result is a projection of forceful and strong male fantasies onto the real female. The woman in any of Bukowski's books is but a intersection of the poet's observations and his internal fantasies. Subsequently, the interaction between males and females is affected by the distorted image of the latter. On some level we may conclude that the poet takes a certain set of male and female qualities and puts them on a collision course; there the male and female collide, explode, and follow trajectories each of their own, but nevertheless the fabric of space remains heavily curved by highly stereotypized male thinking.

123 Bukowski, *Hollywood* 142.
124 Bukowski, *Hollywood* 156.

Chapter 4

Married and Divorced Women

A wife for counsel, a mother-in-law for welcome,
but there's none as dear as one's own mother.
L. N. Tolstoy

Ideally, in this chapter we would take a look at women and the social roles they assume – mothers, wives and so on, but Bukowski himself declared that he did not like his mother and neither for that matter did he appreciate the genius of Tolstoy. In fact a good matron is very unlikely to appear in his texts. In the semi-autobiographical novel *Ham on Rye*, however, he regards mothers of his friends as little other than sexualized objects. Thus said and knowing already his stance toward aged women, we are left with only married and divorced women. We will explore women of both types and we will also consider the institution of marriage, bearing in mind the fact that Bukowski is far from achieving the calibre of Thomas Hardy, for example, who was a great critic and in-depth revisionist of this institution in his works, albeit a very pessimistic one, drawing much too a fatalistic picture. This fatalism, however, is also keenly felt in Bukowski's work. Apart from fulfilling the function as a marital unit in society and the production of children, there are few other motives for marriage. The mechanism at work behind all this is one so characteristic of Bukowski's works, namely the driving force, driving men and women together. Without this force Bukowski's literary world would fall apart, and since the force is there and the world is whole, we will explore to what it leads. On the way we will concentrate again on finding stereotypical patterns, in which Greer and de Beauvoir will grant us their insights.

4.1 Married Women

There are several motivations for getting married. Firstly and foremostly, marriage represents the destiny traditionally offered to women by society, as de Beauvoir observes.[125] This is but a very vague notion, and does not in itself say much about the motive behind it, women – or more generally, people – simply do *not* marry just for the sake of being married, there must be something else in it besides, and this holds true especially for the world of Bukowski's novels. Men have usu-

125 de Beauvoir 425.

ally a plain motive, as the previous chapter suggested. Once married, they are entitled the right to have sex any time they want: "'suppose we get married, then what?' / 'then you can have it any time you want it' she told [him]."[126] As we see, the women themselves are advocates of this privilege. For women the situation differs only in that she looks toward the expected means of securing her material needs and maintenance of the desired lifestyle. Typically, the female is said to be "trying to skin [him]... Trying to get all the money. The house. The garden. The garden house. The gardener, too... And the car. And alimony. Plus a large chunk of cash."[127] On the other hand, there are several cases when the woman is the economically active one, supporting her husband, boyfriend, or partner, who are mostly as yet unsuccessful writers, young poets, or working obscure, irregular jobs which might reflect the author's own working experience. In general, the prospects of married life are not particularly great for either of the sexes and were it not for the mutual – mostly erotic, never intellectual or spiritual – attraction, the marriage would never take place at all.

What happens once you have a husband and a wife? The answer within the framework of Bukowski's texts is apparent: trouble. Every marriage follows the same pattern, comprising of two stages. The first stage, or "the beginning that always seems promising" is accompanied by laughs, understanding, and good sex. Gradually, however, the second stage sets in and the marriage turns in "a job that lacks diversity." The job can be carried on for some time but eventually it turns into a contest, "a contest of who could wear down the other." According to the author the whole affair becomes "a hate game."[128] The metaphor about marriage being a job is quite fitting, as de Beauvoir also affirms that marriage is not only "an honorable career" but "one that is no less tiring than other careers" as well.[129] No marriage in the author's works can be said to be honorable, as the job is often done badly, without either honest effort or sincere devotion. In this sense, the whole affair becomes a mere public institution for the production and raising of children. It is a job at which the work is done thoughtlessly, waiting for the payroll that only breeds further dissatisfaction, or never comes due to quitting. Under these circumstances we can hardly speak of a meaningful relationship. The problem lies not only in reluctant efforts of both sides to build a stable, healthy relationship but also in poor communication. The female usually tries to organize mutual activities like visiting cinemas, going to sit-ins, or making picnic trips but to her dismay the male prefers to stay home and crack open a bottle of beer. The following dialogue from the poem 'close encounters of a third kind'[130] ensues:

126 Bukowski, *the Muse* 193.
127 Bukowski, *No North* 94.
128 Bukowski, *Stew* 206.
129 de Beauvoir 329.
130 Cf. the symbol of a space alien discussed in Chapter 2.

you son of a bitch, she said, I am
trying to build a meaningful
relationship.

you can't build it with a hammer,
he said.[131]

The male's answer wipes out all possibilities of meaningful communication, and hence of sustaining a meaningful relationship. Women blame men for their reluctance to "talk about things." Most of the time the male is not listening, only perhaps grunting an occasional remark that "there's no problem." Ultimately, he expresses some surprise at the discovery that the marriage has been dissolved.

The next question to be answered concerns love or rather the lack of it. What role does love play in the relationships? Apparently, Bukowski's characters are not infrequently trapped in loveless marriages. The poet himself regards love simply as too demanding, stating that "love needs too much help... hate takes care for itself."[132] There are other tones still, notably more cynical and pessimistic. Love, if not nurtured, withers and dies; a process which the poet addresses metaphorically: "love dries up, even faster than sperm."[133] Finally, there is a belief of conditioned love, widely and uniformly spread among the characters: "nobody loves you if you don't have money..."[134]

In Bukowski's world there is little purposeful communication between the sexes and still less love. The poet does not deal with children, save an occasional remark that he or she had so and so many children. On the whole we face a miserable situation: the husband and wife strangers in bed, strangers in life, blaming each other for being what they are and for what they are not. For example Barney, whom we witnessed forcing sex on his spouse in Chapter 3, vents his frustration with marriage as follows:

"Either you don't make coffee at all, either you forget the coffee or boil it all away! Or you forget to buy bacon or you burn the fucking toast or you lose my shorts or you do some fucking thing. You always do some fucking thing!"

"Barney, I'm not feeling good..."

"And you're always not feeling good! When the hell you gonna start feeling good? I go out and bust my hump and you lay around reading magazines all day and feeling sorry for your soft ass. You think it's easy out there? [...] You realize I've got to fight for my job every day, day after day while you sit in an armchair feeling sorry for yourself? And

131 Bukowski, *the Piano* 110.
132 Bukowski, *the Piano 63*.
133 Bukowski, *Love* 45.
134 Bukowski, *Love* 282.

drinking wine and smoking cigarettes and talking to your friends? Girlfriends, boyfriends, whoever the hell friends. You think it's easy for me out there?"

"I know it's not easy, Barney."

"You don't even want to give me a piece of ass anymore."[135]

Barney, however, fails to realize that the coin has two sides, that it is not so easy for her to stay at home day after day either. Indeed the destitute feelings on the wife's side reach deep, as she "sees that her husband could get along very well without her, that her children are bound to get away from her and be always more or less ungrateful. The home no longer saves her from empty liberty; she finds herself alone, forlorn, a *subject*; and she finds nothing to do with herself."[136] Nevertheless, there is a cure for this: the partners can respect and try to understand each other. This, however, almost never happens in Bukowski's texts, as for example a wife is said to be "the *last* person to understand her husband, / it's as if she was / looking into a / mirror, / only she's so / close / ... / that she can't see / anything."[137] "This is no joke," finishes the poet his poem 'the last person' in a tone that we could hardly mark as neutral. On the other hand, the husband, being sick and tired of the woes of marriage, tends to drift toward chauvinistic moods, issuing misogynistic remarks about his wife, for example: "A recession is when your wife runs off with somebody. A depression is when somebody brings her back."[138]

Before we conclude this section, we reproduce in full two poems which we consider most exemplary of the poet's stance on marriage and married life. Both poems were written in the 1960s and published in collection *The Days Run Away like Wild Horses over the Hills*. The first poem is not only skeptical about matrimony but also reveals the poet's dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the people of America in general. Unlike other contemporary authors – mainly the Beat generation – who tried to find new ways of life, and contrary to major political and cultural changes of the 1960s, Bukowski sees no rosy future ahead:

135 Bukowski, *Water* 122.
136 de Beauvoir 477, emphasis mine.
137 Bukowski, *Stew* 308.
138 Bukowski, *Stew* 350.

THE SCREW-GAME

one of the terrible things is
really
being in bed
night after night
with a woman you no longer
want to screw.

they get old, they don't look very good
anymore – they even tend to
snore, lose
spirit.

so, in bed, you turn sometimes,
your foot touches hers–
god, *awful*!–
and the night is out there
beyond the curtains
sealing you together
in the
tomb.

and in the morning you go to the
bathroom, pass in the hall, talk,
say odd things; eggs fry, motors
start.

but sitting across
you have 2 strangers
jamming toasts into mouths
burning the sullen head and gut with
coffee.

in ten million places in America
it is the same–
stale lives propped against each
other and no place to
go.

[...]

and the moon and the stars and the world:

long walks at
night–
that's what's good
for the
soul:
peeking into windows
watching tired
housewives
trying to fight
off
their beer-maddened
husbands

While the first poem maintains a general critical tone, the second poem presents to us a microcosmos, a privileged view of an ordinary family evening. After all the ills and difficulties of marriage have been revealed they give way to a constant battle. Yet there is no choice, says Greer, "a man is bound up to end up with one or the other. Marriage is viewed with fatalism; sooner or later you are sure to find yourself screwed permanently into the system, working in a dead-end job to keep a fading woman and her noisy children in inadequate accommodation in a dull town for the term of your natural life."[139] This fatalism is strongly felt in both poems. And viewed thus skeptically, marriage

139 Greer 250.

now not only lacks harmony, but, more intensely, it is empty and devoid of meaning; it has lost almost all its functions. There are not many ways to end the battle. One version, somewhat extreme and typically Bukowski-like, is that only one member of the unit continues on this side of the grave while the partner moves to the other. An example from *Women* illustrates this scenario well: "The majority of the niches didn't have flowers. Some of them had husband and wife neatly side by side. In some cases one niche was empty and waiting. In all cases the husband was the one already dead."[140] The second option is less drastic but none the less final, that is, the parties may agree to quit the job and obtain a divorce. This, however, does not always put an end to the struggle, as there is the issue of child-care and others to be settled; but this is beyond the scope of this thesis, and neither can we say that Bukowski would pay any special attention to the subject of failed relationships. Let us now look into the life of a divorced woman.

4.2 Divorced Women

While in Bukowski's texts there are virtually almost no reasons for entering the institution of marriage, we have seen more than abundance of reasons for getting out of one. The process of divorce became much easier with the introduction of no-fault divorce instead of the traditional at-fault one. Separation is made accessible immediately to everyone, though with the necessary (and varying) waiting period. The effect of this legal measure was logically a rise in the divorce rate. This is internationally valid, at least for states where these laws were adopted such as America or Australia. Bukowski treats this theme in *Pulp*, putting it in the context of the American Hippies and New Age movements. Those were periods with relaxed moral standards, freer sexual and romantic behavior, but the poet feels that behind all this lies covetousness and lust for profit. In the disguise of the protagonist Nick Belane, a private detective, he consults the matter with his client:

> "You think your wife is copulating with somebody or somebodies."
> "Yes."
> "She's in her twenties."
> "Yes. I want you to prove that she is doing it, then I want a divorce."
> "Why bother, Bass? Just divorce her..."
> "I just want to prove that she... she..."
> "Forget it. She'll get just as much money either way. It's the New Age."
> "What do you mean."
> "It's called the no-fault divorce. It doesn't matter what anybody does."
> "How come?"
> "It speeds up justice, clears the courts."
> "But that's not justice."

140 Bukowski, *Women* 55.

"They think it is."[141]

By and large, Bass is an exception in Bukowski's work, since it is usually the female who initiates a divorce. Apart from at-fault divorces there are numerous no-fault cases, as the above example tell us. But a mutual agreement is achieved only after a series of painful, tedious attempts, of which infelicitous communication is again answerable. The debate commonly begins by the wife's blaming, theatrical recollection of the miseries that accompanied the marriage, then it proceeds by the husband's cold, half-interested replies. After a while the final, chilly resolution is spoken, as in example below:

> "I want to know why we've lived all these years together. Have I wasted my life?"
> "Everybody does, almost everybody does."
> "Waste their lives?"
> "I think so."
> "If you could only guess how much I hate you!"
> "Do you want a divorce?"
> "Do I want a divorce? Oh my god, how calm you are! You ruin my whole god damned life and then ask me if I want a divorce! I'm 50 years old! I've given you my life! Where do I go from here?"
> "You can go to hell. I'm tired of your voice. I'm tired of your bitching."[142]

It is usually only after three or four divorces that the now quadruple ex-husband begins to reflect more seriously on his past, as Nick Belane does in *Pulp*:

> [...] Three wives. Nothing really wrong each time. It all got destroyed by petty bickering. Railing about nothing. Getting pissed-off over anything and everything. Day by day, year by year, grinding. Instead of helping each other you just sliced away, picked all this or that. Goading. Endless goading. It became a cheap contest. And once you got into it, it became habitual. You couldn't seem to get out. You almost didn't want to get out. And then you did get out. All the way.[143]

The instability of marriages in Bukowski's text lies in their being built exclusively upon erotic attractiveness. De Beauvoir observes that "to 'catch' a husband is an art; to 'hold' him is a job – and one in which great competence is called for. [...] What is at stake is extremely serious: material and moral security, a home of one's own, the dignity of wifehood, a more or less satisfactory substitute for love and happiness. A wife soon learns that her erotic attractiveness is the weakest of her weapons; it disappears with familiarity; and, alas, there are other desirable women all about."[144] No wonder that the characters in Bukowski's novels end up in dead-end marriages. A second problem

141 Bukowski, *Pulp* 34-35.
142 Bukowski, *Water* 36-37.
143 Bukowski, *Pulp* 170.
144 de Beauvoir 468.

arises when we consider de Beauvoir's opinion that the marital unit's function in society has changed and does not have its former prestige. In the past the nuclear family had more members and there was greater opportunity for interaction; now in its shrunken form it predominantly serves the interest of society. As de Beauvoir points out, the aim of the economic and sexual union between man and woman does not give priority to the assurance of personal happiness, though the truth is that in patriarchal regimes "the engaged persons possibly happened not to have seen each other's faces before the wedding day."[145]

4.3 Conclusion

What expresses best the poet's depiction of the institution is the following conclusion of de Beauvoir:

> But on the whole marriage is today a surviving relic of dead ways of life, and the situation of the wife is more ungrateful than formerly, because she still has the same duties but they no longer confer the same rights, privileges, and honors. Man marries today to obtain an anchorage in [the woman's] immanence, but not to be himself confined therein; he wants to have a hearth and home while being free to escape therefrom; he settles down but often remains a vagabond at heart. [146]

"A vagabond at heart" – a term that precisely fits most Bukowski's characters. On the whole the poet's treatment of marriage and women partly represents the reality of American low-life classes and partly – once again – speaks not so much of marriage and women themselves as it does about the chauvinistic and misogynistic pose of the author.

145 de Beauvoir 434.
146 de Beauvoir 456, insertion mine.

Conclusion

You get so alone at times
it just makes sense.
Charles Bukowski

Since each chapter has its own conclusion, we now present only a brief summary along with a generalized view of Bukowski's work as a whole. We will first make several remarks about the position of his work within the context of American post-1945 literature, then we will comment on his writing technique. Lastly we will look at representations of the female in the broader context of Bukowski's work.

Some categorize Bukowski's literary achievements under the quite flexible label "the Beat movement" but for several reasons this classification is not particularly accurate. Although he too rode Greyhound buses, visited many cities, lived as a bum, all the while in a drunken stupor – he probably drank more than all the Beats together – he cannot be recognized as a Beat writer based just on that. Bukowski himself gainsaid this disposition on the ground that he never willfully associated with the members of this movement; he was largely ignorant of them, as he even occasionally remarks in his novels. This reason made on the sole basis of subjective feeling would not stand through, as his texts display great affinity to the work of other Beats either in theme or literary conventions – perhaps we should say rather in *obliviousness* of these conventions – but the fact is that Beat writing was a short-lived episode in the history of American literature, lasting a mere decade from late 1950s to early 1960s, while Bukowski, whose career began to flourish in the 1970s with the publication of *Post Cjfice* (1971), *Love is a Dog from Hell* (1977), and *Women* (1978), continued to write well into the 1990s. Many authors, originally members of the Beat movement, also kept writing long after its decline, but for the most part their work took new courses and acquired new features. We can list Allen Ginsberg as the best example, whose poetry drew much critical acclaim, or William S. Burroughs. By and large, long after the Beat movement is dead, we have Bukowski still punching the old-fashioned, heavy typewriter, still dealing with the same issues, only here and there appears in his writing the pool, the house, better wines, better cars, better women. In his soul, though, he remains the thoroughly nihilistic vagabond and an ordinary rolling stone of 20th

century America. So if there is something to Bukowski's being a Beat writer, it is especially his debt to the movement, as the way had been paved by them before his own career began to thrive.

Bukowski uses highly informal, often very foul language in both prose and poetry. His prose has a simple structure, the narration is usually in the first- or third-person and includes an abundance of hyperreal dialogues, as is apparent from numerous examples above. His poetry is direct, sharp, and the manner in which it is structured is again very plain, even primitive at times. Bukowski's verse is not significant in terms of either quantity or quality as far as literary figures and schemes are involved. In both literary modes the characters play the central role while the external world comes second to them. The narrator resides in the outside world, he is not present in the souls of the characters, only rarely in the first-person narrative do we come across a more meditative passage. The characters themselves are flat, two-dimensional shadows of the real world from whence the poet shines his light and chooses what is to be recorded. While he may claim that he is only reflecting reality, most of his work is a projection of fantasy onto the real world. In the preceding chapters we identified this fantasy as strictly male-centered; it is the fantasy of an anti-social, roaming-free, lifelong male bachelor individual. And the perimeter of this projection is significantly reduced by exuberant chauvinism and misogyny. But there is humor at the core of all Bukowski's writing and this distinguishes him from mere radicalism of thought we find for example in the opinions of Valerie Solanas, a recruit from the opposite side of the barricade and a member of SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men), who insisted that "The male chromosome is an incomplete female chromosome. In other words the male is a walking abortion; aborted at the gene stage. To be male is to be deficient, emotionally limited; maleness is a deficiency disease and males are emotional cripples."[147] Solanas ended up in jail after shooting Andy Warhol three times in the chest in 1968. We refer to her here in order to point out that the chauvinism and misogyny in Bukowski's texts are not really an expression of their author's hatred. He rather consciously defines himself against feminist ideologies and engages in counter-cultural efforts.

The next question that arises is how much do reality and the representations of the female correspond. The truth is that Bukowski's choice of women to be included in his texts comprises of "pill-freaks, alcoholics, whores, ex-prostitutions, madwomen,"[148] or the endless combination and variation thereof. This is certainly not a representative sample of the specimen, though perhaps a more penetrating or willing mind might have extracted a truer, more psychologically elaborate portrait. What Bukowski does achieve is the depiction of *experience*, the real experience of real men

147 As quoted in: Manic Street Preachers, *Generation Terrorists* (London: Columbia, 1992) 1.
148 Bukowski, *Love* 74.

with real women in the real world, notwithstanding the aforementioned fact that the poet chose only some parts of the reality to be described and even those parts are grotesquely caricatured and absurdly exaggerated. Nonetheless, the experience is there, regardless of the fact that the social texture in Bukowski's texts lacks depth.

Moreover, Bukowski excels in the autobiographical mode of writing, where he is honest-to-the-bone and a keen observer. He never pretends to be something he is not and he is wise enough to include himself in the wretchedness of human condition. This is a strong and important aspect of his writing. Just as in his writing he makes women look bad, so too does he make men look bad and so too does he make himself look bad. Thus, the macho pose plentifully exhibited in most of his works has its antithesis, when for example Chinaski in *Women* admits to an occasional erectile dysfunction, and through humor these two poles are linked together. At the same time, though, the author is sometimes a hypocrite, as was pointed out in section 1.2, when he asserts that he likes "whores" but in the end prefers to stay with "the better class." This ambivalence necessarily results from the narrowmindedness and limited outlook given to the characters. But being a hypocrite makes him perhaps still more human as human beings are prone to failures due to the weakness of human spirit if not upheld by will. And it is to men, to ordinary men, to whom the work of Bukowski is addressed. He did not write in order to secure eternal fame in the history of literature. No, he wrote for people and for himself. As Barry Miles says, Bukowski made often a point of "always trying to write clearly so that the people knew exactly what he was saying."[149] And he wrote out of fear, stating that "fear makes me a writer." His texts are accessible to all classes of readers and they are read widely, albeit those with a more exquisite taste may perceive in Bukowski a want of intellectual thought and finer literary qualities. Be it as may, Bukowski's books are full of sympathy with the human situation. It is not only the existential anxiety so prominent in literary works of 20th century, but the conviction that life is also a hard, 24/7 job. Women in his works may have little in common with either the original acquaintances of the poet, or the real, living women of today. Despite this, the reading of Bukowski's books gives peculiar comfort not only to male readers but to both sexes, because mishaps in relationships happen to all alike, be it a wino from some L.A. skid row or a politician or academic. The only thing that cannot be avoided in the reading of Bukowski's writing is monotony. All events and stories that take place in his texts are variations of the same basic plot. In all texts ranging from his first book to his fortieth-odd one there is the same powerful and furious formulaic impatience with the American system, with the bitterness of life, with the second sex, with himself, with the trouble, with everything. In Bukowski's own phrase, "[after a bottle and a

149 Barry Miles, *Charles Bukowski* (London: Virgin Books., 2005) 3.

half] I am like any other old drunk in a bar: a repetitive and boring fool."[150]

150 Miles, 257.

Résumé

„Zobrazení žen v díle Charlese Bukowského“

Jak naznačuje název, předložená práce se zabývá pojetím žen v díle Charlese Bukowského. Charles Bukowski (1920 - 1994), americký básník a prozaik, bývá často spojován s představiteli kulturně-literárního hnutí označovaného *beat generation*, ovšem toto zařazení není tak docela přesné. Přestože jeho osobní život se ubíral cestou ne nepodobnou životním poutím autorů tohoto hnutí zejména co se týče volnomyšlenkářství, nespokojenosti s politickou a sociální situací v zemi, tvrdou a nelítostnou kritikou „amerického snu,“ i nezřízenou konzumací návykových látek a tulácké existence vedené od města k městu za prací i náhradou za ztracené iluze, Bukowského kariéra začíná nabírat obrátky až později, v 70. letech, kdežto hnutí beat kulminovalo koncem 50. a počátkem 60. let. Má-li přesto Bukowski s beatniky něco společného, je to téma a literární konvence či spíše jejich cílená nedbalost, jakkoliv se jinak básník sám od členů tohoto hnutí distancoval. V určitém slova smyslu lze totiž dokonce říci, že Bukowski zůstává velkým dlužníkem hnutí beat, neboť oni vydláždili cestu novému literárnímu proudu v historii americké literatury. Nejdelší kus na této cestě urazil pravděpodobně Allen Ginsberg, který došel širokého uznání i u akademické obce. Oproti ostatním spisovatelům tohoto hnutí zůstává Bukowski u svých prověřených témat. Jeho tvorba nenabývá nových obzorů, jen stále piluje k hyperrealistické dokonalosti svou základní formuli, kterou představuje člověk, život americké spodiny a lidské vztahy – především pak vztah mezi mužem a ženou. V naší práci se zaměřujeme právě na pojetí žen v básníkově díle.

K danému subjektu lze přistupovat z různých úhlů. V naší práci jsme se rozhodli pro analýzu primárních děl, jejichž rozsah byl zvolen s ohledem na co možná nejpestřejší záběr básníkových poloh, od básní přes povídky a novely až k románům. Rovněž jsme brali zřetel na zachycení různých tvůrčích období Bukowského kariéry, od 60. let až do básníkovy smrti a dále k některým sbírkám poskládaným z dřívějších textů publikovaných in memoriam. Zde je na místě podotknout, že při kompozici práce jsme užívali toliko původních textů; z nich pochází veškeré citace a výňatky ilustrativního a argumentačního charakteru. Výčet primárních zdrojů jsme doplnili o některá další

básníkova díla u nás vyšlá v překladu, avšak tato sloužila pouze k dosažení ucelenějšího pochopení Bukowského tvorby a k přispění ke zodpovědnějšímu vyvozování závěrů obecné povahy. Námi zvolený přístup nespočívá v systematické komparaci s díly jiných autorů – až na ojedinělé reference k tvorbě amerického spisovatele Normana Mailera (1923 - 2007) a americké básnířky Sylvie Plathové (1932 - 1963) – nýbrž ve snaze o objektivní zhodnocení Bukowského díla na pozadí teorií feministického hnutí v podání Simone de Beauvoirové a Germaine Greerové. První jmenovaná vychází z filozofičtějšího pojetí feminismu, druhá je pragmatičtěji zaměřená a ve formulaci závěrů se přiklání k praktickému využití. V oblasti rozboru symbolismu ženských figur čerpáme z díla Alicie Suskin Ostrikerové a jejího pojednání o americké ženské básnické tvorbě. Výčet pramenů uzavírá několik biograficky laděných knih o Bukowském. Vedle toho, že mapují básníkův život, jsou fakta a poznatky z těchto knih užitečné především pro rozpoznání autorského záměru. Bukowski totiž často nevychází přímo ze své zkušenosti, ale ze zkušenosti svých přátel a známých, třebaže básníkovo dílo působí konfesionalistickým dojmem; zde vzniká náboj typický pro jeho tvorbu – napětí mezi realitou a fikcí, které nejsou ostře rozlišeny. Tento atribut Bukowského díla je klíčový při posuzovaní zobrazení žen v něm.

Práce čítá 54 stran, obsahuje přes 140 referencí k pramenům a je členěna do čtyř kapitol, které jsou tematicky propojeny. V úvodu připomínáme kontext Bukowského tvorby z pohledu literárního, kulturního i historického. První kapitola představuje první přiblížení ženy, a to zvnějšku, tak jak je vnímána mužskými postavami v Bukowského textech, i z lyrické autorovy polohy, a zaměřujeme se zde na různé manifestace misogynie a šovinismu. V druhé kapitole přecházíme k dalšímu přiblížení žen, a sice k symbolismu ženského těla, literárním figurám a celkově k fyzicky laděnému zobrazovaní. Předmětem diskuse ve třetí kapitole je erotično, ženská sexualita a ztvárnění milostného života ženy. V kapitole čtvrté se dostáváme k sociální roli ženy ve společnosti a v osobním životě, zejména pak ve svazku manželském. Vzhledem ke skutečnosti, že Bukowski takřka vůbec nezobrazuje ženy v poloze mateřské ani prarodičovské, nýbrž převážně v roli manželky či partnerky, zaměřujeme se výhradně na tyto a současně s tím i na status ženy rozvedené. Závěr práce je pak věnován shrnutí získaných poznatků a jsou v něm prezentovány doslovné úvahy o reprezentaci žen v Bukowského díle zobecněné o širší souvislosti týkající se významu jeho tvorby.

V první kapitole nazvané „Misogyn, který napsal tyto básně," což je volná parafráze vlastního básníkova vyjádření, se zabýváme verbální, fyzickou i psychickou manifestací misogynních a šovinistických nálad. Prvně se zde setkáváme s pojetím žen jako objektů, tato objektifikace je příznačná pro celé básníkovo dílo a je diskutována ve všech kapitolách. Dále je zde rozlišen autor,

jeho alter-ego a projekce do fiktivního světa, která je výrazně ovlivněna striktně mužským až machovským viděním světa. Seznamujeme se zde také s význačným rysem Bukowského díla, s použitím hovorové mluvy, přičemž autor nijak nešetří explicitními výrazy a vulgaritami. Toto je zvláště patrné u zobrazování a charakterizace žen. Verbální násilí je namířeno proti ženám všech věkových kategorií, napříč všemi společenskými vrstvami a profesemi. Existují ale skupiny, na které je básník mimořádně zaměřen: „ošklivé" ženy, starší ročníky, matky a celkově všechny ženy americké národnosti, což spíše než o ženách vypovídá o autorově hluboké nacionalistické skepsi. Misogynie a šovinismus jsou v první kapitole vysvětleny v rámci teoretického aparátu Greerové, která tvrdí, že tyto jsou projevem mužské ješitnosti a důsledkem opomíjení kulturních změn ve společnosti, zejména působení feministických hnutí a změnou role ženy ve 20. století. Pokud bychom nebrali v úvahu autorský záměr, mohli bychom Bukowského dílo považovat za učebnicový příklad toho, co Greerová vyčítá mužské části populace (přičemž zároveň nabádá stejnou měrou obě pohlaví k přezkoumání a potažmo k přehodnocení postojů), ovšem v kontextu historickém nese Bukowského dílo patrné znaky záměrného zesměšnění až satirizace feministické ideologie ve snaze zachovat tradiční a staletími prověřený patriarchální model. Toto de Beauvoirová považuje za typicky antifeministický postoj, hlásající že „ženy jsou špatné už jen tím, že jsou ženy" a nabízí řešení: přestat s objektifikací žen. To by však znamenalo přiznat ženě rovnoprávný status, čehož hrdina Bukowského díla není schopen.

Druhá kapitola „Ženské tělo a obrazovost fyzična" zkoumá symbolismus a literární figury žen převážně ve fyzickém pojetí. V úvodu jsou diskutovány nejčastější typy zobrazení žen v preadolescentním a adolescentním věku, ve věku produktivním a konečně ve stáří. Objektifikace se vyskytuje u žen dospělých, sexistické tóny u dospělých i mladších, zatímco u starších žen dominuje líčení ve veskrze pejorativním duchu. Dlužno poznamenat, že Bukowski se zabývá především dospělými ženami, neboť – což je ukázkou praktického uplatnění úvah Greerové a de Beauvoirové – ženy příliš mladé i staré ze svého fiktivního světa vytěsnil. Činí tak z důvodu, který souvisí s paralelním symbolismem jednotlivých věkových kategorií. Identifikovali jsme následující zrcadlení: mezi obrazy děvčat „s ústy barakud" a metaforou kroužícího žraloka, mezi stařenkami a figurou Smrtky a mezi dospělými ženami a mimozemskou formou života, ke které básník referuje v románu *Škvár*. Tyto paralely jsou klíčové pro pochopení básníkova zobrazování žen. Greerová definuje zvláštní kategorii žen, tzv. „Hanebná děvka" a jednotlivé věkové kategorie – symbolicky zhuštěné ve svých paralelách – představují právě různé podoby této entity. Jak bylo již řečeno, od děvčat a stařenek se Bukowski vyhrazuje jednoduše proto, že se s nimi neumí vypořádat. Mužské ego trpící neduhy popsanými v první kapitole není s to tyto ženy do svého světa integrovat. Zbývající kategorie dospě-

lých žen je zavržena později, z důvodu neschopnosti projekce básníkova vlastního já s těmito ženami rozumně a smysluplně vycházet. Jestliže v první kapitole zavrhl americké ženy, zde zavrhuje ženy jako takové na základě přesvědčení, že „se s nimi prostě nedá vyjít." Interakci s mimozemskou formou života můžeme interpretovat jako alegorii básníkova hledání porozumění a naplnění svých tužeb, ovšem ani zde nenachází to, co by si představoval, a tak se uchyluje k obrazu figuríny jako ženskému ideálu, především pro její pasivitu a statičnost. V závěru kapitoly je kontrastován obraz figuríny s koncepcí figuríny v podání Sylvie Plathové.

V následující kapitole „Ženská sexualita a erotično" jsou předmětem diskuse postoje k sexu a erotičnu u obou pohlaví. Jsme svědky odlišných představ a nároků mužů i žen, z čehož vyplývají neshody a nedorozumění. Přesto je však pohlavní pud hnacím motorem všech postav v Bukowského textech, působí jako tmelící prvek a nejvyšší projev fyzična. Tak jako u předešlých témat je i zde patrný sexistický postoj vůči ženskému pohlaví a jeho objektifikace. Žena nezřídka zůstává i při samotném aktu pouhým objektem sloužícím k ukojení mužského chtíče. De Beavoirová se přimlouvá za odstranění tohoto stereotypu s tím, že je třeba se od tělesnosti posunout k transcendentnu; něco takového však lze jen stěží očekávat od Bukowského postav. Greerová naopak viní ženy z přílišné pasivity, což se o ženách v Bukowského díle úplně říci nedá, neboť jsou si dobře vědomy moci, kterou jim jejich sexualita propůjčuje, a dále jsou v otázkách sexu velmi otevřené, což lze chápat i jako vyústění trendu nastoleného sexuální revolucí. Obě autorky se však shodují v tom, že ženská sexualita představuje podstatně komplexnější systém nežli mužská. Bukowského ženy jsou obdařeny sexualitou značně zjednodušenou, opět vlivem autorovy šovinistické polohy. Ve třetí kapitole jsou také probrány některé sexuální praktiky a fetiše a v neposlední řadě zmiňujeme autorovy glosy týkající se změn chápaní a projevů sexuality v důsledku sexuální revoluce.

Poslední kapitola „Vdané a rozvedené ženy" předkládá debatu o ztvárnění vztahů mezi mužem a ženou. Přes všechna úskalí vzájemného soužití a vycházení s opačným pohlavím jsou právě vztahy jádrem Bukowského tvorby. V první části zkoumáme ženu jako manželku, partnerku, přítelkyni, společnici či družku. Instituce manželství je podrobena neúnavné kritice z básníkovy strany a my kontrastujeme motivace vedoucí ke vzniku manželského svazku i příčiny jeho rozpadu s názory Greerové a de Beauvoirové. Motivace ze strany muže je jednoduchá a přímočará, je jí snadno dostupný sex. Ženy očekávají materiální zajištění a dosažení požadované životní úrovně. Děti jsou pro Bukowského jakýmsi samozřejmým vedlejším produktem manželského svazku jakožto sociální jednotky. Obě autorky jsou názoru, že instituce manželství především ztratila na váženosti i svátosti, což Bukowského příklady dobře dokládají. Jako hlavní chybu spatřují všechny zúčastněné strany ve

špatné komunikaci, v neochotě na vztahu pracovat a v nedostatku vzájemné úcty; to platí v básníkově díle především pro muže. Dostáváme se k analýze příčin rozvodů a k zobrazení života rozvedené ženy. Bukowski nevnímá rozvod v životě ženy jako stigma, v jeho díle nejsou výjimkou čtyřikrát až pětkrát rozvedené ženy. Pozornost je též věnována souvislostem s působením kulturních hnutí, emancipací žen a se snazší dostupností rozvodu.

Na závěr je třeba podotknout, že nejen ženské, ale ani mužské postavy nejsou psychologicky rozpracovány do velké hloubky. Bukowského texty představují fiktivní svět, kam autor projektuje své básnické já, a těžiště jeho díla spočívá v nadneseném vykreslení *zkušenosti* skutečných mužů a skutečných žen ve skutečné světě. Dílo je sice prosyceno notnou dávkou šovinismu a misogynie, ovšem básník v něm vykresluje v nelichotivém světle nejen ženy, ale i muže a ušetřen nezůstává ani on sám. Toto umožňuje nazírat na jeho tvorbu jinak než jako na pouhý programový manifest zarytého odpůrce feminismu. Bukowski totiž vyjadřuje svou sympatii k údělu člověka způsobem vycházejícím z vlastní trpké zkušenosti s životem, s americkým systémem, s ženami, s nižší sociální vrstvou, s prací a se sebou samotným. V jeho tvorbě se nezračí jen existenciální úzkost, ale také únava z dennodenního zápasu, se kterým se Bukowski vypořádává po svém: nadsázkou, humorem, ironií i nihilismem a místy až překvapivě jemnými momenty, které o to více vynikají pro svou vzácnost.

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