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„*Notes of a Dirty Old Man*:
Bukowski. The Sixties. The Beats.“

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Mag. phil. Matthias K. Heschl

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This is presented as a diploma thesis and dedicated to nobody.

Table of Contents

Introduction 4
1. Charles Bukowski 6
1.1 Biography 7
1.2 *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* 22
1.2.1 Autobiographical Writing 24
1.2.1.1 General Introduction. Or: Introducing Henry Chinaski. 25
1.2.1.2 *Barfly* and *Hollywood* 27
1.2.1.3 Autobiographical Writing in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* 38
1.2.2 Motifs 60
1.2.2.1 Space 63
1.2.2.2 Alcohol 67
1.2.2.3 Women 73
1.2.2.4 Physical Violence 79
1.2.2.5 Writing 84
1.2.3 Style 86
2. The Sixties & the Beats 94
2.1 USA in the Sixties 96
2.1.1 Counterculture 98
2.1.2 Religion 104
2.2 Underground Art 107
2.2.1 *Open City* 108
2.2.2 City Lights & Poetry Readings 110
2.3 Bukowski and the Beats 112
2.3.1 Neal Cassady in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* 115
2.3.2 Homosexuality 118
2.4 Carl Weissner 121
Conclusion 125
Bibliography and References 127
Mediography 132
Table of Figures 133
Abstract / Zusammenfassung 134
Index 136
Résumé 138

Introduction

"[…] I am just an old guy with some dirty stories. Writing for a newspaper, which, like me, might die tomorrow." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 7)

In a foreword Charles Bukowski wrote in 1969 to *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* – a collection of columns previously published in the newspaper *Open City* – the author modulates and fuels the image substantially conveyed among his readership. Whereas he openly admits to the characterization as a dirty old man, the maverick qualities in his novels, short stories, and poems add further facets to the public image generated by the German-born author. The self-imposed label of the dirty old man conforms both to Bukowski's natural age in the year of 1969 – he was to turn fifty in the following year – as well as to the sexual innuendos recurring in the columns and short stories that the composition of *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* encompasses.

In order to flesh out the allegedly filthy author persona that Bukowski seems to have developed for the purposes of his literary writing, I will in the very first chapter of this diploma thesis conscientiously outline Henry Charles Bukowski's life with a focus on the somewhat troubled years before his engagement with the underground paper *Open City* as well as in more general terms before his broad recognition as a professional author. On the basis of this biographical account, instances of autobiographical writing shall be revealed. After a general introduction of the most prominent strategies Bukowski appears to employ in his writing, the persona figure Henry Chinaski shall be properly introduced. Although the autobiographically inspired character's name in none of the columns under *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* is explicitly mentioned, the narrators' voice presumably applies and corresponds to Henry Chinaski's.

Building on the footage gathered from the movie *Barfly* (1987), I will comprehensively cover the introduced field of autobiography as Bukowski contributed the screenplay to director Barbet Schroeder's motion picture. Backing up the inferences made, I will also draw on the novel *Hollywood*

(1989). The complementing sources shall make the feature film's as well as the novel's autobiographical renditions more accessible. Having gained insights into Bukowski's potentially autobiographical presentations, this survey's central book shall be analyzed accordingly.

Horst Schmidt in *»The Germans love me for some reason« Charles Bukowski und Deutschland* (2006) observes that *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* basically consists of short stories rather than classical columns or essays. (Schmidt, *»Germans«*: 18) Although Schmidt's assumption most generally proves valid, to be more precise, one needs to draw on parameters common in commentaries, short stories, drama, as well as in poetry in order to comprehensively examine the pieces of writing denoted columns. For the purposes of this thesis' analysis, the journalistic term "column" may thus apply to all sorts of genres presented in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*. After studying the composition's imagery via the motif of space, aspects of alcohol, women, physical violence, and writing shall be drawn on in order to establish a self-referential framework. Mirroring the motifs' domains on the language level, Bukowski's stylistics rely on a rather crude and bare set of expressions.

Whereas the first and major section will comprise a thorough analysis with respect to autobiographical writing, motifs, and style, in this diploma thesis' second part a historical survey will focus on two particular subject matters existent in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*: On the one hand, socio-political and socio-cultural developments in the United States of America in the nineteen sixties are repeatedly commented on in Bukowski's texts. On the other hand, Bukowski's alleged literary and personal relation to the Beat Generation will be examined according to instances rendered in his columns. While the employment of the umbrella term Beat culture may be fostered in the former part of the said analysis, in the second and last part the notion of the original Beat Generation shall be borne in mind: a rather small circle of friends and literary figures that gathered in postwar New York City. I will particularly focus on Bukowski's relation to the Beat luminaries Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Allen Ginsberg. As the translator Carl Weissner collaborated with both Bukowski and the Beats, further convergences shall be introduced. In an attempt to return to this thesis' starting point, I will briefly illustrate Henry Charles Bukowski's trip to Germany in 1978.

1. Charles Bukowski

In the first chapter of this section I will try to shed some light on the private and professional life of the author Charles Bukowski. The readers will be presented a rather factual and straightforward biography in order to introduce them to the major events that may have influenced and shaped the American poet, novelist, and writer of short stories. I will particularly concentrate on the period before the publication of *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* in 1969. Although the works of prose shall be primarily focused on, I may name and refer to some of the most outstanding and famous poems produced by Charles Bukowski in passing. The following short biography is predominantly based upon Neeli Cherkovski's *Hank* (1991) and Howard Sounes' *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (1998). The personal angle presented by Cherkovski and the rather detached stance occupied in Sounes' biography appear to appropriately complement each other in order to provide an academically dense approach to Bukowski's biographical facts.

The second subchapter shall prepare the readers for a detailed literary survey as techniques of autobiographical writing in Bukowski's works, both on a very general level as well as in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, will be addressed. Barbet Schroeder's movie *Barfly* (1987) – based on Bukowski's script – shall offer an additional angle to make the autobiographical aspects more accessible to the reader. Certain passages and scenes of the feature film shall be analyzed in more detail in order to refer to congruent aspects in Bukowski's works of prose. Furthermore, comprehensive insights into the strategies of autobiographical writing in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* will pave the way for an in-depth analysis of selected literary devices and features. Eventually, the survey of specific characteristics shall be given ample space in order to relate to motifs as well as to the columnist's style. The five motifs of space, alcohol, women, physical violence, and writing will be drawn on in order to exemplify certain conventions prevalent in Bukowski's collection of columns. I will then zoom in on Charles Bukowski's laconic style.

1.1 Biography

Tracing Charles Bukowski's ancestry one will find similarities with both his maternal and paternal predecessors as there are German-European origins of both branches of Bukowski's family tree. The pedigree gives insight into his father's family:

> The patriarch of the Bukowski clan, Grandfather Leonard, had emigrated from Germany in the 1880s, after serving in the Kaiser's army. He made his way to Cleveland, where he met, and fell in love with eighteen-year-old Emilie Krause, an immigrant from Danzig. After their marriage, they moved to Pasadena, a suburb of Los Angeles. Many of America's wealthiest families settled there […] (Cherkovski: 12)

Bukowski's mother also descended from a German family. Whereas Henry Charles Bukowski, Sr.'s ancestors previously emigrated to the United States of America – as pointed out in the above citation – the author's mother appears to have still lived in Germany at the time of her encounter with Bukowski's father. He served in the US army and was stationed in Andernach, Germany, as a GI in 1920. Katharina Fett's brother, who ran a cafeteria frequently visited by the American soldiers, introduced his sister to her future husband Henry Charles. (see Cherkovski: 14)

> They rented an apartment at the corner of Aktienstraße, near the railway station, and it was here Katharina gave birth to a boy at 10 p.m. on 16 August. A few days later the child was baptized at the Roman Catholic cathedral, at a font decorated with a bird very much like a black sparrow. The priest named the child Heinrich Karl Bukowski, like his dad. (Sounes, *Charles*: 8)

The family might have settled in the small German town of Andernach. However, due to the ever-worsening conditions of the German economy they felt compelled to move to the United States of America, the adopted home of Bukowski, Sr.'s family. They left for the U.S. embarking on the SS President Fillmore in Bremerhaven on April 18, 1923. (see Sounes, *Charles*: 8)

Having arrived in the United States, Bukowski's mother preserved expressions of the German language: "She spoke with an accent, and he often heard her say things in German. His father spoke German when he wanted to, even though he was a native-born Californian, and a proud American" (Cherkovski: 7) Although Heinrich Karl Bukowski, Jr. – now Henry

Charles – left the country at the age of two, recollections of his birthplace Andernach remained on his mind during his childhood years:

> […] he thought of his birthplace, Andernach, a town on the Rhine River with cobblestone streets. It had a partial city wall dating back to medieval times, and many buildings over four hundred years old. One person who stood out in his mind was his uncle, Heinrich Fett, whom he called "Uncle Heinie," a jovial, short, good-natured man. (Cherkovski: 6)

* * * * *

During the 1920's Henry Charles Bukowski grew up in Los Angeles. According to the Bukowski biographers Neeli Cherkovski and Howard Sounes Henry Charles Bukowski most definitely spent a rather unpleasant, disturbing, and traumatizing childhood: On the one hand, his strict parents did not allow him to play or mingle with the neighborhood kids. On the other hand, his father, Henry Charles, Sr., regularly beat his son for trivial reasons: "Henry Bukowski didn't just beat his son as the boy grew older, but he also inflicted physical punishment on his wife as well." (Cherkovski: 15)

Bukowski later suffered from a severe case of acne vulgaris. The regular medical treatment caused scars on his face and his upper body and left him marked for life. The acne got worse during the first year of high school. Since the student grew ashamed of exposing his marked body when changing for physical education, Bukowski opted for the so-called ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) program. When exercising he had to bang his rifle against his shoulder and his acne became raw and his uniform soaked with blood. (cf. Cherkovski: 31)

At this time Bukowski's gift of writing developed and was discovered in school. The young boy demonstrated a talent for creative writing and his pieces were read out in class:

> Bukowski […] listened to airplanes droning overhead on their way to Los Angeles airport and was inspired to invent stories about fliers, writing them up in a yellow notebook for his own amusement. One of his first stories was about the daring adventures of a World War One German air ace. (Sounes, *Charles*: 13)

In contrast to Sounes, Cherkovski claims that Bukowski's first minor literary success was a story on President Herbert Hoover's visit at the Coliseum in Exposition Park, Los Angeles. On this occasion, Hank, as he was regularly called, was asked to hand in a written report about the president's appearance. Though Bukowski did not even attend the event, he proved essentially capable of feigning and rendering fictitious characters and settings. After reading out his report, Bukowski's teacher asked him to stay on:

> She questioned whether he had actually been present when President Hoover gave his address. Cornered, he admitted that he had not been there. Rather than being angry, the teacher said that this fact made his essay all the more remarkable, and that she was very impressed. Hank, as young as he was, realized then that "people wanted beautiful lies, not the truth. That's what they needed. People were fools." This impression became central to his way of thinking from that time onward. (Cherkovski: 24)

* * * * *

After graduation Bukowski enrolled at Los Angeles City College on Western Avenue. He signed up for several journalism courses in 1940. Additionally, Hank registered for two drama classes and a few academic subjects such as English and history. Although he did not believe in academic education, in journalism Bukowski saw at least a tiny chance of making money with some sort of writing. One of his professors asked the students to turn in one essay a week. The extraordinarily productive Bukowski handed in ten to twelve assignments a week. Although he seems to have been abundantly prolific, his bad attitude resulted in average grades. (see Cherkovski: 49)

About this time, a decisive incident took place: Hank's father discovered pieces of writing in a drawer and got tremendously furious about the fact that his son, in spite of his warnings, had been writing. Henry Charles Bukowski, Sr. read the short stories and as a consequence threw his son's writings, his typewriter, and clothes on the lawn before their house on Longwood Avenue:

> [Hank] stood there amidst the dirty laundry, the loose papers and bric-a-brac of his life, and yelled for his father to come out of the house so that he could beat him up. […] his father did not come forward […] [Hank] headed downtown to Temple Street,

> where he found inexpensive lodgings in a district filled with Filipino immigrants. The rent came to $1.50 per week for a cramped room on the second floor. Little did he know that his newfound quarters foreshadowed hundreds of more rooms roughly the same size, and equally shabby. (Cherkovski: 52-53)

In order to maintain his newly found independence Bukowski saw himself compelled to apply for a job. He was surprised when he was hired at Sears Roebuck on Olympic Boulevard and hoped this reasonably paid job might offer him some freedom from his father's domination. Henry Bukowski gradually began formulating the goal of becoming a moderately successful and professional writer – not to become necessarily famous but to make a living. (see Cherkovski: 44-45)

Around that time Bukowski learned that Germany had declared war on Poland and mocked the patriotic talk he heard. Enlisting in the US army never became a serious option for him, especially as Bukowski showed some resentment towards superiors: As he entered the job at Sears Roebuck Henry Bukowski noticed an increasing aversion to authority figures. This pattern remained typical in Bukowski's behavior over the years and resulted in a succession of jobs. Having to cope with supervisors he felt he could not work with, Bukowski soon realized that he would not stay very long on each job. Until he began working for the post office in the mid-fifties, this uncompromising attitude forced Bukowski to constantly fill new positions. (cf. Cherkovski: 47)

The problematic relationship between father and son remained unchanged. The fact that they would not reconcile caused a state of discord. In order to maintain his economic independence, Henry Bukowski took several jobs in various cities over the years to come: "Hank moved from city to city, coming home to L.A. infrequently." (Cherkovski: 70)

The years of extensive travel began in 1942 after having worked in the Southern Pacific yards. Bukowski intended to undertake a trip to New Orleans and accordingly had to earn money first. His duties included cleaning and scrubbing boxcars. As the U.S. finally entered World War II, thousands of young men were shipped overseas to fight. Luckily, Bukowski drew one of the highest draft numbers possible and never gave any thought to volunteering. (see Cherkovski: 59)

Due to his life on the road, Bukowski forgot to report his new address to the authorities. Thus, FBI agents took Hank into custody and accused him of being a draft dodger. In prison he explained to have been travelling around in the country and simply forgot to mail his current address to the draft board. Ultimately, he was released as the authorities found that he had not deliberately deceived the board. Nonetheless, it was decided that he had to see a psychiatrist in Philadelphia, the city he was currently living in. The doctor's rating freed Hank of his military duties. (see Cherkovski: 72-74)

By that time Bukowski had to no avail tried submitting pieces of writing to several literary magazines. In 1944 Henry Bukowski landed a job as a packer at a warehouse in St. Louis. Coming home from work one day, he found a letter by his apartment door. Once more, the writer's work of short fiction he had handed in before was turned down by the publishers of *Story*, a literary magazine. However, Whit Burnett, the magazine's founder, informed him that another piece had made it to the March-April 1944 publication of *Story*: "Aftermath of a Lengthy Rejection Slip". Neeli Cherkovski quotes from Burnett's note: "Dear Mr. Bukowski, We are sorry but this one didn't quite do. But we very much liked "Aftermath of a Rejection Slip" and we will run it in our March-April issue…" (Cherkovski: 78)

Slowly but surely Bukowski's career as a writer progressed as another piece was published in 1946 when he moved to Philadelphia for a second time: "His second published work of fiction, 'Twenty Tanks from Kasseldown,' appeared in Caresse Crosby's *Portfolio: An International Review*. She wrote and inquired, 'Who are you?' Hank replied, 'Dear Mrs. Crosby, I don't know who I am. Sincerely yours, Charles Bukowski'" (Cherkovski: 82)

* * * * *

Having returned to Los Angeles, Bukowski in 1947 met Jane Cooney Baker, his future girlfriend, drinking at The Glenview Bar. Although Bukowski was twenty-seven by that time, Jane presumably was the writer's first serious girlfriend and only the second woman he had sex with. Jane would inspire much of Bukowski's literary work and would become Betty in his first novel, *Post Office* (1971), and Laura in his second novel, *Factotum* (1975). The

character of Wanda in Bukowski's movie script *Barfly* was also modeled on the life of Jane Cooney Baker. Jane died before Charles Bukowski became successful as a writer and therefore never was interviewed. The only information about her was based upon the details provided by Bukowski in interviews. Since Bukowski liked to invent stories even in such interviews, his accounts may not be taken as the truth. For example, he claimed her to have been of Irish and Indian origin, raised by nuns and married to a rich wealthy attorney, which is altogether definitely non-plausible and probably fictitious. (cf. Sounes, *Charles*: 27-28)

Bukowski and Jane stayed together a considerable time and he even introduced her to his parents. The following statement provided by Bukowski's biographer Neeli Cherkovski gives insight into both his parents' lack of interest in Jane as well as into the exact duration of their love relationship:

> My parents met Jane sometime in 1954 or '55, shortly before we broke up, which means we must have been together about ten years. You know, she had a pot belly from all the drinking. They thought she was pregnant. So we went on this picnic together and they treated us nicely, even my father. (Cherkovski: 88)

In spite of Bukowski's apparent problems with authority figures he entered the postal service in 1952, hearing that temporary help for the Christmas rush was needed. He considered the post office's hiring policies lax and thought this kind of short-term employment would be helpful in making a good deal of money. Although Bukowski detested the rule-regulated company and its employees, he would stay on this temporary job for three years eventually attaining regular status of a full-time employee. (see Cherkovski: 92)

Bukowski's novel *Post Office* gives an autobiographical account of the events of this period in his life: On the one hand the author renders aspects of his private life, the relationship with Jane, and their inebriated lifestyle. On the other hand, the working conditions at the post office he severely suffered under function as the major theme of this novel.

The hard work at the post office delivering and sorting mail for hours and hours had serious implications for Bukowski's physical health. One day as he was expected to unload a truck he felt ill and went home to rest. He started vomiting blood. Jane called a doctor, who advised sending him to

hospital immediately. (cf. Cherkovski: 92-94) After a while having recovered, "[…] Hank [eventually] went down to the federal building […] He did something a full-time post office employee rarely does: he resigned." (Cherkovski: 95)

Shortly after, Bukowski encountered magazine editor Barbara Frye, who he had exchanged letters with over a certain period. As their letters had gotten more intensely personal and the Texan editor mentioned that she was afraid of never finding a man because of her physical deficiency, Bukowski suggested marriage. Barbara, who lacked a vertebra and therefore could not move her neck from shoulder to shoulder, took a bus to Los Angeles where she first met Charles Bukowski in person. The next morning they went straight to Las Vegas and subsequently married in a quick civil ceremony. (cf. Cherkovski: 98-99)

In *Post Office* Bukowski turns Barbara into the character of Joyce and renders their life together in a town called Wheeler:

> Joyce had a little house in town and we laid around and screwed and ate. She fed me well, fattened me up and weakened me at the same time. She couldn't get enough. Joyce, my wife, was a nymph. I took little walks through the town alone, to get away from her, teethmarks all over my chest, neck and shoulders, and somewhere else that worried me more and was quite painful. She was eating me alive. I limped through the town and they stared at me, knowing about Joyce, her sex drive, and also that her father and grandfather had more money, land, lakes, hunting preserves than all of them. (Bukowski, *Post*: 35)

Frye's and Bukowski's marriage turned out different than expected. Although Bukowski himself generally enjoyed indulging in sensual pleasures, Barbara's nymphomaniac behavior appears to have been enough to weaken the rising poet and novelist – the couple split up.

* * * * *

In 1958 Charles Bukowski ran into Jane and they started seeing each other once again. However, the relationship did not last long. Bukowski returned to the postal service and would stay on this job for the next twelve years until 1970. Despite the unbearable working conditions and the below average salary he received, Bukowski endured this since he desperately needed a

regular paycheck. Conducting his rote assignments at least helped conserve his energies for his writing. (see Cherkovski: 109)

Jane died at the age of forty-nine: Bukowski visited her in her hospital room and sat beside her for several hours. When he drove to her apartment he found numerous unopened bottles of liquor given as a Christmas gifts by the people whose rooms Jane had cleaned. Bukowski felt that alcohol first hospitalized then killed her. When she died, he made arrangements concerning her funeral and called on her son, who lived in Texas. Since Jane and Bukowski had spent more than a decade together, the loss left him deeply affected. (cf. Cherkovski: 110-111)

In spite of this traumatizing and devastating event in Bukowski's private life, his professional career as a poet and novelist appears to have prospered at that time. The goal of becoming a successful writer that Bukowski had always longed for seems to have become more attainable than ever before:

> […] success now lay at Hank's door. […] Eventually, a group of devoted fans existed, people around the country who could hardly wait for the next Bukowski poem. By the late fifties, Hank had become an important voice in the underground poetry scene, sought by important small-magazine editors who coveted his name for their contributor list. For some of the more staid publications, printing a poem by Bukowski meant the loss of subscribers and angry letters of protest to the editor. (Cherkovski: 113)

Although Bukowski's success was gradually increasing, his readership encompassed only a very small circle of literary people and aficionados. The magazines he published in as well as his books of poetry hardly ever went beyond a circulation of three to four hundred. Not being associated with the so-called Beat Generation proved essentially difficult to Bukowski and it seemed a burdensome task to gain recognition as a more independently working poet. In contrast, poets like Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, or Gregory Corso all benefitted from and relied on a pre-established network that provided endorsement by well-known journals in New York City, Chicago, as well as San Francisco. (see Cherkovski: 122)

Nevertheless, the editor of *The Outsider* cherished Bukowski's poetry and strongly believed in the renegade quality of his work. Jon Edgar Webb published the first issue of his magazine in 1961: Along with works by renowned poets associated with the Beat Generation, *The Outsider* featured a

portfolio of six pages exclusively dedicated to Bukowski's poetry. The fact that Webb's publication also comprised works by Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso, Henry Miller, or William Burroughs both underpinned the magazine's importance and makes it all the more astonishing that Webb chose the relatively unknown Bukowski among those distinguished poets for the issue's feature. The editor expressed his admiration by making "A Charles Bukowski Album" the centerpiece of the first issue of *The Outsider*. (see Cherkovski: 127)

Howard Sounes maintains that the portfolio includes some of the best poems by Bukowski and underscores Webb's conscientious and professional approach of choosing only the most outstanding poems, a task usually carried out together with his wife Gypsy Lou Webb:

> The Webbs published eleven Bukowski poems in the first issue of The Outsider, some of the best he had written, alongside work by fashionable beat writers. The Bukowski selection was all the more impressive because Webb took a professional approach to being an editor, rejecting much of what Bukowski submitted as sub-standard. (Sounes, *Charles*: 48)

Shortly after the assassination of president John F. Kennedy in 1963, Frances Smith, Bukowski's current girlfriend, confessed that she was pregnant. Frances hoped the revelation to foster Bukowski's gentle side, which, as he immediately started making plans for the baby, proved correct. (see Cherkovski: 138)

Furthermore, the moment Frances told him about her pregnancy, he asked her to marry him, since, as Sounes puts it, "[…] he wanted to do the right thing." (Sounes, *Charles*: 65) Frances declined and they agreed on living together as a family with Bukowski being the financially responsible person.

Whereas Bukowski apparently harbored true and intense feelings for his previous girlfriend Jane, his relationship with Frances began as a mere affair pursuing his simple need for love. The fact that Bukowski did not write many love poems about her support this assumption, as none of the few poems is comparable to those he wrote for Jane. (cf. Sounes, *Charles*: 61)

[…] on 7 September, 1964, [Frances] gave birth to a perfectly healthy baby girl. She chose Marina as the first name, after a courtesan […], and

Bukowski chose Louise as the middle name in honor of Gypsy Lou [Webb]. (Sounes, *Charles*: 69)

When Marina Louise was born, the baby's parents opted for Bukowski as her surname. Since Frances Smith and Charles Bukowski were not married, the nurse refused. Marina's parents urged her to check on the law and call up the county clerk's office. As the nurse returned, she informed them about the exception they were going to make. (see Cherkovski: 142)

Despite the joy of fatherhood, Bukowski lapsed into a state of severe depression. Friends like Sam Cherry[1] supported Bukowski to cope with his mental problem. Additionally, by promoting his literary work, Jon and Gypsy Lou Webb appear to have been able to lift him out of his long and continuously reappearing periods of mental distress. Not only would they publish some of his texts, but they also made Bukowski the first "Outsider of the Year". Honoring Charles Bukowski's oeuvre, the Webbs would publish an anthology of his best poems. Overwhelmed by their generosity and spirit, the author also generated *It Catches My Heart in Its Hands*. The anthology was published in October 1963 and would attract a broad readership as a work of art. (cf. Sounes, *Charles*: 62-63)

By that time Bukowski's professional relationship with Jon and Gypsy Lou Webb had developed into honest friendship. Not only did the couple edit *The Outsider*, but they also ran Loujon Press, where Charles Bukowski published *It Catches My Heart in Its Hands* (1963) as well as *Crucifix in a Deathhand* (1965):

> Before the first Loujon Press book, Bukowski's reputation lay primarily with his little-magazine publications and not the individual chapbooks. Once his poetry was in trade-book form, readers could see it more comprehensively – what Jon Webb had hoped for from the beginning. Webb wanted to complete *Crucifix in a Deathhand* as quickly as possible, hoping to establish Bukowski as a major new talent in American letters. (Cherkovski: 144)

Howard Sounes observes that although the publication of *Crucifix in a Deathhand* may have been a major success for Bukowski at this point, the

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[1] Sam Cherkovski: also called Sam Cherry, photographer, close friend of Bukowski's, Neeli Cherkovski's father; Neeli Cherkovski would become Bukowski's official biographer.

quality of the poems published within may have suffered under the author's pressure having to produce a sufficient amount of poetry:

> With a relatively large print run and New York publisher, Lyle Stuart, handling distribution, *Crucifix in a Deathhand* was the biggest book of Bukowski's career to date, and the Webbs did another beautiful design job. Printed in a large format, and illustrated with nightmarish etchings by Noel Rockmore, it looked like an album of Gothic fairy tales. But with the benefit of hindsight, Bukowski was correct to fear his poetry would be compromised by writing under pressure. (Sounes, *Charles*: 72)

Furthermore, Sounes stresses Bukowski's growing importance as a leader figure and role model. He claims that Charles Bukowski, by this advanced stage in his career, had become familiar to the readers of virtually every little literature magazine in the United States of America as well as to some in Europe. The well-produced and sometimes obscure books, like the ones published by the Webbs, contributed positively to his reputation as many young poets looked up to Bukowski. Among these poets was the Chicagoan poet Douglas Blazek, who produced his own little magazine, *Ole*. When he discovered some of Bukowski's short stories written in the nineteen forties, he requested some prose pieces for his magazine. Bukowski submitted the seminal "A Rambling Essay on Poetics and the Bleeding Life Written While Drinking a Six-Pack (Tall)" that was meant as an essay more than a short story and expressed his genuine literary beliefs. (see Sounes, *Charles*: 73-74)

Similarly, Neeli Cherkovski illustrates Blazek's discovery and demand for Bukowski's prose work. The biographer gives insight into the editor's opinion about the literary success and the appreciation his readership felt for Bukowski:

> From Bukowski's letters Blazek learned of the years when he had written prose. Judging by the passion, wildness, and natural wisdom of his letters, Blazek urged him to write the essay. […] Blazek recalls that his subscribers identified with Bukowski's prose. It brought them the voice of an older man who wrote on the edge of madness with an Artaud-like sensibility[.] (Cherkovski: 166)

Blazek's discovery and the subsequent publication of "A Rambling Essay on Poetics and the Bleeding Life Written While Drinking a Six-Pack (Tall)" triggered an inquiry of Mimeo Press and the wish to publish two works of prose. The first of the two prose books, *Confessions of a Man Insane Enough*

to Live with the Beasts, came out in 1965, followed by *All the Assholes in the World and Mine* in 1966. (cf. Cherkovski: 168)

* * * * *

About the time Bukowski commenced publishing with Mimeo, he also met John Martin, founder of the publishing company Black Sparrow Press, a small press that would become essentially important to both the work of Bukowski and other writers of the country: "John Martin was the manager of an office supply company when he first read Bukowski's poetry, and it literally changed his life. He decided Bukowski was a great genius […] and set out to become his publisher." (Sounes, *Charles*: 78)

Although Bukowski considered Martin a wealthy man, in reality the editor had merely sold his private archive of first editions from his library to the University of Santa Barbara, which earned him a good deal of money for starting his small business. Bukowski, as Cherkovski points out, must have cherished John Martin from the moment they met for his straightforward way of going about the business. His job with the postal service seems to have both bothered and exhausted Bukowski. Thus, he thought Martin the right man to conduct business with and start making a living as a professional writer – their common undertakings prospered and the fact that Martin never failed Bukowski helped create a long-standing friendship. In the spring and summer of 1966 Bukowski's first broadside publications with Black Sparrow Press appeared, including *True Story*, *On Going Out to Get the Mail*, *To Kiss the Worms Goodnight*, and *The Girls – For the Mercy-Mongers*. The print run comprised only thirty copies each. (cf. Cherkovski: 186-187)

> Both men were pleased with the way the broadsides turned out and almost right away Martin decided to try and publish books. He sold his collection of first editions to the University of California at Santa Barbara and used the $50,000 he raised to build Black Sparrow into a company that could publish Bukowski and other new or neglected writers. He was soon bringing out broadsides and chapbooks as striking in the simplicity of their design as the Loujon books were ornate. (Sounes, *Charles*: 81)

The weekly column entitled "Notes of a Dirty Old Man" Bukowski started in early 1967 for the alternative newspaper *Open City* earned him a reputation

close to being a local hero. John Bryan's underground newspaper had a relatively wide circulation, which helped Bukowski gain recognition in and around Los Angeles. (cf. Cherkovski: 187-188)

In 1969 Essex House published a selection of these columns as *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*. As Cherkovski claims, the publishing house's focus lay mainly on erotic publications. This may have set a questionable angle for some of Bukowski's readers approaching his work:

> In January 1969 […] a North Hollywood press specializing in pornographic book, released a collection of Bukowski's *Open City* stories, *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*. It didn't take long for the twenty thousand copies printed to completely disappear from bookstore racks. This success resulted from Hank's exposure in the L.A. underground newspapers and helped enhance his status as a cult figure. (Cherkovski: 206)

In February of the same year Neeli Cherkovski, Bukowski's future biographer, and the author himself considered starting their own literary magazine, *Laugh Literary and Man the Humping Gun*:

> It had been planned as a major new literary journal. Financial considerations, however, trimmed us down to a thirty-pound paper in a photo-offset edition. Bukowski originally thought he had a backer on the line, someone he had known in high school. He wanted to call the journal "The Contemporary Review: A Non-Snob Journal of Active Creativity Now." When I protested, telling him that the title fit neither his wildness nor my own sensibility, he told me to go home […] (Cherkovski: 195-196)

Having attained many of his career goals, Bukowski in 1970 finally was able to quit his job at the post office on January 2, at the age of forty-nine. The day thereafter, Charles Bukowski began writing his groundbreaking novel *Post Office*, coming to terms with the almost traumatic experiences he had lived through over the last couple of years. He completed the first draft of the novel in less than three weeks and immediately called John Martin. (cf. Cherkovski: 208)

> […] writing the novel came as a cathartic release, a means to finally purge himself of a bad situation. Hank fell into a kind of trance the day he began the novel, and did not take any days off until he finished. Typing began at 2:30 in the afternoon and went on until midnight […] On the day that he completed the manuscript, January 21, 1970, he called Martin […] (Cherkovski: 208)

* * * * *

In 1970 Bukowski appears to have met his next long-term girlfriend Linda King and in January of the following year Black Sparrow Press published its ninety-forth book: *Post Office*. The novel became a bestseller: “The edition of two thousand paperback copies quickly sold out, prompting a new printing and eventually the sale of more than forty thousand copies.” (Cherkovski: 211)

The success of *Post Office* appears to have been Bukowski’s ultimate breakthrough, not only as a poet and writer of short stories, but also as a major novelist. Four years after *Post Office* and following the publication of poems in the years in-between, Black Sparrow Press released the second novel by Charles Bukowski, *Factotum* (1975).

In 1976 a decisive event in Charles Bukowski’s private life took place when he met his future wife Linda Lee Beighle, who, returning from a trip on the hippie trail in India, devoted herself to the Indian guru Meher Baba (widely known to have coined the phrase “Don’t worry, be happy”). Beighle first worked for the television station in Miami, before she moved to California where she ran a health food restaurant at Redono Beach. When she heard of Bukowski’s reading at the Troubadour in September, Beighle decided to not only attend his show, but also to finally meet him in person: (see Sounes, *Charles*: 164)

> Little did Hank know that one of the most important persons in his life would come to a reading he gave on September 29, 1976, at the Troubadour, a popular L.A. night spot on Santa Monica Boulevard, a few miles west of his apartment on Carlton Way. This was one of the last public readings, and, typically, had sold out. The Troubadour’s main dance floor was crowded to capacity on the night that Linda Lee Beighle, the future Mrs. Bukowski, heard him read. Although she had wanted to meet him for some time, she had waited for more than a year, attending his readings, staying in the background. Linda, who is about twenty-five years younger than Hank, watched women screaming with passionate intensity at their hero, and closely observed his lively response. (Cherkovski: 248)

Having had sufficient experience with the topic and what might be regarded as an attempt to come to terms with his past, *Women*, Charles Bukowski’s third novel, came out in 1978. Black Sparrow Press expanded business onto Australia, where an edition of the book was published – a hallmark of the writer’s growing worldwide success. (cf. Cherkovski: 262)

In the following year, the author Charles Bukowski signed a contract with filmmaker Barbet Schroeder, agreeing to write the script for what would eventually become the movie *Barfly*. The screenplay to a large extent was based upon two influential periods in Bukowski's life: on the one hand, his years in Philadelphia in the early forties, on the other hand, the few years on Alvarado Street, Los Angeles, where he met Jane briefly after the end of World War II. Neeli Cherkovski highlights the fact that the screenwriter closely stuck to the most basic facts of his life – similar to the way he would proceed in most of his novels. However, he seems to have played around with some details in order to adapt them for the screen. (see Cherkovski: 279)

During this period struggling to realize the movie *Barfly*, Bukowski married Linda Beighle. The ceremony took place on August 18, 1985, shortly after his proposal. (see Cherkovski: 282-283)

* * * * *

Following the publication of *Ham on Rye* (1982) and *Hollywood* (1989), in 1994 the last of Bukowski's novels was published: *Pulp* (Black Sparrow Press). Death seems to be a very salient and highly autobiographical topic in the partly noiresque detective novel *Pulp*. Having been afflicted by leukemia, the choice of the story's theme mirrored the author's anxieties as he seems to have prepared himself for his own looming and advancing death: "At 11.55 a.m. on Wednesday 9 March, 1994, Bukowski died. He was seventy-three." (Sounes, *Charles*: 241)

The epitomization of death by a female figure in *Pulp* exemplifies one of numerous strategies to weave autobiographical features into the writing of Charles Bukowski. More striking features in order to argue in favor of autobiographical writing per se may be unveiled by analyzing the writer's continual use of his alter ego Henry Chinaski in the subsequent chapter.

1.2 *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*

Many – if not all – of Bukowski's literary works appear to contain autobiographical patterns of some sort. Whereas in *Pulp* death functions as a theme establishing a weak and rather farfetched link to his personal life and his coping with his illness, his earlier works may yield more fully fledged autobiographical readings.

In the second chapter of this thesis I will try giving an insight into the admittedly vast amount of autobiographical facts, references and allusions in some of Bukowski's poems, the movie *Barfly*, and, of course, in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*.

Firstly, certain autobiographical strategies shall be pointed out that Bukowski seems to have begun applying in the very first texts of his literary production. The use of the persona Henry Chinaski will be paid special attention to. By shedding light on and distinguishing Chinaski from the author Bukowski I hope to be establishing adequate ports of entry to approach Bukowski's oeuvre. However, as the writer's voice quite often seems to fuse with the speaker's and the fictional events seem to be densely woven into a pattern of autobiographical facts, a clear-cut distinction appears to be rather unattainable.

Secondly, as the plot of Barbet Schroeder's movie *Barfly* is based upon two periods of the writer's life and, more importantly, as Charles Bukowski himself wrote the script for the movie, autobiographical strategies may be found in the feature film; footage will be taken from the movie in order to back up and illustrate certain hypotheses made. Furthermore, the depicted scenes set at nightclubs, bars, and in seedy apartments tie in with the predominant settings in Bukowski's fiction. They therefore relate to his idea and depiction of urbanity, place, and space, which in turn sets the mood for most of his stories.

The said mood and the respective settings presumably are essential and unifying elements recurring in all of the stories presented within *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, and therefore they offer one possible approach to the examination of the collection of short stories and columns – Bukowski quite

often focuses on the down-and-out. Having presented one potential way in accessing the collection I will then continue with a close analysis of *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*; by detecting and analyzing the narrative mode I will account for the autobiographical viewpoint mingled with that of a narrator figure. Furthermore, the characters of *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* shall be examined as they relate to specific, recurrent motifs – violence, both physical and psychological, alcohol, writing, as well as implied misogyny prevail. After presenting the most prominent motifs, an in-depth analysis of Bukowski's style as applied in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* will ensue. To conclude, the idea of determining and surveying the book's commentary columns will be resumed at the beginning of the following chapter zooming in on the nineteen sixties.

1.2.1 Autobiographical Writing

> Bukowski claimed the majority of what he wrote was literally what had happened in his life. Essentially that is what his books are all about – an honest representation of himself and his experiences at the bottom of American society. He even went so far as to put a figure on it: ninety-three per cent of his work was autobiography, he said, and the remaining seven per cent was "improved upon". Yet while he could be extraordinarily honest as a writer, a close examination of the facts of Bukowski's life leads to one question whether, to make himself more picaresque for the reader, he didn't "improve upon" a great deal more of his life than he said. (Sounes, *Charles*: 7)

The following chapter shall offer a general introduction to Bukowski's autobiographical writing. Whereas the first subchapter will shed light on the use of a recurrent, partly autobiographical character within Bukowski's prose works, the second part will offer ample space to illustrate the before mentioned assertions. By close reading the movie *Barfly* (1987) a comprehensive film analytical approach shall offer further insights into the autobiographical aspects inherent in Bukowski's texts as well as in the audiovisual adaptation. Screenshots shall be used to more illustratively account for certain conventions relating to autobiographical writing. Furthermore, the depictions shall function as supportive sources in order to develop further hypotheses and to simply render possible periods in the life of Henry Charles Bukowski.

Another complementing source may be found in Bukowski's novel *Hollywood*, as the portrayal is presented vaguely as a fictitious diary of the period of the movie's production. Howard Sounes underscores that the novel particularly lends itself to the analysis of autobiographical features:

> Before the story gets underway we read a prominent disclaimer: 'This is a work of fiction and any resemblance between the characters and persons living or dead is purely coincidental, etc.' While it is usually a mistake to assume that people in novels are facsimiles of people in life, this disclaimer is disingenuous, as the sarcastic 'etc. indicates. Bukowski's working method had always been to create characters based closely on himself and those around him, and seldom was this more true than with *Hollywood* […] (Sounes, "Introduction": vii)

1.2.1.1 General Introduction. Or: Introducing Henry Chinaski.

> Bukowski: Well, the few people I know call me Hank. My first name is Henry, you see. Hank is slang for Henry. And when I first started writing I said it can't be Henry Bukowski, because nobody would ever publish it. Because Henry and Bukowski were too much alike. You see, they both have this curve of sound. Henry, Bukowski … Up and down. You put Charles Bukowski, that's a straight line. That sounds like a writer. Also my father always called me Henry. So I thought I would get rid of Henry for a while. […] So I'm really Hank, but write as Charles Bukowski. The last name is the same: Bukowski. (Duval, "Evening": 135)

Especially Charles Bukowski's novels may be considered intrinsically autobiographical: Five out of a total of six novels feature the central narrator character Henry Chinaski. Bukowski's first novel *Post Office* (1971), as well as *Factotum* (1975), *Women* (1978), *Ham on Rye* (1982), and *Hollywood* (1989) are centered on the persona Chinaski. Only in *Pulp* (1994), which was also the last novel written shortly before the author's death, did Bukowski refrain from including his alter ego character.

> Chinaski, yes, and Bukowski a very few times. […] Mostly, I'm Chinaski *(laughs)*. I'm Hank Chinaski. He is the more interesting one, you see. Generally he has done the interesting things, or the painful things. And I only write about the interesting things – I think they are interesting. (Duval, "Evening": 135)

Having presented the most relevant aspects of Bukowski's biography in the first major chapter of this thesis, it may at this point be crucial to mention the initial introduction of the Chinaski character to the American's literary art: Around the time Charles Bukowski began publishing with Blazek's *Ole* magazine, the writer appears to already have sketched the rough outlines of his persona Henry Chinaski: "Hank did not know at the time that many prose books lay ahead. He had already begun sharply defining the shadings of the character that later emerged as the world-wise Henry Chinaski." (Cherkovski: 167)

In the same year, 1965, Bukowski was offered the publication of two short prose books by Mimeo Press. One of them bore the title *Confessions of a Man Insane Enough to Live with Beasts* (1965). In this publication, as Cherkovski claims, the character of Henry Chinaski was brought to life. (see Cherkovski: 168)

Similarly, Howard Sounes stresses the fact that *Confessions of a Man Insane Enough to Live with Beasts* functioned as a literary small-scale test for Charles Bukowski's first novel *Post Office*, where he more extensively fleshed out the character of Henry Chinaski:

> […] *Confessions of a Man Insane Enough to Live with Beasts* [represented] a portmanteau of nine short stories based on his childhood, of his adolescence and youth. It further promoted Bukowski as the hero of his own work, even though he used the device of a fictional first-person narrator. The name, Henry Chinaski, was noticeably similar to his own. "*Confessions* became a dry run for his novel, *Post Office*, and from then on I think he duplicated himself," says Blazek. (Sounes, *Charles*: 74)

Accordingly, the newly introduced character seems to have regularly been mistaken for the author himself by his readership in the years to come. Before I now move on to investigate the similarities between the writer and his alter ego, I will give a short overview of the most outstanding character traits of Chinaski: "Bukowski portrays [him] as wild-eyed and weakened by nonstop bouts of guzzling cheap wine, having been unsuccessful at finding his usual life-saving jobs as shipping clerk or stock boy." (Cherkovski: 168)

Andrew J. Madigan in "What Fame Is: Bukowski's Exploration of Self." (1996) offers another description of the character of Henry Chinaski:

> Bukowski-Chinaski is a hard-drinker, borderline misanthrope, prone to fits of macho boasting and carelessness, private, scorns visitors, hates work, favors the underdog and the small thing done well, likes gambling, classical music, Hemingway, Dostoyevsky and Fante, and has a troubled past with women. Reading Bukowski is an exercise in eavesdropping into the author's private thoughts. To separate his personal and fictional voice is a Herculean task. (Madigan: 457)

This voice is present in many stories, poems, and novels. Especially in Bukowski's novels it is easily recognizable as the character is presented as such – contrary to the sole voice employed in the majority of the poems. The perseveringly coherent use of the Henry Chinaski character exceeds Bukowski's novels as it expands onto the screen:

> In *Hollywood* Bukowski obfuscates the distinction between the real self and the drunken, boasting Buk-beast persona. First, he names the central character of the novel, as well as the film character created *by* him, Henry Chinaski. (Madigan 1996: 457)

To relativize all said, Bukowski makes a surprising and intentionally misleading statement in the interview “An Evening at Buk’s Place” (2002) conducted by Jean-Francois Duval. When the journalist asks Henry Charles Bukowski whether the protagonist and narrator figure of Henry Chinaski in the majority of his novels is some sort of a fictitious character or a double of himself, the American answers: “No. He is me. The same.” (Duval, “Evening”: 135)

1.2.1.2 *Barfly* and *Hollywood*

Not only did Bukowski employ the autobiographically inspired character Henry Chinaski in most of his works of prose, but the former also provided the basis for Barbet Schroeder’s feature film *Barfly*. The author’s script is centered on the said protagonist and is presumably set in Los Angeles.

Before I go into more detail with the analysis of this audiovisual document, I will briefly present the factors of production: When and by whom was the movie produced? Who or what encouraged Bukowski to write a movie script? I will refer to Bukowski’s novel *Hollywood* in passing. Since the book represents a semi-autobiographical and retrospectively written account, it may prove a useful source in introducing the events accompanying the conception and production of *Barfly*.

As Andrew J. Madigan asserts in his paper, “Hollywood has traditionally been a place where some writers ‘end up’.” (Madigan: 448) However, he observes: “By exploiting the medium of cinema, writers transform their work into something lesser or greater, or something entirely new. Hollywood can consume the writer or catapult him/her to stardom.” (Madigan: 448)

It could be because of these possible ramifications, that Bukowski hesitated to produce a screenplay. Charles Bukowski appears to substantially have disliked the film industry. However strong this aversion to Hollywood must have been, it did not prevent Bukowski from eventually engaging in a movie project. More importantly, as Madigan argues, “Bukowski’s brief

flirtation with Hollywood was made possible by devout readers of his work within the film industry." (Madigan: 451)

First and foremost the designated movie director Barbet Schroeder of *Barfly* personally approached the author to write a screenplay. In Bukowski's fictionalized account *Hollywood* he makes his standpoint clear. *Barfly* marks a breach with his artistic virtues and his picture of himself as writer – it therefore has an exceptional status among Bukowski's works:

> "You think you'll ever do another screenplay?" she asked.
> "I doubt it. You just have to make too many fucking compromises. And you always have to think through the eye of the camera. Will the audience get it? And almost anything upsets or insults a movie audience, while people who read novels and short stories love to be upset and insulted."
> "Well, you're good at that…" (Bukowski, *Hollywood*: 209)

It was in 1979 that the author signed a contract with Barbet Schroeder agreeing to write a screenplay. Charles Bukowski intended to build the script for *Barfly* – in *Hollywood* he calls it *The Dance of Jim Beam* – on historical facts. Yet, since "[a]ll the people he knew from those periods of his life were either dead or long gone from his world, […] nothing prevented him from relating the story out as he chose." (Cherkovski: 279)

This citation again unveils how difficult a valid separation of fact and fiction in *Barfly* may seem. Neeli Cherkovski goes as far as to even state that Bukowski's persona sometimes stands in contrast to the author's personality:

> In writing Barfly, Hank enjoyed contrasting himself, a true prepunk, feisty young man with this quintessential blow-hard. "Yet, as I got into it," he said, "the guy didn't seem so bad. He was just searching in his own way, like I was." Hank had no intention of sparing himself. He had been a clown of sorts in his drinking days, and he didn't hide it while writing the screenplay. The master of self-depreciation as an art form did what comes naturally. He made a universal statement about his own foibles, one that others could laugh at and garner truth from. He wrote about the errands he would run for both bar patrons and bartenders. Antihero Henry Chinaski was no larger than life in film than he has been in the stories and novels. (Cherkovski: 280)

Apart from the many settings and characters that parallel Bukowski's personal life, the persona and its creator appear to share certain psychological states as they both cope with harsh living conditions in the respective periods in their lives. Those seemingly hard-to-decipher character traits of the prototypical antihero are set to film in *Barfly*: The inherent hopelessness of the down-and-

out, excessive alcoholism, and the recurrent motif of violence and fistfights may thus be regarded both as explicit and metaphorical depictions relating to the private person Charles Bukowski. Whereas these aspects will be picked up and dealt with in more detail in a later chapter, I will now concentrate on the more obviously autobiographical features in *Barfly*: settings and characters.

> When Charles Bukowski writes about Hollywood he is not usually referring to the movie industry, but to the place where he lived for many years: a scruffy residential district, at the unfashionable end of Sunset Boulevard, known as East Hollywood. Here in rundown apartment buildings in the smoggy basin of Los Angeles, below the HOLLYWOOD sign, live the working poor of LA, newly arrived immigrants and those who have all but given up on life. Night sounds include sirens, arguments, bottles smashed into trash cans and gunshots. This is Bukowskiland – the setting of many of his poems, stories and novels […] In contrast to the rest of his work, when Bukowski writes here about 'Hollywood', he *is* concerned with the movie business. (Sounes, "Introduction": vii)

In *Barfly* numerous bars and dives function as adequate settings for the intrinsically inert individuals the movie is centered and probably also modeled on. As Chinaski desperately wanders about Los Angeles, California, he visits one bar after another in search of nothing in particular except alcohol and the apparent wish for genuine attention. If it was not for these endless hours he spends at the various local establishments, Chinaski might have already disappeared without anybody noticing. Leading a pathetic life without a wife and job, sitting at the counter appears to be one of the remaining and, presumably, redeeming features in Chinaski's everyday life.

The movie's director Barbet Schroeder introduces his audiences to the local nightclubs in the initial sequence of *Barfly*. The great number of bars presented gives insight into the major role this specific kind of setting plays throughout the feature film. Due to their similar outer appearances, the individual bars are difficult to identify as such – most of the establishments' signs and logos are lit in bright neon colors. They bear vacuous names, such as: The Sunset, The Hollyway, The Golden Horn, or Silver Platter. Barbet Schroeder thus establishes a hazy realm beneath the society's surface, where social outcasts – probably also criminals – may take shelter.

FADE IN:

EXTERIOR – CITY STREETS – NIGHT

(including LONG SHOTS of the “Golden Horn” and “Elbow Inn”)

VARIOUS ANGLES of lowlife bars on the streets throughout the city of Los Angeles. LAST SHOT is the Golden Horn.

EXTERIOR/INTERIOR – GOLDEN HORN BAR – NIGHT

ANGLE on the GOLDEN HORN BAR SIGN, above the entrance.

The CAMERA BOOMS DOWN and PANS AROUND slowly to reveal the doorway below the sign; it MOVES SLOWLY through the entrance and INTO THE INTERIOR BAR.
(Bukowski, *Barfly*: 13)



Figure 1: Introducing *Barfly*’s settings.

After the introductory sequence that consists of numerous long shots depicting the various bars’ fronts and entrances, Schroeder makes use of a subjective camera shot – the camera assuming the protagonist’s viewpoint and stance. As the spectator sees The Golden Horn through Henry Chinaski’s eyes, one enters the character’s shady world. Whether or not the places’ names, the interiors, or the characters within resemble the ones Charles Bukowski encountered in his drinking years in Philadelphia, the atmosphere established by film maker Barbet Schroeder at least closely clings to the one created in Bukowski’s texts.

In his novel *Hollywood* Charles Bukowski subsequently summarized the experiences made during the production of *Barfly*. He comments on the search for adequate settings in the Los Angeles area:

> THE SHOOTING WAS to start in Culver City. The bar was there and the hotel with my room. The part of the shooting was to be done in the Alvarado Street district, where the apartment of the female lead was located. Then there was a bar to be used near 6th Street and Vermont. But the first shots were to be in Culver City. (Bukowski, *Hollywood*: 154)

Bukowski could not watch the shooting in the apartment of the female protagonist. A bathtub scene's setting did not provide enough space for the author to supervise. Nevertheless, in *Hollywood* Chinaski reminisces about the building the author Bukowski had lived in:

> Actually, over 30 years ago I had briefly lived in that same building on Alvarado Street with the lady I was writing the screenplay about. Strange and chilling indeed. 'Everything that goes around comes around.' In one way or another. And after 30 years the place looked just about the same. Only the people I'd known had all died. (Bukowski, *Hollywood*: 177-178)

Not only does the movie feature a building Bukowski had previously lived in, but it also depicts Bukowski himself miming a barfly in one of the decisive scenes: He witnesses the encounter of his cinematic alter ego Henry Chinaski and Wanda Wilcox, who Bukowski intended to model on his long-term girlfriend Jane.



Figure 2: Charles Bukowski miming a barfly.

The characters in *Barfly*, on the one hand, seem to have been taken from Bukowski's private life and were adapted to the screen – like Wanda. On the other hand, the swarm of barflies in company with Chinaski presumably is to

fulfill stereotypical roles and are less autobiographically retraceable than Wanda. Those characters may bear many different features corresponding to both Bukowski's memories of the barflies encountered in Philadelphia and the sometimes bizarre, dismal and impoverished drunkard figures in his writings. Therefore, the autobiographical extent of those characters is difficult to define. However, they function to convey a certain atmosphere apparent in Bukowski's texts as well as in the movie *Barfly*.



Figure 3: Barflies in *Barfly*.

Another crucial and related spot in *Barfly* is the backyard, where the repeated fistfights of Chinaski and the barkeeper Eddie take place. The socially marginalized figures engage in fights over relatively trivial matters and out of boredom. Chinaski instigates a brawl as he orders drinks he is not willing and, more importantly, not able to pay for. When Chinaski dares Eddie once more, he wants to make up for the pain Eddie inflicted on him by seducing Wanda in one of the previous nights. This time Chinaski triumphs as he seems well prepared, more focused, and less drunk than in prior fistfights. The barflies and spectators of the ultimate showdown make bets and the winner, Henry Chinaski, receives his share after the win.

In a later scene, Chinaski proves particularly generous when he makes a good deal of money from a piece of writing he had submitted to a magazine.

He invites all his “friends” at the bar and buys a round. In these final moments of *Barfly* he also turns down an editor who had to no avail tried to persuade the author Chinaski to come stay with her at a more prestigious and less sleazy area of Los Angeles. She argues that such conditions could facilitate his literary production, whereby he could in turn ameliorate his pieces. Chinaski declines her offer in favor of his seemingly less hospitable circle and prefers to stay at his shabby apartment.

In the beginning of *Barfly* Henry Chinaski lives all by himself. His apartment appears essentially small and cramped. When he gets home after a long night at one or more of the bars, he sits down, puts on classical music, takes a sip from a large bottle of wine, and begins writing. Later in the story – at this point he has already moved in with Wanda – his habits remain the same. Classical music, as a recurring motif, relates to Charles Bukowski, who himself likes listening to this kind of music.



Figure 4: Chinaski: Writing, drinking, thinking.

As far as Chinaski’s writing habits are concerned, it is quite likely that they closely resemble those of his creator; Bukowski mostly wrote by night, smoking cigarettes and drinking bottles of wine. In Bukowski’s poem “An Observer” a female bystander – presumably one of his girlfriends – observes his methods:

oh, she said, I know how you do it.
you sit down
you've got your wine
your cigarette
you turn the radio on
you blow smoke
you touch your nose
you touch your face
you rub yourself along the throat
and then you begin:
tick tick ticka tick tick
ah, tick ticka tick tick tick
and you go on
and on
and then you blow more smoke
drink more wine
you touch your nose
you touch your ear
and then
tick ticka tick tick
a, tick ticka tick tick tick …

she's right.
that's how I wrote this
one.
(Bukowski, *Hello*: Track 3)

Accordingly, one may account for obvious congruencies in the professional behavior of the persona of Henry Chinaski and the author Charles Bukowski. Although Chinaski superficially does not appear necessarily eager to make it as a writer, there are noticeable flashes of his innermost wishes and aspirations.

Chinaski's housing situation underscores the fact that he is in desperate need of money. Although he applies for a job, he is aware of the fact that he has basically no chance of getting out of there, except by writing. While he also seems to regard writing as a form of contemplation and a self-reflexive process, its main purpose is to get him a sufficient amount of money. Thus, Chinaski clings to his only talent and hopes to attain economic independence and success.

When Chinaski meets Wanda, they soon discover their shared passion for cheap and strong booze as well as their similarly negative worldviews. Although they barely know each other, Chinaski moves in with Wanda shortly after. She hands him a spare key and they agree on sharing the rent. Wanda cheats on Henry when he leaves to apply for a job. When he learns of Eddie

being the one Wanda has cheated on him with, Chinaski turns immensely furious and subsequently throws all her belongings out of the window. They reconcile as Chinaski acknowledges the fact that they are disoriented and weak individuals rarely aware of their deeds and decisions.



Figure 5: Henry and Wanda: Encounter, liquor store, spare keys, drinking.

Similarly, the character of Wanda seems to lack the ability to articulate her aspirations and has come to terms with her virtually pathetic life. They both do not fit in any kind of system – neither do they care to. In certain passages of *Barfly* Wanda acts as if out of her mind and may thus be described as genuinely crazy. Wanda resorts to liquor and her character appears highly dependent on the male, and probably also on partly fatherly figures like Henry or Eddie. Since Bukowski acknowledged that Wanda is modeled on Jane, comparisons as to whether they share their stance towards life or their instable ways of behavior may be drawn:

Bukowski met Jane Baker as he returned to Los Angeles in 1947. The setting of Chinaski's and Wanda's encounter in *Barfly* might parallel the actual event taking place at The Glenview Bar to a certain degree. Since Jane is assumed to have been Henry Charles Bukowski's first girlfriend, one may account for her steady reappearances in a great number of Bukowski's works. In *Barfly* the actress Faye Dunaway impersonated Jane Cooney Baker alias

Wanda. As mentioned in a previous chapter, it is essentially difficult to define to what degree Wanda and Jane indeed share certain characteristics because Jane died before Bukowski's star as an author soared. The remaining sources predominately consisting of interviews with Bukowski are not very credible, as the author liked to twist certain facts – he, for example, claimed that Jane was of Irish and Indian origin.

As far as Bukowski himself is concerned, the character of Chinaski, as Jean-Francois Duval in *Bukowski and the Beats* (2002) points out, may represent virtues and behaviors contrary to the American author's:

> Far from the character that the film projects, Buk was never the tramp or the bum that has often been imagined. He was never slovenly, hirsute and neglected, sprawled out in the squalid mire of a filthy apartment with dirty, greasy hair, like Rourke in the film (it is a fact that Hank washed his hair every day). In order to live very frugally, in cramped rooms, he owned two sets of clothing. While he wore one of them, he washed the other and dried it by the window at night. Who would have believed that Hank had a clean shirt every day! Clean. Well turned out. More exactly: simplicity. (Duval, *Bukowski*: 124)

As Bukowski fictionalized the period shortly before and during the production of the movie, his novel *Hollywood* may be regarded as a work full of references to his private life at this exact moment. Although Bukowski himself may be expected to reflect upon the movie *Barfly*, in *Hollywood* he again employs the narrator figure of Henry Chinaski. Thus, within the framework of the novel *Hollywood* he uses this viewpoint to comment on the character of Henry Chinaski in the movie *The Dance of Jim Beam* starring Jack Bledsoe. Correspondingly, the real author Charles Bukowski, who actually created both the novel as well as the script for the movie *Barfly*, makes use of his alter ego's viewpoint to narrate the story about the feature film's conception and production. *Barfly* features the actor Mickey Rourke who plays Henry Chinaski and whom Bukowski calls Bledsoe in *Hollywood*.

One might therefore cautiously consult *Hollywood* and check the novel for autobiographical references relating to the period rendered as well as past events Bukowski may have used for sketching the movie's screenplay. However, one needs to be aware of the fact that Charles Bukowski did not only alter the names but also historical facts. He changes the production company's name from Cannon to Firepower, the actress Faye Dunaway

becomes Francine, and Mickey Rourke's name in *Hollywood* is altered to Jack Bledsoe.

On the very last page of the novel *Hollywood* the central character Chinaski reveals his future plans and projects as a writer and relates back to the narration's beginning:

> "What are you going to do now?" Sarah asked.
> "About what?"
> "I mean, the movie is really over"
> "Oh, yes."
> "What will you do?"
> "There are the horses."
> "Besides the horses."
> "Oh, hell, I'll write a novel about writing the screenplay and making the movie."
> "Sure, I guess you can do that"
> "I can, I think."
> "What are you going to call it?"
> "*Hollywood*."
> "*Hollywood*?"
> "Yes…"
> And this is it.
> (Bukowski, *Hollywood* 262-263)

Duval praises this self-reflexive ending and asserts that Bukowski by applying this kind of rhetorical device expresses his dislike and resentment towards the art form of motion pictures:

> And this is it. Fantastic ellipsis! Hollywood does not end with the celebration or success story that the achievement of the film *Barfly* represents but rather with that superior accomplishment that is the book in the reader's hands. This is certainly not unintentional. Hank distrusted the cinema, an art of illusion by definition, which he could only challenge. In Hollywood, he lets fly like small left and right hooks an endless list of cutting remarks at this specifically American art form, linked more than any other to the American way of life. The disabused blows the Buk inflicted on the world of cinema were in a way meant for the American dream in its entirety […] (Duval, *Bukowski*: 110)

Indeed, similar voices may be found in *Hollywood*, as the first-person narrator comments on the business: "It was a sickness: this great interest in a medium that relentlessly and consistently failed, time after time, to produce anything at all. People became so used to seeing shit on film that they no longer realized it *was* shit." (Bukowski, *Hollywood* 161)

Yet, in spite of this obvious aversion to cinema and the dream factory Hollywood, Bukowski – contrary to his intentions – became a celebrated and widely known star:

> […] before the release and success of […] *Barfly* in 1987, only a narrow circle of poetry lovers was aware of Buk's work […] With Mickey Rourke and Faye Dunaway in the leading roles, Bukowski suddenly became a well-known name to a lot of people who had never read any of his work. At the film's première, the rich and famous crowded in and discovered him. (Duval, *Bukowski*: 123)

Andrew J. Madigan poses the question as to whether the release of *Barfly* featuring the author's persona Henry Chinaski as well as the media frenzy that came with the movie had any consequences for the private person Henry Charles Bukowski. The critic formulates a rather unsatisfactory hypothesis: "The precise degree to which Bukowski was transformed and fooled by his persona, by fame, money and success, would be difficult to ascertain. However, his frank and humorous explication of these issues indicates balance and acceptance." (Madigan: 461)

Whether or not the said factors transformed Bukowski, they definitely had positive effects on his career. Charles Bukowski's name was more than before exposed to a broad public, which did by no means negatively affect his reputation as a novelist and poet. However, "*Barfly* confirmed a number of clichés about him. Rourke, who played Buk, conformed to the whole popular mythology of the 'drunken poet'" (Duval, *Bukowski*: 123)

1.2.1.3 Autobiographical Writing in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*

Having introduced the most salient autobiographical strategies in Bukowski's works of prose as well as in the screenplay of the movie *Barfly*, I will now turn to the centerpiece of this thesis' analysis, *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* (1969), and will survey the features of autobiographical writing.

The publication provides columns and articles written by Charles Bukowski for the underground newspaper *Open City*. "[…] beginning in May 1967, Hank became a local hero due to his weekly column, "Notes of a Dirty Old Man" written for […] an alternative paper founded by John Bryan." (Cherkovski: 187) The potentially misleading presentation of the title may relate to two similar, however not entirely congruent, literary works: Whereas the column's title indicated in quotation marks refers to Bukowski's weekly

column as such, published as part of the newspaper *Open City*, the title's formatting in italics denotes the selection of certain columns and hence its publication as a collection in 1969.

Moreover, since the individual columns in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* are presented without headings and are separated only by horizontal lines, it proved helpful to generate contextually unique titles for each column. In order to closely relate to the distinct articles the titles selected were literally and directly taken over from the individual columns' texts, either representing the stories' most crucial elements or characters.

The primary intention of this subchapter is to survey whether and in how far Bukowski builds his columns on his personal life. Furthermore, it shall be examined if Bukowski's persona Henry Chinaski, that presumably was introduced 1965, is superficially retraceable in one or more of the texts. I will therefore focus on the most prominent columns with respect to the angle presented in order to exemplify the autobiographical features.

Only the most illustrative of the forty-two columns will be drawn on to relate to the phenomenon of autobiographical writing. Some of the remaining texts may be presented in one of the subsequent chapters, in which the columns' style and motifs will be analyzed. Due to this focus on a significant selection of columns, some of the stories may be mentioned only in passing. Nevertheless, in order to provide an adequately comprehensive and thorough overview, readers may refer to the table featured on the following pages.

Each single column has been examined according to eight categories: First, as mentioned above, the columns were given a suitable and distinct title in order to unambiguously refer to the article currently under scrutiny. Second, page numbers of the edition used are indicated. Third, the parameter applied will give insight into the predominant narrative mode of the column in question. Fourth, as many of Bukowski's works consist of and are centered on dialogue sections, the question was posed whether the columns contained direct speech. The fifth and sixth categories feature the narrator figure's name (if the point of view is that of a first-person limited narrator) as well as the names of the major characters, respectively. Finally, the prevalent tense of the individual narrations has been monitored and may along with the major settings in terms of place and time be found in the two rightmost boxes.

Column / Chapter	Page	Narrative Mode	Dialogue	Narrator Figure(s)	Major Character(s)	Tense	Setting
"Foreword"	5-7	1st P. Ltd.	NO	Charles Bukowski	Charles Bukowski, John Bryan	PRS / PST	Two Story House (Publishing House), Melrose Ave, Los Angeles, 1968/69
1. "The Elf"	9-13	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Mr. Bukowski	Mr. Bukowski, The Elf, Landlady, Filipino / Flip Monkey	PST	Bukowski's Room, Card Game, Cab / Bus Depot, New Orleans
2. "Paper Wings"	13-20	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Tim Bailey	Tim Bailey, Henderson, Bull Kronkite, Bugsy Malone, Jimmy Crispin, Helena	PST	Office, Stadium, Jail / Cell
3. "The Lather & the Brush"	20-23	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Charles Bukowski	Charles Bukowski, 2 Guys (Harry & Unknown), Big Jack, Maggy	PST	Party / Club, Bathroom, Standard Station, Bukowski's Home, Pasadena
4. "Neal Cassady"	23-27	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Bukowski	Bukowski, Neal Cassady, John Bryan, Joan	PST	Office, Car, Sunset Blvd, Hollywood Blvd, Carlton Way, Bryan's, Los Angeles, 1968
5. "Jack"	27-32	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Bukowski	Bukowski, Jack, Bird, Bird's Wife	PRS / PST	Venice Canal, Car, Bird's Place, Los Angeles

6. “New York”	32-37	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Not Specified	“I”, Two Old Guys	PST	New York City, Times Square, The Village, Yankee Stadium, Father Divine’s Mission, Subway, Kansas City
7. “The Olympic”	37-40	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Not Specified	“I”, Jane, Some Woman	PST	The Olympic, Bedroom, Overhead Lighting Factory
8. “At the Racetrack”	40-45	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Not Specified	“I”, Denver Danny, Crowd	PRS / PST	Race Track, Santa Anita, March 22 / 23, Los Angeles, 1968
9. “R. Kennedy”	45-51	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Not Specified	“I”, Guy in Army Fatigues, Jean	PRS / PST	Santa Fe, Exposition Blvd, Century Blvd, June 6 / 7, Los Angeles, 1968
10. “Moss & Anderson”	51-57	3rd P. Omn.	YES		Moss, Anderson	PST	Moss’ Apartment, Saturday Evening
11. “Mr. McCuller”	57-62	3rd P. Omn.	YES		Freddie McCuller, Daughter, Mama, Marty	PST	Mr. McCuller’s Apartment
12. “Revolution”	62-70	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Bukowski	Bukowski	PRS	Election USA, 1968: Humphrey / Nixon
13. “Mr. Business Man”	70-75	3rd P. Ltd.	YES		“He”	PST	Skid Row Room, Sunset Blvd, Los Angeles

14. “The Tailor”	75-79	3rd P. Omn.	YES		Jack (The Tailor), Harry	PST	Jack’s Place
15. “L.”	79-85	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Bukowski	Bukowski, Hilliard Jensen, L., Marlowe	PST	Skid Row, L’s Place, Pico Blvd, Los Angeles
16. “Red”	85-88	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Bukowski	Bukowski, Red	PST	Coffee Table, Near Normandie Ave / Vermont Ave
17. “Gold With Green Polka Dots”	88-94	3rd P. Omn.	YES		Henry Beckett, Gloria, Austrian Doctor, Cops	PST	Monday Morning, Beckett’s Apartment, Doctor’s Office, Freeway
18. “Suicide”	94-98	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Bukowski	Bukowski / Ski, Little Thing (Girl), Dock Workers, Lou	PRS / PST	N Mariposa Ave, Los Angeles, Frisco Docks, Lou’s Place
19. “Pink Panties”	98-104	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Bukowski	Bukowski, The Boys, Pink Panties (Woman)		Last Monday, Place With Lights On, Hollywood Blvd, Los Angeles, Bukowski’s Place
20. “What Time Is It Now?”	104-108	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Not Specified	“I”, “She”	PRS	Not Specified
21. “Philly”	108-112	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Charles Bukowski	Charles Bukowski, Jim, The Boss’s Girl, Bartender, Two Big Guys, Doctor, Nurse	PST	Philly, Bar, Near 16th Street / Fairmount Ave, Hospital, Gangster Bar

22. “The Funeral”	112-115	3rd P. Omn. / 1st P. Ltd.	NO	Henry Charles	Henry (Charles), Light Yellow Girl, Shirley, Maggy, Harry, Harry’s Wife	PRS / PST	Funeral, Racetrack, Girl’s Apartment, Inherited House, Jail, Church
23. “The Cardboard Shack”	115-121	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Not Specified	“I”, Old Woman	PST	Atlanta, Cardboard Shack
24. “Barbara”	121-129	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Bukowski	Bukowski, Barbara, Papa, José, The Art Instructor, The Turk	PRS/ PST	Room, N Kingsley Dr, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Small House, Texas
25. “Unsigned”	130-138	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Charles Bukowski, Unsigned	Charles Bukowski, Foreman, Whore, Madam-Lesbian	PRS / PST	USA, WWII, Lady’s Dress Shop, Bar / West of a Downtown Tunnel, Bukowski’s Room, Near Bunker Hill, Los Angeles
26. “Mailbox”	138-138	1st P. Ltd.	NO	Not Specified, Meggy	“I”, Bongo	PRS / PST	Rented Porch
27. “Meggy”	138-145	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Mr. B, Meggy	Mr. B, Meggy, Bongo	PRS / PST	Mr. B’s Place, Los Angeles
28. “Baldy M.”	145-149	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Bukowski	Bukowski / Hank, Baldy M. / William, Mrs. M.	PST	Bukowski’s Room, Party

29. “The 300 Pound Whore”	149-153	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Hank / Mr. Bukowski	Hank / Mr. Bukowski, The 300 Pound Whore / Ann, The Landlady, Lila	PST	Rooming House, Philadelphia
30. “Mary”	154-159	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Hank / Mr. Bukowski, E. R.	Hank / Mr. Bukowski, Mary, Eddie, The Duchess	PRS / PST	Apartment, 4th Floor, Outside
31. “New Orleans”	159-160	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Not Specified	“I”, Italian, Frenchman, Sunderson	PST	New Orleans, French Quarter, Sidewalk, Bar
32. “Gas Station”	161-165	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Hank / Bukowski	Hank / Bukowski, Sunderson, Elsie, Pinelli, Marty	PST	Gas Station, New Orleans
33. “Shirt Cardboards”	165-166	1st P. Ltd.	NO	Not Specified	“I”	PRS	During Two Day Drunks
34. “Lou”	166-170	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Not Specified	“I”, Lou, Blond Landlady, Fatso	PRS / PST	Room, Bar (Molino’s), Alvarado Street
35. “Steam Bath”	170-171	3rd P. Ltd. / 1st P. Ltd.	YES	Not Specified	“He”, “I”, Lawyer	PST	Steam Bath, Kitchen
36. “Maxfield”	172-175	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Charles Bukowski	Charles Bukowski, Maxfield, Steinfelt	PST	Laundry (Shoot), Upstairs

37. “Stirkoff”	176-180	Dramatic Mode	YES		Stirkoff, King, Guard	PRS	Not Specified
38. “The Stripper”	180-187	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Not Specified	“I”, Miriam, Renie, Little Fat Housewife	PST	Little Shack, Renie’s House, Apartment on Kingsley Dr, Los Angeles
39. “The Frozen Man I”	187-193	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Henry	Henry, Father / Henry, Mother	PRS / PST	Childhood, Adolescence 1937, Parents’ House
40. “The Frozen Man II”	193-197	1st P. Ltd.	NO	Not Specified	“I”, Jimmy Hadford, Poet Friend in London	PRS / PST	Los Angeles High School 1936 / 1937 / 1938
41. “The Frozen Man III”	197-197	1st P. Ltd.	NO	Not Specified	“I”, Friend From London, Marina, Old Men	PRS	Plaza Between Terminal Annex / Union Station, Los Angeles
42. “The Demon”	198-204	1st P. Ltd.	YES	Hank / Mr. Radowski	Hank / Mr. Radowski, Felica, Yevonna, Psychiatrist, Final Benson	PST	Bookstore / Bar, House, Yevonna’s Mother’s Place in Glendale, Motel in Los Angeles, Hollywood Blvd and Normandie Ave, Vermont Ave, Hotel Near Vine Street

Figure 6: *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*: Overview.

* * * * *

> In “Notes” Hank treated his readers to slices of autobiography, a portrait of himself as the eternal outsider, or as he puts it “the frozen man”. He wrote freewheeling essays, like the one quoted above, in which he presents his viewpoint on society and politics. Young people in the late sixties could empathize with the seventeen-year-old Bukowski battling it out with his father after coming home drunk one night or participating in an ROTC competition that he won without really wanting to. Readers of the alternative press could hardly resist reading Hank’s portrayal of himself as the ultimate rebel against authority of any kind [...] (Cherkovski: 189)

In the above quote Neeli Cherkovski stresses the fact that ardent readers of the underground newspaper were presented episodes taken from Henry Charles Bukowski’s personal life and history. Although one has to concur that especially the columns on the author’s “frozen man stance” seem to go with Bukowski’s biography, other sections of *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* appear less compellingly autobiographical. The superficially evident autobiographical strands in three of the forty-two columns provided (examples 39-41) will thus be looked at in great detail before digging up less obvious links to Bukowski’s biography.

The chapters “The Frozen Man I”, “The Frozen Man II”, and “The Frozen Man III” are all narrated from the viewpoint of a first-person limited narrator. Whereas the first and also the most extensive of the three columns reveals the narrator’s name as Henry, the points of view in “The Frozen Man II” and “The Frozen Man III” are expressed through the use of the first-person singular pronoun. The narrator, Henry, switches from present to past tense in the fourth paragraph as he reminisces about the first instances of the “frozen man stance”. The initial three and a half paragraphs represent an account of the “frozen man stance” in general with reference to one of the narrator’s best poet friends. The first-person narrator introduces the topic of the “frozen man” by comparing the stance to an “[…] Immobility – a weakness of movement, an increasing lack of care and wonder; I think of it as The Frozen Man Stance, although it hardly is a STANCE at all, but it might allow us to view the corpse with SOME humor.” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 187) He feels that this sort of stance may have been experienced by all men on earth and that it helps in overcoming certain negative emotions: “otherwise the blackness would be too

much. all men are afflicted, at times, with the Frozen Man Stance […]" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 187)

While the first explanatory section may be considered a commentary, the remainder of this column is clearly presented as a work of autobiographical fiction as the narrator recounts his childhood and adolescence. He claims to virtually have been born into the above-mentioned figurative state of a "frozen man":

> […] I was BORN into the Frozen Man Stance. one of the instances that I can recall is once when my father, a cowardly vicious brute of a man, was beating me in the bathroom with this long leather razor strap, or stop, as some call it. he beat me quite regularly; I was born out of wedlock and I believe he blamed me for all his troubles. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 188)

This representation ties in with the biographical accounts drawn on in the first chapter of this thesis. Henry Charles Bukowski's father, whose name was also Henry, appears to have been essentially pedantic about the way his son was to mow the lawn and used his alleged failure as an excuse to constantly beat Henry, Jr.:

> for some time say before I reached the age of seven or eight, he almost imposed this sense of guilt upon me. for I could not understand why he beat me. he would search very hard for a reason. I had to cut his grass once a week, once lengthwise, then crosswise, then trim the edges with shears, and if I missed ONE blade of grass anywhere on the front or back lawns he beat the living shit-hell out of me. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 188)

Despite the repeated beatings, the seven-year-old Bukowski did not want to show emotions: "I didn't want to cry." He therefore asserts that "it was only the first RECOGNIZABLE appearance of The Frozen Boy." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 189)

> when I got into a fist fight with one of my friends I could never get angry. I only fought as a matter of course. no other out. I was Frozen. I could not understand the ANGER and the FURY of my opponent. I would find myself studying his face and his manner, puzzled with it, rather than trying to beat him. every now and then I would land a good one to see if I could do it, then I would fall back into lethargy. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 190)

The retrospective rendition of Henry Charles Bukowski's childhood sticks with many factual elements of his life. He, for example, mentions his father's

name, “Henry”, and describes his mother as “a fine German lady”. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 189)

Furthermore, the column offers insight into the story’s settings. As the narrator recalls another episode of his adolescence, he states: “[…] I was still living with my parents and it was depression times, 1937, impossible for a 17 year old to get a job.” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 190) Considering Bukowski’s year of birth in 1920, he very likely provides a rather factual account of himself as a teenager.

The extensive exploration of alcohol at this quite young age foreshadows a crucial and ever-recurring motif and theme in Bukowski’s writing:

> I began drinking about 17 with older boys who roamed the streets and robbed gas stations and liquor stores. they thought my disgust with everything was a lack of fear, that my non-complaining was a soulful bravado. I was popular and I didn’t care whether I was popular or not. I was Frozen. they set great quantities of whiskey and beer and wine in front of me. I drank them down. nothing could get me drunk, really and finally drunk. the others would be falling to the floor, fighting, singing, swaggering, and I would sit quietly at the table draining another glass, feeling less and less with them, feeling lost, but not painfully so. just electric light and sound and bodies and little more. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 190)

When Bukowski came home drunk one night, his furious father “[…] kept pressing [his son’s] head down, down toward [his] lake of vomit upon *The Tree of Life*.” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 191) Henry, Jr. didn’t see the point of being pushed into his own vomit and hit his father – not out of anger, as he claims:

> […] I caught him with a full flowing and majestic uppercut, I caught him hard and full and very accurate upon the chin and he fell backwards heavily and clumsily, a whole brutal empire shot to shit, finally, and he fell into his sofa, bang, spread-armed, eyes like the eyes of a doped animal. animal? the dog had turned, I walked toward the couch, waiting for him to get up. he didn’t get up. he just kept staring up at me. he would not get up. for all his fury, my father had been a coward. I was not surprised. then I thought, since my father is a coward, I am probably a coward. but being a Frozen Man, there wasn’t any pain in this. it didn’t matter, even as my mother began clawing my face with her fingernails […] (Bukowski, *Notes*: 192)

The second of three “frozen man” stories ties in directly with the preceding chapter. The unnamed first-person limited narrator starts off by claiming that certain women by scratching his face have deformed his physical appearance, as did his mother:

> I have often let shackjobs and whores slash my face as my mother did, and this is a most bad habit; being frozen does not mean let the jackals take control, and, besides, children and old women, and strong men, now wince, as they see my face. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 193)

However bad his injuries from those scrapes may have been, it seems more likely that Bukowski's scars are a result of the severe form of acne he suffered from during his childhood. It seems possible that the expression of slashing his face may have been employed to denote the procedure of drilling Bukowski's pus-filled acne. Interestingly, "The Frozen Man II" continues with an episode dealing with the exact kind of motif. The narrator remembers his high school years and gives insight into his motivations to join the so-called Reserve Officers' Training Corps program. Not only does Bukowski take up the motif from the preceding column, he also continues his thoughts on the "frozen man stance" and backs them up with instances occurring earlier in his life. Like "The Frozen Man I" the second part appears highly autobiographical as they both render events also included in the biographies of the most credible Bukowski biographers. After a short introduction featuring the statement on these occurrences, Bukowski continues with another frozen man tale:

> […] I was in Los Angeles High School, say 1938? 1937?, around there? 1936? I joined the ROTC without any interest in army doings in the least. I had these huge grapefruit boils, immense, slugging out all over me and a boy had one of two choices, at this time, either join the ROTC or take gym. well, really all the decent good guys were in gym. the shits and freaks and madmen, like me, the Frozen Men, what there were of them, were taking ROTC. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 193)

The reason for Bukowski opting for ROTC is simple: In an army uniform his classmates could not see his acne. At least most of his boils were covered by the army fatigue, whereas a tracksuit would not have offered such disguise. However, the narrator proceeds by stating that he was quite indifferent about his highly impure skin, but to his peers it mattered and he therefore spared them the look. (see Bukowski, *Notes*: 193-194)

Both Bukowski participating in the ROTC program and him attending high school vaguely at the indicated period of time, conform to the author's vita. Subsequently, the first-person narrator in "The Frozen Man I" carries on with a rather questionable episode, taking place later in his life:

> "[…] I was living in Philadelphia as a 4-F and I screwed a 300-pound whore who looked like a giant pig and she broke all four legs of my bed, bouncing and sweating and farting during the action. I might go on and on, giving incidents within the Frozen Man context. it is not quite true that I never CARE or that I never anger or that I never hate or that I never hope or that I never have joy. I do not mean to infer that I am ENTIRELY without passions or feelings or whatever […]" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 195-196)

Although the narrator's account seems relatively incredible as far as this tale is concerned, the fact that Bukowski uses the same sujet in another column in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* may yield further insights whether or not the presented episode may be regarded as autobiographical.

Right in the beginning the narrator offers a rather concise description of the character in question:

> the night the 300 pound whore came in I was ready. nobody else was ready but I was ready. she was god awful fat all around and not very clean either. where the hell she had come from and what she wanted and how she had survived up to now was a question you could ask about any human being, and so we drank […] (Bukowski, *Notes*: 149)

In "The 300 Pound Whore" Bukowski uses the narrative mode of a first-person limited narrator and, as the choice of the past tense suggests, the story is told in retrospect. The character whose point of view one takes on is called "Hank" (151) or "Mr. Bukowski" (152). (Bukowski, *Notes*) However misleading Bukowski's autobiographical strategies may be, on the basis of the names used, one may infer that there might at least be some truth behind the story: In the early 1940s Bukowski spent some time in Philadelphia, the place both the columns are set at.

After having had wild sex with overweight Ann, in the morning Hank discovers the remnants of what has been his bed: "in the morning when we awakened, I found that the bed was flat on the floor. we had broken all four legs down to the floor in our crazy freakfuck." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 151) Hank's rooming house's landlady has the bed repaired by the colored maid Lila. Considering the period Bukowski appears to have lived in Philadelphia and his accordingly young age – he must have been in his early twenties – the superficially questionable story seems to have been based upon some actual events and facts. The overall setting as well as the presentation of the

rooming house and its smug landlady may be listed amongst the most accurate elements in this respect:

> the landlady stood in the doorway and looked at me. 'please try to behave yourself Mr. Bukowski. we have only the finest tenants in here.' then she slowly closed the door and then it was shut. I looked at the bed, it was made of steel. then I undressed and climbed naked between the new sheets of my new bed, Philadelphia, one p.m. in the afternoon […] (Bukowski, *Notes*: 153)

Furthermore, Hank's situation of unemployment and unsuccessful ambitions as a writer tie in with his alleged constitution during the years of travel as a young grown-up: "'I'm sorry,' I said, 'I can't pay for that bed. I lost my job as a busboy and all my stories are coming back from *Harpers* and the *Atlantic Monthly*." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 152)

Having looked into this cross-reference, I would now like to return to the "The Frozen Man II" that Bukowski closes by citing a letter from a poet friend in London. The third part in this mini-trilogy, "The Frozen Man III", directly continues where Bukowski had stopped in the preceding column. The third, last, and shortest part once again draws on the poet friend who shares the knowledge of the "frozen man stance" with Charles Bukowski. Instead of a consistent story line featuring another retrospective instance of the said stance, the author briefly comments on his previously drawn inferences. Once more, the narrator's name is not given, he, however, makes an unambiguous reference to Bukowski's girl child Marina:

> […] only Marina, my small girlchild, can bring light at the highest noon, for the sun will not speak. and up in the plaza between the terminal annex and the union station the old men sit in a circle and watch the pigeons, sit in a circle for hours and watch the pigeons and watch nothing. frozen, but I could cry. and at night we will sweat through senseless dreams. there's only one place to go. (Bukowski, *Notes*:197)

Alongside the reference to his only daughter, who must have been an infant by the time of the text's production, Bukowski refers to a plaza between Terminal Annex and Union Station, Los Angeles. He thus unmistakably alludes to a locally retraceable spot in the place he was living in when writing for the underground newspaper *Open City*.

The setting of the bar in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* often reveals details of the whereabouts of Henry Charles Bukowski. Although in the latter part of

the column “Philly” the border between fact and fiction increasingly blurs, the story’s initial section may, both exemplarily and explicitly, represent Bukowski’s lifestyle when living in Philadelphia in the early 1940s:

> in Philly, I had the end seat and ran errands for sandwiches, so forth. Jim, the early bartender, would let me in at 5:30 a.m. while he was mopping and I’d have free drinks until the crowd came in at 7:00 a.m. I’d close the bar at 2:00 a.m., which didn’t give me much time for sleep. but I wasn’t doing much those days – sleeping, eating or anything else. the bar was so run down, old, smelled of urine and death, that when a whore came in to make a catch we felt particularly honored. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 108)

The Bukowski biographer Neeli Cherkovski detects that the author landed for a second time in Philadelphia in 1946 and fulfilled the above-mentioned duties in a local bar. Furthermore, Bukowski is assumed to have had his first minor successes at this time publishing one of his stories with *Portfolio*, a literary magazine. (see Cherkovski: 82).

A consistent rendition of the event may as well be found in the column “Philly”:

> about this time a short story of mine appeared in *PORTFOLIO III*, along with Henry Miller, Lorca, Sartre, many others. the Portfolio sold for $10. a huge thing of separate pages, each printed in different type on colored expensive paper, and drawings mad with exploration. Caresse Crosby the editoress wrote me: “a most unusual and wonderful story. who ARE you?” and I wrote back, “Dear Mrs. Crosby: I don’t know who I am. sincerely yours, Charles Bukowski.” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 108)

Howard Sounes’ biographical account complies with the one Cherkovski gives and accordingly unveils further details on the published story’s title and year: “Bukowski had submitted a short story, *20 Tanks from Kasseldown*, to Crosby’s *Portfolio* magazine. […] The story was accepted for publication in the third issue of *Portfolio* which appeared in the spring of 1946.” (Sounes, *Charles*: 25)

Both the biographies by Sounes and Cherkovski and the column “Philly” published in *Open City* approximately twenty years after the actual event contain the scene illustrating the correspondence between the magazine’s editor Caresse Crosby and the author Charles Bukowski. Not only does the plain answer give insight into his mental constitution as well as his lack of self-confidence and proper personality, but it also has been modeled on in the movie *Barfly*.



Figure 7: Professional Writing: Chinaski and Tully.

In *Barfly* the editor Tully comes into a bar in the hope of encountering the author Henry Chinaski. Although the dialogue has been adapted to the screen and in this scene takes place in person instead of via mail, the conversation's content and the characters' constellation remains the same:

> TULLY
> Pardon me, sir, but … are you the writer?
>
> Henry smiles, doesn't answer, pushing her gently on the shoulder, going around her toward the door.
>
> TULLY
> Who are you?
>
> HENRY
> The eternal question and the eternal answer: I don't know.
> (Bukowski, *Barfly*: 67)

Hence, the parallels between Charles Bukowski and Henry Chinaski become apparent once more. Whereas Bukowski functions as the major character and the first-person limited narrator in "Philly", in the above excerpt from *Barfly* Henry Chinaski participates in an almost entirely identical conversation with the editor.

In “Philly” the reader subsequently learns that the protagonist Bukowski intends to visit a bar everybody warns him of. Rumors have it that the bar down the street is a gangster bar: “I was sitting there one day when I asked somebody, ‘how come nobody never ever goes into the bar down the street?’ and I was told, ‘that’s a gangster bar. you go in there, you get killed.’ I finished my drink, got up and walked on down.” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 109)

As Bukowski enters the bar, he notices an unfamiliar atmosphere. Along with the place’s cleanliness the protagonist mentions a bunch of big sullen guys sitting about in the silence. Not only does the bar’s depiction seem to have been aligned to the portrayal in “Philly”, but also does Chinaski’s encounter with Wanda in *Barfly* comply with the column’s plot: “I noticed a young lady sitting alone. she looked lonely. she looked good, she looked good and lonely. I had some money. I don’t remember where I got the money. I took my drink and went down and sat next to her.” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 109)



Figure 8: Fistfights: Chinaski vs. Eddie.

If *Barfly*’s screenplay and “Philly” are considered to complement each other, the movie, for example, reveals further details on how and where Chinaski probably has gotten the money from. Having defeated the antagonistic bartender figure Eddie in one of the numerous fistfights in the backyard, Jim,

a bystander who has made bets, catches up with Henry as he leaves the bar after his victory:

> JIM
> Hey, *Henry*!
>
> Henry stops.
> Henry turns. Jim enters close, walks up. He has some money in his hand.
>
> JIM
> Go on, take it. You've earned your cut. All I did was watch.
>
> Henry stares at the money in Jim's outstretched hand.
>
> HENRY
> I can't take the money, Jim. Suppose I had lost?
>
> JIM
> You can buy a lot of drinks with this, slugger…
>
> HENRY
> Since you put it that way, well, I'll take a couple of Scotch-and-waters.
>
> Henry picks three dollars out of Jim's palm.
> (Bukowski, *Barfly*: 44-45)

Whereas in "Philly" the major character Bukowski is told not to enter the gangster bar down the street, in *Barfly* the screenplay author Charles Bukowski does not provide any hints on the night club's clientele. Nevertheless, the stage directions of the scene Chinaski entering suggest a similarly somber and muted atmosphere:

> INTERIOR – "KENMORE" – NIGHT
>
> HIGH ANGLE ON BAR FACING ENTRANCE BEHIND
> WANDA IN SLIGHT PROFILE
>
> There are three of four men at the bar and one woman, WANDA. She sits on the corner, far away from the others. The other men don't sit near her or speak to her. Henry enters and sits down directly across the room from Wanda, at the opposite end of the bar.
> (Bukowski, *Barfly*: 45)

Despite the different directions the two plots follow afterwards, another detail catches the reader's and spectator's attention. In "Philly" one of the big guys introduces himself to Bukowski and warns him: "'that's the boss's girl. keep messing and you're going to get yourself killed.' that's what he said: 'killed.' it was just like a movie." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 110)

Apart from the cross-reference to the crime story's and film noir's genre conventions, the author Charles Bukowski marks the woman as the gangster boss's girl, similar to the way he characterizes her in the screenplay for *Barfly*. Wilbur, a character appearing only via telephone calls, pays for Wanda's booze at a liquor store and in return repeatedly demands her to visit. While Wanda and Chinaski hide from the police in a cornfield, Henry turns curious and asks:

> HENRY
> Who's Wilbur? Is he your pimp?
>
> WANDA
> (still yanking at the corn)
> I'm no hooker. I don't have a pimp.
>
> HENRY
> Who's the guy?
>
> WANDA
> (still yanking)
> Wilbur's just an old guy who cares for me.
> (Bukowski, *Barfly*: 51-52)

Although not explicitly stated, Wanda in *Barfly* may be regarded as being as dependent on Wilbur as the boss's girl Bukowski meets in the gangster bar in "Philly". As the first-person narrator Bukowski returns to his favorite night club, he defines the bar's geographical position in Philadelphia in a side remark:

> the scotch and water arrived. I sat down at the end stool. the dirty sunshine around 16th and Fairmount worked its way in. my day had begun. "the rumors," I began, "about it being a very tough joint are definitely true…" then I told them roughly about what I have told you. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 112)

At the end of the column Bukowski notes that he "[…] left Philly not much later looking for more trouble or whatever I was looking for." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 112)

Either did Charles Bukowski simply find some of the episodes to his liking, or the characters, stories, and elements perpetually recurring in his works indicate that they bear autobiographical significance. In "Barbara", a column included in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, Charles Bukowski recounts a period in his life when he had been married to Barbara Frye. Not only did Bukowski model the female character in "Barbara" upon his former wife, but

he also portrays the events of their short marital intermezzo as similar to the way he would render them a couple of years later in his first novel *Post Office*.

Additionally, excessive drinking had caused a rather precarious health condition and Bukowski found himself hospitalized in Los Angeles:

> I'm just sitting in a room on N. Kingsley Dr., out of the hospital with hemorrhages, stomach and ass, my blood all over the country general hospital, and they telling me after nine pints of blood and nine pints of glucose, "one more drink and you're dead." this is no way to talk to a suicide head. I sat in that room every night surrounded by full and empty beer cans, writing poems, smoking cheap cigars, very white and weak, waiting for the final wall to fall. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 121)

Bukowski biographer Howard Sounes identifies 1955 as the year when the above-cited events must have taken place. At this point, Charles Bukowski was working at the post office. (cf. Sounes, *Charles*: 33)

Similar to the account given in his novel *Post Office*, Bukowski as a first-person limited narrator in retrospect describes his future wife's physical appearance in "Barbara":

> […] I was once married to a woman, a girl, who was coming into a million dollars, all somebody had to do was die, but there isn't any smog in that part of Texas and they eat well, drink the finest booze and go to the doctor for a scratch or a sneeze. she was a nympho, there was something wrong with her neck, and to get it down close and fast, it was my poems, she thought my poems were the greatest thing since Black, no I mean Blake – Blake. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 121)

It seems to have been clear from the beginning that the marriage they arranged over their exchange of letters was going to be not of much avail: "I kept hearing this: 'no man will ever marry me, no man will ever marry me, no man will ever marry me.' so I did it while drunk one night: 'for Christ's sake I'll marry you! relax.'" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 121-122)

So it was that one day Barbara was to meet Bukowski in Los Angeles and drive straight down to Vegas to exchange their vows:

> well, she came out on a bus, mama didn't know, papa didn't know, grandpa didn't know, they were on vacation somewhere and she had a little change. I met her at the bus station, that is, I sat there drunk waiting for a woman I had never seen to get off a bus, waiting for a woman I had never spoken to, to marry. I was insane. I didn't belong on the streets. the call came. it was her bus. I watched the people swing through the door. and here comes this cute sexy blonde on high heels, all ass and bounce and young, young, 23, and the neck wasn't bad at all. could that be the one? maybe she'd missed her bus? I walked up.
> "are you Barbara?" I asked.

> "yes," she said, "I guess you're Bukowski?"
> "I guess I am. should we go?"
> "alright."
> […] I drove all the way to Vegas and back, we were married. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 122)

Later in the story Bukowski depicts the married couple moving to small-town Texas to live with the wife's family: "I quit my job as a shipping clerk and we took the bus to Texas." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 123) However, they decide to move back to Los Angeles, where Barbara finds a job with the police department. They begin taking art classes and although Bukowski only very reluctantly accompanies his wife to those classes, the instructor praises his paintings, a fact that drives Barbara increasingly furious.

Preparing Chinese snails for dinner, Bukowski and Barbara get into a fight over a colleague of hers. "I wasn't surprised when one morning a couple of days later somebody knocked on my door, her door, and served me with a divorce summons." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 128)

Other than the bulk of the story, the column's conclusion appears rather fictitious as Bukowski claims Barbara to have later traveled "[…] to Alaska and married an Eskimo, a Japanese fisherman […]". (Bukowski, *Notes*: 129)

In the column's frame narration, wherein the narrator correspondently switches back to present tense, Bukowski retrospectively ponders whether it was the art classes, the Turk, or the snail dinner that caused the marriage's annulment: "I don't know if it was those Chinese snails with the little round assholes or if it was the Turk with the purple stickpin or if it was simply that I had to go to bed with her seven or eight or nine or eleven times a week […]" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 121)

* * * * *

The column "Suicide" represents some of Bukowski's thoughts on killing himself. The first-person limited narrator's story starts off as follows:

> everywhere we hang onto the walls of the world, and in the darkest part of hangover, I think of two friends who advise me on various methods of suicide. one of my friends has razor scars running along his left arm. the other jams pills by the bucketloads into

> a mass of black beard. they both write poetry. there is something about writing poetry that brings a man close to the cliff's edge. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 94-95)

Bukowski elaborates on the idea of suicide, gives insight into a poet's constitution, and refers to a concrete instance: "I think that it was in 1954 that I last tried suicide. I was living on the third floor in an apartment building on N. Mariposa Avenue. I closed all the windows and turned on the oven and the gas jets, without lighting them, of course." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 95)

Hence, it may be argued that only a year before Bukowski met his first wife Barbara he last tried suicide and therefore seems to have been in a much worse condition. A few years before the above-mentioned instance, as the narrator presents in "Suicide", his psychological condition may have been even worse:

> a few years earlier I awakened from a week's drunk and pretty determined to kill myself. I was shacked with a sweet little thing at the time and not working. the money was gone, the rent was due, and even if I had been able to find a flunk's job of some sort, that would have only seemed like another kind of death. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 95)

And as Bukowski contemplates suicide and looks back upon the past events his phone rings: "[…] 'watcha doin' now, ya still writing?' he asks. 'yeah, right now I'm writing about suicide.' 'suicide?' 'yeah, I have this column, kind of , in a new paper that's starting, OPEN CITY.' 'they'll print the suicide thing?' 'I dunno.' (Bukowski, *Notes*: 98)

The cited examples are evidence of a highly ambitionless, world-weary, and desperate character. Bukowski may have transferred those experiences to the persona figure of Henry Chinaski. In the screenplay for *Barfly* he writes the following about the movie's protagonist:

> HENRY CHINASKI:
> Late twenties. Already life-worn. More weary than angry. Face formed by the streets, poverty. If he is mad, then it is the madness of the disowned who lack interest in the standard way of life. Rather than enter the treadmill of society he has chosen the bottle and the bars. There seems little for him to do but sit and wait, but he is not sure what the waiting means. Drinking seems a way to hide. He fears the life of the dull and the damned, and the eight-hour jobs they hate yet must fight to keep. He thinks of suicide, he has tried suicide several times and failed, but he's not even a good suicide. He is more sad than bitter, and like most desperate men he has some humor. He attempts to remain hidden behind his street face but now and then kindness and gentleness come to the surface, though rarely. (Bukowski, *Barfly*: 7)

Although the character was officially introduced in 1965 and thus was apparently invented before Bukowski started his column in *Open City*, none of the articles contained in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* features the character of Henry Chinaski. Notwithstanding the fact that Chinaski is not explicitly mentioned, many traces of and links to the character are detectable under the surface – as pointed out in the above sections.

In order to flesh out the figure of Chinaski even more, one may delve into the columns' motifs as well as the most prominent themes in the works of Bukowski's. As they appear to be tightly linked to the stories' characters, the recurrent motifs may reveal further details concerning Henry Chinaski.

1.2.2 Motifs

> He moves slowly for a young man, rather stiff-shouldered, but at times his movements show a sudden swiftness and grace. It is as if he were saving himself for some magic moment, some magic time. Meanwhile, he drinks and drinks and drinks. (Bukowski, *Barfly*: 7)

Longing for his mediocre life to improve Henry Chinaski clings to whatever there is – mostly to alcohol. Without any hopes and aspirations, leading a rather pathetic life, Henry incessantly engages in fistfights, has sex with innumerable women, and keeps writing poems and short stories in the hope for change. Whereas none of the forty-two columns compiled in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* names Chinaski as a character, almost all articles feature at least one of the following motifs: alcohol, women and sex, physical violence, or writing and literature.

Due to the columns' brevity it proved especially difficult to precisely define whether certain elements may be counted as full-fledged motifs or not. The following table shall thus be considered to rather give a possible overview than to definitely determine. It shall be drawn upon in exemplifying certain motifs as well as express the respective motif's importance in terms of quantity.

Column / Chapter	Alcohol	Women / Sex	Physical Violence	Writing / Literature
“Foreword”	YES	NO	NO	YES
1. “The Elf”	YES	YES	YES	YES
2. “Paper Wings”	YES	YES	YES	NO
3. “The Lather & the Brush”	YES	YES	NO	YES
4. “Neal Cassady”	YES	NO	NO	YES
5. “Jack”	YES	YES	NO	YES
6. “New York”	YES	NO	NO	NO
7. “The Olympic”	YES	YES	YES	YES
8. “At the Racetrack”	NO	YES	YES	YES
9. “R. Kennedy”	YES	NO	YES	YES
10. “Moss & Anderson”	YES	YES	NO	NO
11. “Mr. McCuller”	YES	NO	YES	NO
12. “Revolution”	YES	YES	NO	YES
13. “Mr. Business Man”	YES	YES	NO	YES
14. “The Tailor”	NO	YES	YES	NO
15. “L.”	YES	NO	YES	YES
16. “Red”	YES	YES	YES	YES
17. “Gold With Green Polka Dots”	NO	YES	YES	NO
18. “Suicide”	YES	YES	YES	YES
19. “Pink Panties”	YES	YES	NO	YES
20. “What Time Is It Now?”	YES	NO	NO	NO
21. “Philly”	YES	YES	YES	YES
22. “The Funeral”	YES	YES	YES	NO
23. “The Cardboard Shack”	NO	NO	NO	YES
24. “Barbara”	YES	YES	NO	YES
25. “Unsigned”	YES	YES	NO	YES
26. “Mailbox”	NO	NO	NO	YES
27. “Meggy”	YES	YES	NO	YES
28. “Baldy M.”	YES	YES	NO	NO
29. “The 300 Pound Whore”	YES	YES	NO	YES
30. “Mary”	YES	YES	YES	YES
31. “New Orleans”	YES	NO	YES	NO
32. “Gas Station”	YES	YES	YES	NO
33. “Shirt Cardboards”	YES	YES	YES	YES
34. “Lou”	YES	YES	YES	NO
35. “Steam Bath”	NO	NO	YES	NO
36. “Maxfield”	NO	NO	YES	YES
37. “Stirkoff”	YES	YES	YES	YES
38. “The Stripper”	YES	YES	NO	YES

39. “The Frozen Man I”	YES	NO	YES	YES
40. “The Frozen Man II”	NO	YES	YES	YES
41. “The Frozen Man III”	NO	NO	NO	NO
42. “The Demon”	YES	YES	NO	NO

Figure 9: Motifs in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*.

1.2.2.1 Space

Before I go into more detail with the four motifs presented in the above table, I would like to briefly elaborate on the idea of space in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*. As the Canadian academic Marc Brosseau suggests in his paper "The Traps: Bukowski as Interpreter of Cornered Lives" (2008) the existential traps Bukowski recurrently depicts in his stories are inherently spatial:

> In the writings of Charles Bukowski (1920-1994), we find many individuals, including the narrator/author, whose lives have been crushed by circumstance: men and women "trapped" by visible and less visible forces that keep them at the bottom of the social ladder or in hopeless situations. (Brosseau: 380)

As with all short stories, it may be useful to bear in mind that due to the columns' limited length there is only very little room for comprehensive descriptions of place. Hence, the stories often feature a fairly reduced number of places that tend to be stereotyped in order to be easily classifiable for the reader. (cf. Brosseau: 382)

Brosseau distinguishes between the concept's application as a motif or a theme: "As a motif it is used to describe various desperate situations in his novels, short stories and poems […] As a theme, it often serves to organize Bukowski's interpretation of social reality." (Brosseau: 380)

Whereas the notion of the trap as a theme may be applied more easily to Bukowski's novels, in the columns composed in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* it is rather likely to occur as a motif. Nevertheless, the trap as a theme – a certain notion of social reality – reverberates throughout the whole compilation. Thus, it may be argued that despite the lack of a consistent plot line, the theme of the existential trap functions as a unifying element. When analyzing the individual stories' geographical settings, it becomes apparent that many of the stories are set in bars and nightclubs, on skid row, and in shabby apartments.

Marc Brosseau's hypothesis ties in with the above-stated: "[Bukowski's] short stories are by and large set in generic places and poorly fleshed out through description. […] The stories are characterized by recurring place settings, such as the bar, the home (usually a rented room or flat), the

workplace, the street and the racetrack." (Brosseau: 383) He categorizes the existential traps according to four settings: the home, the workplace, the street, and space. In the following chapter I would like to discuss the former three in more detail.

As indicated in the overview in chapter 1.2.1.3 the home is also a setting frequently employed in the columns of *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, noticeable in "The Elf", "Neal Cassady", "Jack", "New York", "Mr. Business Man", "L.", "Suicide", "Pink Panties", "The Cardboard Shack", "Barbara", "Meggy", "Baldy M.", "The Stripper", "The Frozen Man"-trilogy, and "The Demon", to name only some stories. Whereas some of them feature rented rooms and apartments in tenement buildings or rooming houses, others may be set in houses and cardboard shacks, or simply in the plain settings of bathrooms, bedrooms, or porches. As Brosseau claims, the bar "[…] functions as a temporary antechamber […]" to all kinds of homes listed above. (Brosseau: 386)

The home presented in "The Cardboard Shack" may be stressed as the gravest version presented in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*: "[…] and there I was in Atlanta, worse off than in New York, broker [sic], crazier, sicker, thinner; no more chance than a 53-year-old whore or a spider in a forest fire […]" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 115)

The main character wanders through the cold looking for a room and finally moves into a cardboard shack leased out by an old lady. His new home does not have a toilet, nor does the kerosene lamp contain sufficient fuel. The rude landlady proves essentially unkind and sends him back to his room when he asks for assistance. The first-person narrator sarcastically remarks: "I went back to my room (?) and sat on the bed." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 119)

He decides to write a letter asking his father for help. The answer, however, seems unsatisfactory:

> […] I read your stories, they're UGLY. people don't want to read UGLY things. you ought to write like Mark Twain. he was a great man. he could make people laugh. in all your stories your people kill themselves or go insane or murder somebody. most of life isn't the way you imagine it. get a good job, MAKE something of yourself… (Bukowski, *Notes*: 120)

The advice provided by the protagonist's father relates to the setting of workplace. Bukowski's first novel *Post Office* was based upon his experiences during his working periods for the American postal service. Especially in this novel, the workplace is closely linked to what may be considered an existential trap. Although Bukowski detests his jobs, his duties, and supervisors, he is financially dependent on them.

Notes of a Dirty Old Man's columns provide information on similar kinds of jobs and situations. Arriving in "New York" the nameless first-person narrator fills a menial job exchanging cardboard advertisements on the subway.

> jesus, mother, it was terrible – here they came pounding out of the vast cuntholes in the earth spinning me about with my paper suitcase up near Times Square. I finally managed to ask one of them where the Village was and when I got to the Village I found a room and when I opened my wine bottle and took off my shoes I found that the room had an easel, but I wasn't a painter, just a kid looking for luck, and I sat behind the easel and drank my wine and looked out the dirty window. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 32)

Having portrayed his new apartment, the protagonist sets out with the intention of finding a bar – the antechamber to the spatial trap of the home: "I found a bar around the corner and sipped at beers all day. my money was going but, as usual, I hated to look for a job." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 33)

Notably, in "New York" the setting of the bar directly leads to the workplace, another stage of existential traps. After unintentionally having had coffee at a mission, the protagonist recognizes his own desperate situation.

> I was so clever that I even got a job the next day. and the next night, hungover, shaky, very sad, I was at work. two old guys were to break me in. they'd each been on the job since the subways were invented. we walked along with these heavy sheets of cardboard under the left arm and a little tool in the right hand that looked like a beercan opener. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 35)

At the story's end, the major character feels more than happy having left the city of New York and abandoned his job: "I left New York soon after, never went back, never will. cities are built to kill people, and there are lucky towns and the other kind. mostly the other kind." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 37)

As Brosseau adds, the trap of the workplace also mirrors the gender constellations in general as well as partially presented in Bukowski's work.

Men have a little more agency over the kind of jobs they expose themselves to, whereas the wives are generally left with no option at all. While the husbands may be suppressed at work, they at least can reign at home. (cf. Brosseau: 390)

> However desperately Bukowski renders the home or the workplace as existential traps, it is the street that Bukowski renders as the most brutal, violent and hopeless of his spatial traps. While for some of Bukowski's characters the street constitutes a place of freedom from the demands of mainstream American life, for most of them the street is rarely a place of election, but rather the last step at the end of a long process of rejection. Sometimes it is referred to as skid row, at other times simply as the street, or the place where the jobless, the rejected, and the beaten coexist. It is also somewhat of a compound space composed of a series of discrete elements: the street itself, bars, flophouses, "vacant" urban spaces and so forth. (Brosseau: 390)

When looking at *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*'s column "New Orleans" one will find proof for Brosseau's assumption: The first-person narrator recounts the events of a fistfight in the city's streets, visits a bar, and encounters dubious people. Thus, the story may be assumed to consist of virtually all above-listed elements:

> it was in New Orleans, the French Quarter, and I stood on the sidewalk and watched a drunk leaning against a wall and the drunk was crying, and the Italian was asking him "are you a Frenchman? and the Frenchman said, "yes I'm a Frenchman." and the Italian hit him in his face hard, knocking his head against the wall, and then he asked the drunk again, "are you a Frenchman?" and the frog would say yes, and the wop would hit him again […] (Bukowski, *Notes*: 159)

As the setting of the streets and bars obviously is closely linked to the motif of alcohol, the presented thoughts will be elaborated on in the next chapter. To conclude, Brosseau detects a redeeming feature in the settings' plain presentation:

> [Bukowski's] stories, as we have seen, are by and large free of psychological and sociological explanation; the interpretation is left to the reader. […] Herein, I would argue, lies the importance of place in Bukowski's short stories: place has a narrative – or epistemological – superiority as that which grounds and modulates the social processes that trap Bukowski's characters. (BROSSEAU YEAR: 394)

1.2.2.2 Alcohol

In an interview conducted by Jean-Francois Duval on February 17, 1986 in San Pedro, Bukowski affirms that alcohol has always been both a central topic in his writings as well as an appropriate medium to foster the creative process of writing. Whereas in the beginning he preferred whisky and beer, Bukowski later turned to wine and praises its effects:

> The blood of the gods. You can drink a lot of it and stay relatively sane. I used to drink an awful lot of beer. But wine is the best for creation. You can write three or four hours… You drink whisky, there is trouble… So I don't want to drink any whisky […] Because then I think I'm tough. Then I got to prove it. (Duval, "Evening": 137)

Not only is alcohol an important means in Charles Bukowski's act of writing, it also serves as a crucial motif in almost all his works of literature. As demonstrated in the previous sections of this thesis, Bukowski's poems, short stories, and novels to a large extent go back to his own experiences made during various phases in his lifetime. Drinking was one of those. Charles Bukowski appears to have made contact with alcohol at a very young age:

> Oh, I had a friend called Baldy. His father was a doctor who lost his license for drinking too much. And one day he took me to his father's wine cellar. I don't know if we were eleven, twelve years old… He said, "Hank, try some of this wine!" I said, "oh! Come on." He said, "No! Come on! Stick your head under there, turn that spigot." There was a big barrel. I tried a little, and I said, "eeeeh, it stinks like shit!" He put his head there and got a little wine. And I said, "Let me try some more of that." So I took a big one… I grew, I expanded, I was twelve feet tall, I was a giant of a man. And my heart felt wonderful. And life was good. And I was powerful. And I said, "Baldy, this is good stuff." And that was it. I've been hooked ever since. (Duval, "Evening": 167-168)

As Bukowski got older, his drinking habits grew more and more severe. In order to indulge in drinking whisky the adolescent Bukowski often had to sneak out of his parents' house:

> In 1937, during the last semester of the school year, Hank began drinking. Because he looked older than his age, he occasionally went into bars in downtown L.A., and he found whiskey to his liking. He met three guys who were three or four years older than himself. One was a tall, well-built fellow with light-blond hair that fell over his forehead and was perpetually uncombed. He made his living by robbing service stations. Another was a pleasant young man called "Stinky". Hank always stuck up for him and protested against the nickname. They hung out with a married man who held down a steady job and rented a large apartment. As the oldest of the group and the

> one with a steady job, he supplied whiskey and kept his house open to his friends. (Cherkovski: 35)

As shown in *Barfly*, Charles Bukowski subsequently spent much time in bars and night clubs drinking. He admits that alcohol may have served as a primary means to prove one's manhood at that time:

> Yeah, in the worst sense, yeah. We used to think that a man drank, you know. That drinking made a man. Of course, that's entirely untrue. And those ten years I spent just in the bars… An awful lot of people who drink aren't men at all, they are hardly anything. And they get on my ear, and they talked the most terrible dribble into my head you've ever heard… So drinking doesn't create anything. It's destructive to most people. Not to me, you understand, but to most people. (Duval, "Evening": 166)

Bukowski then more explicitly goes on about his years of excessive drinking and how he turned his inebriated adventures into a screenplay:

> In this one bar for about five years, I would run air for sandwiches, you know. I didn't do anything but stay in this bar night and day, and how I survived I have no idea. But one thing that helped, I said, at least I've not worked an eight hour job – it was a twenty-four hour job (*laughs bitterly*). I wasn't pointing at the time clock or anything… Just running a little air, and fighting the bartender, and being the bar clown. I was the personality the guy laughed at. The bum. And I was waiting for something to happen. Somebody to say something… I was waiting for some magic to occur in this bar… It never did. So finally I just walked out. I waited a long time… So I wrote a play about it called *Barfly*, a movie script for Barbet Schroeder, and it might be produced, it's getting close, but we'll see. (Duval, "Evening": 167)

The above-cited statements underscore the role alcohol played throughout Bukowski's life – both his private and his professional one. In *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, similar to many works published by Charles Bukowski, alcohol and drinking function as a central and ever-recurring motif. The following examples shall give insight into the vast number of instances that may be found in the collection of columns.

* * * * *

In three quarters of the stories included in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* alcohol is either explicitly mentioned or alluded to in some way. I would like to distinguish between two shades of the motif in question. Whereas some stories feature the motif of alcohol as an autobiographical reference to Bukowski's years of excessive drinking, as rendered in the movie *Barfly*, in

others it may serve to mark the characters' status on the social ladder. Additionally, especially the first kind of stories tend to depict alcohol as a plain and ordinary habit, whereas the latter stories are more likely to also express the negatively intoxicating effects of alcohol. Before I elaborate on this idea, I would like to discuss the partly autobiographical column "Mary" to illustrate the key element of alcohol.

> "Dear Mr. Bukowski:
> You say you began writing at 35. what were you doing before then?
> E.R."
>
> "Dear E.R.
> Not writing."
>
> (Bukowski, *Notes*: 154)

Bukowski starts the column by citing a letter he must have received from one of his readers interested in his private life. It was in 1955 that Bukowski turned 35 and in fact Bukowski had been writing long before. Hence, the presumed reader of his works and writer of the quoted letter, E.R., may have had in mind the more professional direction Bukowski's work turned into at that time. However inaccurate the letter may be, it implies that Charles Bukowski between his school years and the indicated point in history must have done something other than writing. The story that follows the citation of the letter exemplifies what this might have been. As pointed out in great detail in the previous sections of this thesis, Bukowski, especially in the early 1940s, spent his (leisure) time to large extents in the bars or drinking at home. "Mary" nicely renders one of these instances.

Mary, the woman the protagonist lives with in the story, can be assumed to again have been modeled on Bukowski's long-term girlfriend Jane Baker. In a side remark in the first paragraph illustrating a fight between the couple, the first-person narrator says: "I'd just pour another wine." (154) Because of the matter-of-fact-tone the narrator employs in this example, one may claim that drinking wine is an integral and inherently natural part of the characters' daily routine. Hank, the major character and narrator figure, then walks into the bedroom: "I went over and lay on the bed, cigarette in one hand, wine-glass half tottering on the nightstand. barefoot, in shorts and

undershirt a week dirty." (154) After their fight Hank sits down and pours a glass of wine. (see Bukowski, *Notes*: 155)

"'WORK!' she screamed, 'WORK! WHY THAT SON OF A BITCH HAS NEVER WORKED A DAY IN HIS LIFE!!'" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 155) Mary accuses Hank of never having worked in his life. She hereby recognizes a possible reason for Hank's addiction. However, drinking should not be regarded as a means by which Hank compensates his joblessness. As can be inferred from the examples provided, drinking and alcohol are routinely drawn upon. The consumption may thus be considered to happen as a mere matter of fact.

In the story Mary leaves Hank soon after, but returns a few days later. When they get in yet another fight Hank calmly grabs another drink: "I drained a wineglass […] I walked to the door and stood there in my shorts, refilled wineglass in my hand, waiting." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 155)

It could also be Hank's seemingly endless indifference that makes Mary mad:

> I started to close the door and she raised her purse over her head, "you ROTTEN son of a bitch!" I saw the purse coming down and just stood there with a little calm smile on my face. I'd been in some fights with some rough boys; a woman's purse was the last thing I was worried about. it came down. I felt it. plenty. she had stuffed the thing and in the front corner, the part that hit me over the head was a white cold cream jar. it was like a rock. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 156)

Hence, it may be argued that as the fight gets more intensive, the characters' apparent intoxication inevitably results in physical violence. Yet, I would not opt for this assumption: In a movie scene almost entirely identical to the one quoted in *Barfly* as well as throughout the whole short story in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, Hank remains relatively sane but become progressively inert – in spite of the large quantities of alcohol he consumes.

> when I awakened the door was closed and I was alone. I looked around and the floor was an inch thick in my blood. luckily the whole apartment was covered with linoleum. I splashed through the stuff and headed for the kitchen. I'd saved a bottle of whiskey for a special occasion. this was it. I opened it and poured a good bit of it over my head, then I poured a glassful and drank it straight down. rotten bitch had tried to KILL me! unbelievable. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 156)



Figure 10: Same scene: *Barfly* and “Mary”.

As Hank dizzily staggers through the apartment he drinks more of the disinfectant alcohol and heads for Mary’s closet, determined to get rid of her belongings:

> we were on the fourth floor. I had a little more whiskey and walked over to the closet. I got her dresses, shoes, pants, slips, brassieres, slippers, hankies, garterbelts, all that crap and piled it in front of the window, one by one sipping at my whiskey. “god damned whore tried to kill me…” sailed them out the window. […] then I felt better, began to work on the whiskey, found a mop and mopped the place up. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 156-157)

Although the plots then diverge, Charles Bukowski can be assumed to directly have taken over the presented scene into the script of *Barfly*: In the column, Mary later returns with Eddie: “she came back that night with Eddie and the Duchess. they had wine.” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 157) In *Barfly*, as the spectator learns merely through the dialogue, Hank’s girlfriend also cheats on him with Eddie. However, they do not come to their place as in “Mary”.

Hank sends Mary and Eddie out for more wine and remains in the apartment with the Duchess: “we’d been drinking about another hour when the Duchess […] said ‘he raped me, he raped me while you were out getting the wine.’” (158) Since Mary does not believe her, she reconciles with Hank: “I sat down with my drink in a chair and she came over and looked at the top of my head. ‘oh you poor baby. god, I’m sorry.’” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 159)

In contrast to the other characters, Hank generally remains sane and his thoughts stay clear and structured. To mitigate this hypothesis' validity, one could refer to the very first column in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* wherein the major character can hardly remember the events of the night before: "when I awakened the sun was up and I was *under* the bed. I got out from under and found that I could stand up. large cut under chin. scraped knuckles. I'd worse hangovers. and there were worse places to awaken. like jail? maybe. I looked around. it *had* been real." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 10)

Besides the motif's function as a habitual element of the characters' monotonous lives, alcohol may also serve to brand certain characters as social outcasts, which is tightly linked to the stories' settings, as pointed out in the previous chapter. Bukowski depicts and establishes a realm beneath the establishment's surface. It is in the bars and night clubs that the columns' protagonist(s) encounter hobo figures, prostitutes, outlaws, homeless and socially rejected people.

Therefore, the motif of alcohol aligns with and supports the settings previously introduced. In "Red" the character Bukowski explains to an interlocutor sitting at his coffee table:

> "'Red,'" I told the kid, "to the female I no longer exist. much of it is my fault. I don't go to dances, church bazaars, poetry readings, love-ins, all that shit, and this is where the whores hustle. I used to make it in the bars or on the train back from Del Mar, anywhere drinking was going on. now I can't stand the bars anymore. those guys just sitting there, lonely, passing the hours, hoping some syphed-up hole will drop in. the whole scene is disgraceful to the human race." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 85)

As they talk over one beer, Red boasts about his adventures on the road tying a girl to a bed. Bukowski disgustedly poses some questions about the precise proceedings and to evade further details he suggests: "'have another beer.' […] we each went for another beer. he put it down pretty good." (86) After having heard another story the narrator remarks: "so we sat there again sucking at the beer." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 87)

In another story the hobo claims to have witnessed a murder: "'with a rock. he was drinking wine and when he got drunk they cracked his head with a rock. and took the wallet. I was watching.' […] we sat there a few more

hours drinking and I told a few, not nearly as good. then we both got silent. kept thinking." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 87)

1.2.2.3 Women

Charles Bukowski visited Europe in 1978 and gave a poetry reading in Hamburg, Germany. In a short break between the recitations of two poems he remarked from the Markthalle's podium:

> All these poems aren't about sex. I don't fuck all the time. I don't think about sex all the time. I don't hate women and I don't hate men and I don't hate children and I don't hate dogs… Well, there's certain dogs that I might dislike – when I step in their shit, you know. (Bukowski, *Hello*: Track 3, TC 00:01:12-00:01:42)

Nevertheless, a great number of Bukowski's works feature eclectic variations of the motif of women, romance, or sex – most of which presented from an archetypically male viewpoint. The male characters' carnal desire often functions in order to degrade and disparage the women's roles as whores and objects. As for romance, the characters' feelings and desires may be presented as being more honest and upright. While the readers are confronted with different shades of the motif in question, many of those seem to have been built on autobiographical as well as factual events and characters.

Whether the protagonists' stance on women corresponds to Charles Bukowski's, remains questionable as he equips his persona character Henry Chinaski also with attributes dissimilar to his own. Since the author Bukowski appears to have had many (sexual) relationships himself, one might favor an entirely misogynistic reading of his biography. However, as the private person's sensitive, loving and caring side shimmers through quite often too, as for example concerning his daughter, I would suggest cautiously drawing a distinction between both his stories' characters and his personal life as well as between the various phases in his life.

In contrast, Stephen Kessler in “Notes on a Dirty Old Man.” (1985) fully defends Bukowski’s sexually explicit imagery as being particularly based upon actual facts and people:

> The sexism of which he is sometimes accused is also a bogus charge. The women in most of his poems and stories are real people, they come across as quirky, complete beings, eccentrically individual, not just anonymous genitals on which the writer exercises his fantasies – although there’s surely plenty of close-to-the-crotch activity. (Kessler: para. 11)

Kessler’s hypothesis appears especially challengeable, as in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* there are instances where women *are* just, as he puts it, anonymous genitals. Nevertheless, his assumption might prove more legitimate with those novels, poems, and short stories wherein Bukowski’s radically masculine presentation of the motif draws on his personal preoccupation.

Furthermore, Howard Sounes asserts that one might need to differentiate between the individual presentations of characters. He offers, as I would argue, quite a plausible approach and additional angle in judging the degree of probable sexism in Bukowski’s works: “[…] although Bukowski dealt with his female characters in a critical, almost misogynistic way, he did not spare his male characters either. The men in *Women* are almost all weak, dishonest and sexually insecure. None more so than Chinaski himself.” (Sounes, *Charles*: 187)

According to Neeli Cherkovski, Charles Bukowski’s preoccupation with women advanced gradually, beginning in Junior High School when he, together with two classmates, commenced to explore the world of women. They started visiting the burlesque houses downtown, where none of the three boys was ever asked their ages. (see Cherkovski: 29)

At the age of twenty-three Charles Bukowski had sexual intercourse for the first time, with an obviously obese woman he had met in a bar near where he lived. (cf. Cherkovski: 75) Sounes states that Jane, Bukowski’s first serious girlfriend, was only the second woman he had sex with. Sounes agrees with Cherkovski that the one to take Bukowski’s virginity was most plausibly the above-mentioned prostitute in Philadelphia. (see Sounes, *Charles*: 29)

Whereas Bukowski cultivated a rather dismissive attitude towards women in his youth, he later learned to appreciate the advantages of courtship:

> Well, I feel about girls now, just like I did then. That the calling part on the part of the male entails a lot of bullshit and falseness that I had rather not go through. Like dating and talking and making all the jeers and going through all these movements, making little jokes and cleaning yourself, standing in front of the mirror, all this bullshit, I didn't want to bother with that. I think that's why I went directly to the whore. I said, hey, have a drink, you know, and that was it. We just dispense with one another. Courtship? Nonsense! Because there is a lot of lying in that. A lot of untruth. A lot of game playing, what I don't come to do. (Duval, "Evening": 150)

As the author grew older and presumably also more mature, he may have changed his attitude towards women, romance, and relationships; when Bukowski encountered his wife in spe, Linda Beighle, their friendship grew gradually and became increasingly sensual over time: "[…] Hank saw her as a kind of shelter amidst a raging storm, and realized he might be able to free himself from a cycle of womanizing that had worn him out." (Cherkovski: 252)

The extensive use of the motifs of women and sex also goes back to economic considerations. In the interview with Jean-Francois Duval Bukowski explains how sex became central to his writing and that his reasons for employing it were other than personal:

> Well, you see, we go through phases of writing. For a while, I wrote about sex, I explored it. Much of it was done when I first started writing. Because I had to make money fast, because I didn't have any. I was fifty years old, and I quit my job at the post office, and I was in that room in Hollywood. So I drank and I wrote sex stories for the sex magazines, who paid very well at that time. […] So I made my living writing these short stories for the sex magazines and they were very nice to me, the checks arrived continually, bing, bing, bing, and I kept writing these sex stories. The only thing I did… You know, most sex stories in the sex magazines were (*with a long suggestive tone*): HE HAD A BIG THING, AND HE STUCK IT IN AND HE PUT HIS HAND ON HER ASS, etc. So, I didn't like that. I put sex in it, but I would put a story around it, to please myself. […] So this is how the sex stories came about. Even though they have sex, you will find sex is not the story; sex is in there, but there is another story going on. So it was never sex-obsessed. But I had to put sex in to sell the story. (Duval, "Evening": 174)

The story "Moss & Anderson" in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, told from a third-person narrator's perspective, features two guys talking about their dull jobs and their sad lives over some beers. However, the topic most outstanding is women and sex.

To refute Kessler's theory that Bukowski's female characters are fully fleshed out since they are based upon real persons, "Moss & Anderson" can serve as an illustrative counterexample. As they ponder their lives, the characters repeatedly denounce women as being mere sex objects:

> "well, I've got to get some pussy pretty soon or I'll go goofy."
> "the price is always too high. forget it."
> "I know. but I can't forget it. I'm starting to have crazy dreams. I screw chickens in the ass."
> (Bukowski, *Notes*: 52)

One may also recognize flashes of their underlying weaknesses dealing with women: "'you know,' he said, 'some men just aren't any good with women. I never was any good with women. the whole things seems a terrible bore, and when it's over you feel like you really been screwed.'" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 52) In reflecting upon their desperate situations Moss and Anderson cling to discriminating expressions: "'you win. I still need some pussy.' […] 'ah, pussy,' he said. 'we talk like kids of fifteen. […]'" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 54) Furthermore, they make women responsible for the places they are currently in:

> "then you say the female has brought us to the edge of hell where we sit today?"
> "the word for that is 'misogynist.'"
> […]
> "[…] the pussy has betrayed us and their atomic eggs lay stacked all about us…"
> "call it 'misogyny.'"
> […]
> they drained their bottles.
> Moss opened two more. "two lonely old men blaming it on the ladies…"
> "we're really a couple of shits," said Anderson.
> "yeah."
> "listen, you sure you don't know a couple of pussy somewhere?"
> (Bukowski, *Notes*: 55-56)

The protagonist in the column "Pink Panties" takes a similar attitude towards women. The first-person narrator, who appears to be a writer called Bukowski, writes down a succinct sentence with respect to romance: "love is a way with some meaning; sex is meaning enough." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 99)

Walking home in the dawning morning after a long night of drinking, the protagonist runs into a woman on the outskirts of Hollywood who apparently is having troubles with her car:

> I looked in. there sat this woman. she had on high heels, long dark stockings, blouse, earrings, wedding ring and panties. no skirt, just these light pink panties. I inhaled the morning air. she had this old woman's face and these young big unwrinkled girl's legs and thighs. […] under the blouse were young girl's breasts too. […] I stood there watching the whirling of the buttocks under that pink tight sheen. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 100)

Throughout the story the woman Bukowski encounters is not given a proper name. He simply calls her pink panties, just like Moss and Anderson refer to women as pussy. Intended to get her into bed, the protagonist pursues a certain strategy:

> this is the old pro's line. always pretend to be understanding, even when you are not. women never want sensibility, all they want is a kind of emotional vindictiveness toward somebody else they care for too much. women are basically stupid animals but they concentrate so much and entirely upon the male that they often defeat him while he is thinking of other things. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 102)

Awakening in the morning after having slept with her, "[…] pink panties had pink panties on again […] it was sad and ridiculous and ornery and a tear-hurling jerker, but the old pro narrowed his eyes, pretended to be asleep." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 103)

* * * * *

> here in the United States, especially, sex is inflated far beyond its simplest importance. a woman with a sexy body immediately turns into a weapon for MATERIAL advancement. and I am not speaking of the whorehouse whore, I am speaking of your mother and your sister and your wife and your daughter. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 131)

In "Unsigned" Bukowski comments on sex in the United States of America on the occasion of a previously received letter by an anonymous person. The column's beginning features a citation of the said fan mail:

> To Funky Bukowski
>
> I call you funky Bukowski, because
> I think you're nasty
> don't get mad, cause, I like your
> nasty – it makes me hot to read
> about; you looking up ladies dresses
> or jacking-off in elevators or sniffing drawers – to
> get high;
> now I know you're wondering who

this is writing you. Well I'll tell
you who I am, nice and clear
so there'll be no mistake
in pointing me out. I'm the clean
smooth cunt you think about
when you fuck those discharging wrinkled
pussies, I'm the lady who sits
down the row from you in the all night
movies , and watches you cum and cum
in your jacket pocket, and I slowly hike
my skirt up, hoping you'll look at my thighs
as you – get up to wipe your hands, I call
it long dis-stance sex. but I love it
I love the feel of your heavy breathing on the
back of my neck as you try to poke your
fingers in my asshole through the crack
in the seat; now you're thinking, (it sounds
nice, but I don't remember you.) but from
now on you will/think of me/and after all –
that's what I wanted any way. my nasty
man –

unsigned

(Bukowski, *Notes*: 130)

In the commentary that follows this letter, Bukowski intends to negotiate the importance of sex in U.S. society as presented via the media. The narrator establishes a frame narration that defines his stance on women and sex more closely. For instance, he claims that "sex is interesting but not totally important." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 131) Charles Bukowski then elaborates on this idea as he offers a possible as well as plausible approach in order to account for the American males' behavior with respect to sex:

> and the American male is the sucker (bad term, yes) who perpetuates the extremism of the hoax. but the American male has had his brains beaten out by the American formal education and the American prenumbed parent and the American monster Advertising long before he was twelve years old. he is ready and the female is ready to make him beg and get up the $$$. […] the openly professional whore poses a breakdown threat to the whole American society of Strive and Hustle all the way to the grave. she devaluated the pussy. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 131)

"Unsigned" gives further insight into Bukowski's opinion of the U.S. American newspapers as he denounces the visual language favored by some of those:

> yes, sex has gone completely beyond its value. notice sometime, in your newspaper (you ain't gonna find it in her in "Open City" except off laughs), a group of entrants in bathing suits posing for a photo for some beauty contest or other, for the queen of this or that. see those legs, those long flanks, the breasts – some magic there,

> indeed. and these girlies know this, plus the bargaining price attached. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 131)

However critical the views presented may be, Bukowski also notices the motif's merits for him as a writer. He cherishes the topic for its inherent literary potential and attempts to prove wrong the assumption that its use in his writings goes back to the simple fact that he is vulgar and filthy:

> so, to some writers, including the glorious impertinent Bukowski, sex is obviously the tragicomedy. I don't write about it as an instrument of obsession, I write about it as a stage play laugh where you have to cry about it, a bit, between acts. […] people simply think I'm dirty. if you haven't read Boccaccio, do. you might begin with "The Decameron". (Bukowski, *Notes*: 132)

As pointed out, the motif of women and sex in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* fulfils various functions – for example to illustrate the male characters' desperate situations. Nevertheless, Charles Bukowski's crude imagery sometimes appears to be on the verge of becoming misogynistic and sexist. Furthermore, it is based on autobiographical, financial, atmospheric, critical, as well as ironic considerations. Reflecting on the whole topic, the American author himself admits that "the sex thing even confuses the great Bukowski." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 134)

1.2.2.4 Physical Violence

> Violence occupies a significant place in Charles Bukowski's imagery. It is seen in the harshness of human relationships and of a life which, for most, leaves no other choice but a daily battle for survival. It is also evident in drunken brawls in the backyards of seedy bars, in filthy hotels and in unmade beds where couples appear knotted together in a fight to the death in which both are losers. (Duval, *Bukowski*: 105)

In this chapter I would like to discuss the role of two specific kinds of physical violence as found in the motifs of *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*: On the one hand, certain columns feature explicit depictions of violence that may be associated with the genre of crime fiction, which therefore foreshadows genre conventions as applied in the author's final novel *Pulp*. On the other hand and as previously elaborated on, the image of physical violence ties in with and

complements Bukowski's entire set of motifs, whereby he tries to render certain situations at the society's bottom. As pointed out also in the introductory quotation, where virtually every major motif in Bukowski's works is listed, overlaps between the individual motifs of physical violence, sex, place and alcohol tend to recur.

In analyzing the motif of physical violence it proves useful to distinguish between two kinds of stories in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*: The first group encompasses the stories that are more fictitious due to setting, atmosphere, and characters. The second kind comprises the more realistic columns with respect to the aforementioned parameters. "Paper Wings", a short story belonging to the former type, centers its plot on the character of Jimmy Crispin, whose initials may indicate an allegorical representation of Jesus Christ the Redeemer. The first-person narrator appears to be managing a baseball team. The Blues have had a losing streak recently. Out of the blue, Jimmy Crispin enters the office and introduces himself to the manager and offers to play:

> it was a kid about 18. "I'm here to help your club," said the kid. he had on these big paper wings. a real nut. holes cut in his suit. the wings are glued to his back. or strapped. or something. […] AND SO HELP ME GOD, that punk began to FLY! he flapped around the room, up near the ceiling. […] "I'm no angel. I just want to help the Blues. I been a Blues fan ever since I can remember." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 14)

Jimmy Crispin proves a virtual redeemer and immediately helps the team win until one day before the decisive last game, when Bugsy Malone, a bookmaker, cuts off Crispin's wings:

> "they sawed off my motherfucking wings, the rats! they put this woman on me in the hotel room. what a woman! what a broad! man, they loaded my drinks! I got on top of this cunt and they began SAWING MY WINGS OFF. I couldn't move! I couldn't even get my nuts! what a FARCE! and all the time, this guy smoking a cigar, laughing and cackling in the back-ground… – oh god, what a beautiful woman, and I couldn't get it… – oh, shit…" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 17-18)

Tim Bailey, the first-person narrator and manager of the Blues, decides to take vengeance. When the last game begins, he takes a box directly behind Bugsy Malone and the woman who had seduced Crispin: "I pulled the luger out and put it at the back of his head. […] I pulled the trigger. it was awful. a

luger. parts of eggshell head, and brain and blood everywhere: over me, over her nylon legs, her dress…" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 19) The next day Bailey learns in his prison cell that the Blues had won the ball game and his desperate deed had been unnecessary.

Therefore, the supernatural and fantastic elements detectable in the text may help differentiate between the columns based upon actual events and mere fantasy stories. "Paper Wings" functions as such an example as the story evokes a rather somber atmosphere and reveals an explicitly bizarre use of the motif of physical violence. Since *Pulp*, Bukowski's last novel published before his death, consists of a similar imagery, the column analyzed may be regarded as one of the book's predecessors. Accordingly, the motif of violence in "Paper Wings" directly relates to the genre of crime fiction. As the genre is usually violent, it may feature murder, weapons, and organized crime; elements that stand in contrast to the imagery in Bukowski's realistic stories, where, for example, spontaneous fistfights represent a motif of physical violence.

Concerning the former kind, one might as well speak of pulp fiction – as the title of Bukowski's novel *Pulp* suggests. Such explicitly brutal presentations of the motif of violence may be found in the stories "Mr. McCuller", "The Tailor", and "Gold With Green Polka Dots". The crimes committed resemble Freddie McCuller's homicide of his daughter's stepfather:

> Marty saw the butcher knife. "what do you think you're going to do with *that* thing? I'll jam it up your ass." […] Freddie moved very fast. the quickness was a still magic. the butcher knife sliced four or five times across Marty's throat before he fell back, down, halfway down the steps… (Bukowski, *Notes*: 60-61)

"The Tailor" features an even more abnormally bizarre version of the motif. Jack, a tailor, appears to have killed three men:

> it was then that the tailor remembered the three dead bodies. one was in the kitchen, stretched along in front of the stove. another one was upright, hung by its collar in the closet, stiffened, standing there. and the third was in the bathtub, sitting upright, well, not exactly upright, for the head could just be seen above the rim of the tub. the flies were beginning to come around and that was bad. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 75)

Furthermore, Harry, a friend visiting, recalls a heinously morbid event taking place when he was younger:

> "you know," said Harry, "that reminds me. when I was a young man – god *damn* these flies! I'm not DEAD! – when I was a young man I used to have this job, me and this other kid. the job was washing down these dead bodies. we got some good-looking women in there sometimes. I came in one time and Mickey, that was the other kid, had mounted one of these women. […] when he got down he said, 'Harry, I've screwed at least a dozen of them. it's good! try her. you'll see!' (Bukowski, *Notes*: 77)

Henry Beckett in "Gold With Green Polka Dots" is afflicted by a curious illness and resorts to shooting people passing by in their cars. The sniper hides in an ambush near the freeway and begins killing innocent passers-by:

> he made it to his place and got his hunting rifle and enough rounds of ammunition to kill a batallion [sic]. he found the cutoff on the freeway that led to the knoll. […] the first one he got was very strange. the bullet entered the right forehead and the man seemed to look right up at him, and the car flipped, it hit the fence, flipped on its side and he shot the next one coming by, a woman, missed, hit her engine, there was a fire, and she just sat in the car screaming and waving her arms and burning. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 92-93)

Additionally, three columns, which are composed in subsequent order, evoke an atmosphere usually associated with crime fiction and detective stories. In "Steam Bath" a lawyer hires the unnamed first-person narrator to torture his client in a steam bath. Paradoxically, the tortured person seems to be enjoying the treatment:

> I went back to the locker and got the belt and then he bent over on the table, and all that white mushmeat, that hairy sickening ass, and I swung and laid the belt buckle across hard again and again: ZAP! ZAP! […] while he screamed again two or three times I leaned down and burned him with the cigar. then he laid flat, smiling […] I walked into the kitchen where his lawyer sat drinking coffee. […] he peeled off five tens, threw them across the table. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 171)

Organized crime and a mafia-like gang are the essentials of "Maxfield". Charles Bukowski, the character in this story, remarks:

> he came down through the laundry shoot and as he slid out, Maxfield hit him with an ax handle, breaking his neck. we went through his pockets, we had the wrong man. "ah, shit," Maxfield said. "ah, shit," I said. I went upstairs and phoned. "rabbit ram kay remus. hard," I said. "shoot bugger damn lame," Steinfelt said. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 172)

As demonstrated, these instances tend to yield fictitious characters, highly non-autobiographical plotlines, or non-factual settings. Thus, the motif of

physical violence appears less restrained and bound to actual events, which enables a rather explicitly morbid presentation.

To conclude, “Stirkoff” represents a rather hybrid approach to crime fiction as it seems to blend anachronistic characters and settings with more contemporary elements. The column, which almost exclusively consists of dialogue, features three characters: a king, a guard, and the prisoner. At the end of their conversation the prisoner’s master, the king, calls for the guard: “GUARD! TAKE THIS MAN TO THE TORTURE CHAMBERS IMMEDIATELY AND BEGIN PROCEEDINGS!” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 180)

* * * * *

In contrast to the examples given, there are those stories that are presumably based upon autobiographical events and are rather realistic in presentation. With these columns, the motif of physical violence is likely to stem from originally autobiographical sources and fulfils another function than in the stories mentioned above, depicting the existential struggle of hopeless characters. As exemplified in the previous chapters, the motif of physical violence corresponds to situations of the down-and-out. In an attempt to create an appropriately plausible set of motifs, Bukowski often links sex, alcohol, and physical violence to mark his characters as belonging to a certain group

With these autobiographically inspired stories, says Jean-Francois Duval, Bukowski confides in the potential of violence to create originals: “Destructive violence played no part. Bukowski considered it to be another kind of violence that in destroying all artifice, re-establishing an original scene from chaos and stripping to the essentials, attempts to create new forms from this chaos.” (Duval, *Bukowski*: 107)

Hence, the motif of violence functions in order to establish an overall setting closer to reality. The crude, brutal, plain, as well as unadorned scenes diminish and subvert artificiality of the stories. Whereas the examples given in the first part of this chapter contain instances of destructive violence, in most of Bukowski’s autobiographically colored stories the motif both stands for a

certain shade of everyday life at society's bottom and is employed as a dramaturgical device in order to build on the rubble generated.

Accordingly, the motif ties in with Bukowski's intention of a realistic overall picture. Thus, physical violence, as in the repeated fistfights and bar brawls that are rendered in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* or *Barfly*, links to a particular atmosphere: The settings in bars and nightclubs, in shabby rooms and apartments, or on the streets and skid row, as well as laconically plain elements of sex, scenes of exhausting menial jobs, and the excessive use of alcohol appear inevitably fused:

> It should be understood that, for Bukowski, it is reality itself that is violent, in its sordid truth that permits no way out to illusion. The very fact of existence is violent. Everything that follows is just a progressive extension of this ontological violence: in love, in sex, in relations with others, oneself, work… So much so that the different manifestations of violence are endless in Bukowski's work. (Duval, *Bukowski*: 106)

1.2.2.5 Writing

The last motif I would like to introduce is the motif of writing. Many columns of *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* refer to either the narrator or the protagonist being a professional writer. The motif confirms the assumption that Bukowski's works are highly autobiographical. Additionally, features of self-reflexivity may be found as the author of the columns repeatedly refers to the fact that he is writing for the newspaper *Open City*.

Vaguely two thirds of a total of forty-two columns contain elements that can be ascribed to the motif of writing. Bukowski either alludes to writing and literature in general or presents the main character as being a writer himself. Via the use of these motifs he openly reveals his choice of an autobiographical strategy. One could argue that by assuming a status similar to his real one, he does not try to hide details of his personal life. Charles Bukowski, whose views and preoccupations steadily seep through, rather builds on the basic facts and characters to generate more drastically shaped realities.

"Mr. Businessman" is one of these stories and outlines the protagonist's anxiety about death. The episode is told from a third-person narrator's viewpoint and, although not explicitly indicated, one may infer that Bukowski imagines his own death from an external perspective. The narrator recognizes that the major character had conveyed an image different from his actual personality: "and Jesus, he was soft. all the hard poems; he'd played hard-man all his life but he was soft. everybody was soft, really. – the hard was only there to protect the soft. what a ridiculous asshole trap." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 72)

Moreover, writing is not necessarily presented as being part of the above-drawn image of the protagonist being a hopeless outsider. Thus, in those stories where Charles Bukowski features Chinaski-like characters, writing may occupy a unique place among this set of motifs as it symbolizes the very last serious chance the protagonist may see for himself. "The 300 Pound Whore", for example, is set in the 1940s when Bukowski spent time in Philadelphia: "I lost my job as a busboy and all my short stories are coming back […]" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 152)

Additionally, *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* contains stories rendering the time when Bukowski had already published some books: "I had gotten a bit drunk one night when this guy who had published a couple of my books said to me, 'Bukowski, you want to go see L?' L – was a famous writer. had been a famous writer for some time. […] 'no, shit, no,' I said to Jensen, 'his stuff bores me.'" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 79)

Furthermore, as Bukowski often refers to his profession as a writer in the frame narrations of certain columns, he unmistakably and self-referentially alludes to his current situation, roughly at the time of writing the columns. In "Suicide" Bukowski writes for instance: "'yeah, I have this column, kind of, in a new paper that's starting, OPEN CITY.'" (98) And the introductory sentence in "Unsigned" reads as follows: "the public takes from a writer, or a writing, what it needs and lets the remainder go." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 130)

To conclude, Bukowski offers a great number of references to the arts in numerous columns in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*. Julian Smith in "Charles Bukowski and the Avant-Garde" (1987) asserts that this may be the reason

why Bukowski's works lend themselves to investigations by academic audiences:

> Surface indications to the contrary, Bukowski's fiction addresses itself to literate readers capable of appreciating the enormous number of irreverent references to writers, composers, painters and philosophers, and its slangy departures from polite literary expressions. Which is why his writing goes down so well with university audiences, even though his humor subverts their educational values. (Smith: para. 7)

By referring to writers, poets, or composers, Charles Bukowski opens his works to a broader audience. As Smith argues, he combines elements from an academic background with a bare and crude style. In the next chapter I will have a closer look at the stylistic repertoire and idiosyncrasies apparent in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*.

1.2.3 Style

"It was first in junior high school that Hank discovered the local library. The old brownstone between Washington and Adams Boulevards, near 21st Street and La Brea Avenue, provided a safe haven from the oppressive atmosphere at home and in school." (Cherkovski: 27)

When young Bukowski began reading in the local library, he found certain styles and authors to his liking. Especially those books whose characters he felt particular empathy with and whose attitudes corresponded to his own views seem to have had tremendous influence both on the person as well as on the author Bukowski. Thus, in approaching the author's literary style he was about to develop, it proves useful to draw on biographical accounts.

> From the beginning of his reading, he maintained an innate respect for the passions and prejudices of the writers he read, particularly for those who did not resign themselves to normalcy. The disgust he had held for so long against the rules, regulations, and norms of the adult world was shared by many of the writers he read, such as Sinclair Lewis and Ernest Hemingway. When he could feel the hard edge of the words, when the writing ran uncompromisingly against the grain, he identified with it. Words that had a dangerous feel to them appealed to Hank's sensibility. He came across novels and short stories that mirrored his own thinking. Emotional drive coupled with lucidity […] (Cherkovski: 38)

On the basis of these biographical facts, I will attempt to shed some light on the most prominent choices Bukowski made in terms of style. Both Charles Bukowski's works in general and *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* in particular shall be examined in great detail. As stressed in the conclusion of the previous chapter, style depends on certain atmospheric properties as well as on the use of certain motifs. In the following part I will thus analyze in how far Bukowski's style reverberates with those strategies presented. In the interview conducted by Jean-Francois Duval, Charles Bukowski accounts for his style and pins its characteristics down quite appropriately:

> I prefer the term simple. I always try to write clearly, so people know what I am saying. And so that I know what I'm saying. So I try not to use large words. I try to use the easiest, smallest word possible to say anything. I don't use the dictionary, and I like it raw, easy and simple. That way, I don't lie to myself. Because what I'd read first, the classical literature, is not raw, easy and simple. It's confusing, contrived, cloudy and devious. I want to get rid of these things. (Duval, "Evening": 157)

As Bukowski asserts, his works withdraw from ornate expressions and ambiguous patterns. On the basis of my analysis and as manifested in the first table introduced (ch. 1.2.3.1), it becomes particularly evident that almost all columns in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* contain features of spoken word and dialogue. Accordingly, one might argue that in his literary works Bukowski is inclined to align his texts with spoken language.

Critics tend to read the texts as stemming from the spoken word and from dialogue too: Julian Smith offers a possible approach to Bukowski's style. His analysis features virtually every parameter the stylistic choices in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* consist of:

> The tools in his craftsman's bag are used to create an impression of artless spontaneity. How is this textual illusion obtained? By the use of the first-person singular; a vigorous street language with no recourse to dictionaries, complex words or intellectual concepts; by the use of first names or real names as though the reader were an acquaintance; by the cultivation of a no-bullshit approach, as though the speaker were too busy telling the truth to dilute it with high cultural values; and most effectively by jokes and asides to the reader… Bukowski flavors the lexical stew of *Notes* with misspellings, ungrammatical constructions, sentences with no verbs, repetitions, split infinitives, much slang and swearing, sexual innuendo and other linguistic ambiguities that enable him to splice sexuality, violence, nastiness and humor. By deliberately leaving in the text the sort of grammatical confusions common in speech but usually suppressed in written English, Bukowski is indicating that he wants to align with *spoken* rather than *written* conventions… (Smith: para. 5-6)

Although Smith appropriately unveils Bukowski's major stylistic strategies, he neglects to provide illustrative examples to back up his hypotheses. Thus, I will continue this task by highlighting certain stylistic instances from *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*.

With reference to the grid presented in chapter 1.2.1.3, one can easily notice that approximately one fifth of the columns provided in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* does not feature a first-person singular narrator's voice. Therefore, most of the compilation is told from a first-person narrator. The narrator's name is usually given and at least in some cases roughly parallels the author's name, which reinforces the illusion of unmediated accounts, as Smith underscores. In "The Funeral", as will be elaborated on later in this chapter, Bukowski breaks with this convention as he switches from one mode of narration to another. Other stories are exclusively told from a third-person's perspective and therefore cause a somewhat fictitious and artificial feel.

Furthermore, Julian Smith emphasizes that Bukowski's columns rest upon street language without recourse to dictionaries or complex words. Charles Bukowski seems to have striven for colloquial expressions and the less rigid syntax of spoken language rather than sophisticated and technical vocabulary or complex and ornate sentence structures as common in written language. "The Olympic" appears to be told directly from the city's underbelly as the protagonist visits and bets on fistfights at a venue called the Olympic:

> the gallery boys went ape and the fighters fought like fighters and the place was blue with cigar smoke, and how we screamed, baby baby, and threw money and drank our whiskey, and when it was over, there was the drive in, the old lovebed with our dyed and vicious women. you slammed it home, then slept like a drunk angel. […] it wasn't until much later that night, the whiskey pouring into me like sea, fighting with my woman, cursing her sitting there showing me all that fine leg […] (Bukowski, *Notes*: 39)

Instead of splitting up his utterances into proper sentences, Bukowski uses the coordinating conjunction "and" to combine numerous thoughts within a single sentence. The crude depiction of the female partner may result from a certain strategy to irritate the readers. Howard Sounes notes that the callow journalism in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* comprises choices of brutal language that were probably used as a means to shock:

> The short stories Bukowski wrote for the *LA Free Press*, and pornographic magazines like *Adam*, *Screw*, *Fling* and Larry Flynt's *Hustler*, were far less crafted than the work Black Sparrow Press published. Bukowski commonly used extreme language to shock: women were 'whores' and intercourse was 'rape', pandering to his readers' basest expectations. (Sounes, *Charles*: 147)

In the column "Meggy" the first-person narrator keeps getting mail from a seemingly obsessed reader of his. As he imagines their encounter, he draws on a terminology similar to the one introduced in the above citation, full of slang, swearing, and sex:

> meggy keeps on writing these letters. I have never met meggy, as I told you, but she does send photos, and she looks like a big healthy fuck […] if meggy had lived close enough I could have ended the whole torture easily enough, herself at my place breathing in the fine lilting flare of my poet eyes, the pantherpiss stride, pants torn at the knees with 2:30 a.m. falls […] I would turn and say in not very articulate English: "baby, in a couple of minutes I'm going to rip off your goddamned panties and show you some turkey neck you'll remember all the way to the graveside. I have a vast and curved penis, like a sickle, and many a gutted pussy has gasped come upon my callous and roach-smeared rug. first let me finish this drink." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 138-139)

While this quotation exemplifies what Sounes may have meant by extreme language, Cherkovski makes a further and generally more valid observation, claiming that Bukowski's style may be considered resistant to current literary vogues:

> In the columns one did not find the parlance of the times. Whether talking about himself or society, or his half-crazed friends, or how the writing of poetry can put a person on the cliff's edge, Hank wrote in the no-nonsense style he had begun with back in the early forties. In the heart of the sixties, he remained untouched by hippie terminology, employing it only sarcastically to prove a point. (Cherkovski: 189)

* * * * *

Julian Smith suggests that the employment of first names and real names add to the illusion of artless spontaneity. As elaborated on in the chapters on autobiographical writing in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, it proves a difficult task to derive authenticity or credibility from mere character names. Nevertheless, first names plausibly establish a feeling of familiarity with Bukowski's readers. Additionally, Smith formulates the hypothesis that Charles Bukowski's writings

contain frequent misspellings, ungrammatical constructions, sentences without verbs, repetitions, or split infinitives. Indeed, these are elements incessantly recurring in his stories.

The very last column included in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, "The Demon", begins with a cataphoric reference to a major character:

> I met her in a bookstore. she was wearing a very short tight skirt, enormous highheels, and her breasts were quite evident even under the loose-fitting blue sweater. her face was very pointed, austere, no make-up, with a lower lip that didn't seem to hang quite right. but with a body like that you could forgive quite a number of things. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 198)

Although the female character plays a crucial role in this episode, the narrator, who seems to encounter her for the first time himself, waits until the mid-second page to reveal her name: "my wife's name was Yevonna." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 199)

At the end of "Gas Station", the protagonist Bukowski learns of a murder at his former workplace. In the example to be quoted there is extensive repetition as the character continuously refers to his room and to the fact that he is crying. Moreover, it becomes evident that Charles Bukowski uses simple sentence structures either connected by simple coordinators and commas or separated by full stops – sometimes even if the subsequent sentence does not possess a verb:

> I was drunk. I walked away back towards my room. It was high New Orleans moon. I kept walking towards my room and soon the tears came, a great wash of tears in the moonlight. and then they stopped and I could feel the tear-water drying on my face, stretching the skin. when I got to my room I didn't bother with the light, got my shoes off, my socks off, and fell back on the bed without Elsie, my beautiful black whore, and then I slept, I slept through the sadness of everything and when I awakened I wondered what the next town would be, the next job. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 164)

The beginning of the third sentence occupies an exceptional place in Bukowski's stylistics: Whereas this sentence starts with a capital letter – this may have happened unintentionally – the majority of Bukowski's words in sentence-initial positions are non-capitalized. This observation enhances the impression of a rather spontaneous and inartificial way of writing, and thus conforms to the hypotheses posed by Julian Smith. Interestingly, names and the first-person pronoun are generally excluded from this rule of capitalization.

The deliberately sloppy style in terms of capitalization may also be seen as pointing to an inconsistent use of punctuation. In certain passages Bukowski neglects to indicate dialogue by appropriate punctuation marks.

> sit down, Stirkoff.
> thank you, sir.
> stretch your legs.
> most gracious of you, sir.
> Stirkoff, I understand you've been writing articles on justice, equality; also the right to you and survival. Stirkoff?
> yes, sir?
> (Bukowski, *Notes*: 176)

This scene taken from "Stirkoff" illustrates how dialogue may or may not be indicated by Bukowski. Although the column above seems to favor a dramatic mode with stage directions, some other pieces of prose in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* accord with the presented way of not indicating dialogue by punctuation marks. Nevertheless, dialogue occupies a prominent place in Bukowski's texts, as underscored by the outline table in chapter 1.2.3.1.

As Julian Smith demonstrates, Charles Bukowski's works feature tense shifts as well as jokes and asides. In the story "Jack" the author openly proclaims his tense shift in a side remark: "(by the way… I realize I switch from present to past tense, and if you don't like it… ram a nipple up your scrotum. – printer: leave this in.)" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 31)

In "Unsigned" the protagonist's boss is being drafted in World War II and the narrator mischievously remarks in an aside: "(I didn't tell him that somebody would fuck his wife for him while he was gone. and that if he didn't come back, she would adjust to the next position of Body for Sale with whatever she had left.)" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 133)

Howard Sounes considers Bukowski's columns only superficially sloppy in spelling and syntax:

> Bukowski wrote his column using slap-dash syntax and irregular spelling. He rarely bothered to capitalize letters or use conventional punctuation. But the apparent sloppiness was a stylistic experiment and, despite appearances, he was fairly serious about what he was doing. (Sounes, *Charles*: 86)

The conscientiously crafted language Bukowski employs in the stories and columns of *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* is partly based on the characters he

depicts and also defines them. Julian Smith goes as far as to even claim that Charles Bukowski's style is inseparably linked to the tough drunkard persona of Henry Chinaski and the author's language reflects his opposition to the current status. (see Smith: para. 1)

Accordingly, certain motifs like the consumption of alcohol and violence play essential roles in Bukowski's works. As Jean-Francois Duval notices, the imagery established by the employment of these motifs is also mirrored on a stylistic level:

> When violence is not physical, material or psychological, when it isn't bouncing off the repellent walls of a shabby room or the darkness of depressions, it is conveyed in word, becomes verbal and is concentrated in insults and fight scenes. Bukowski's terminology – his choice of the most raw, crude and simple words – is itself the expression of a violence created with language, stripped back to its most elementary forms of expression, considered to be "more real". […] The brutality of reality is matched by the brutality of words. (Duval, *Bukowski*: 106)

Furthermore, in establishing a suitable set of styles that evokes the impression of an unmediated reality, Charles Bukowski additionally draws on biographical experience. Sounes argues that Bukowski in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* progressed from the more autobiographical stories to highly fictitious columns since he had depleted his stock of anecdotes, maintaining the simple, callow, direct, crude, and raw language he had previously developed.

> He wrote in the first person using his real name and, initially, he used his past life as a subject matter: the death and funeral of his father, the Philadelphia barfly years, starving for his art in the shack in Atlanta, and marriage to 'the Texan heiress'. By the summer of 1967, he'd exhausted his stock of anecdotes and began inventing sex stories […] (Sounes, *Charles*: 86)

"The Funeral" starts in the mode of a third-person narrator recounting the funerals of Henry's parents:

> when Henry's mother died it wasn't bad. nice Catholic funeral. the priest waved some smoking sticks and it was all over. the coffin remained closed. Henry went right from that funeral to the racetrack. had a good day. found a light yellow girl there and they went to her apartment. she cooked steaks and they made it. when his father died it was more complicated. they left the coffin open and he had the last look. before that, the old man's girl friend, somebody he'd never met, a Shirley, this Shirley reached into the coffin, moaning and crying and grabbed that dead head and kissed it. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 112-113)

While the ending of the column parallels its beginning in terms of style, word choice, and content, it features a first-person narrator. Bukowski switches to another narrative mode in order to stress the story's autobiographical basis. In a confessional tone the narrator remarks:

> my name is Henry. Charles is my middle name. when my mother died it wasn't bad. nice catholic funeral. smocking [sic] sticks. closed coffin. when my father died it was complicated. they left the coffin open and the old man's girl friend reached into the coffin… kissed that dead head, and that started the whole thing. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 115)

Besides the autobiographical subject matter, one may notice both the stylistic repetition in the story's ending and the misspelling of smoking sticks. Both appear as characteristics of Bukowski's writing.

As pointed out in the previous chapters of this diploma thesis, the autobiographical background may be regarded as one major quality of Bukowski's works. Not only did he put personal experiences into his columns, he also wrote commentaries on recent socio-political and socio-cultural developments. Within this context, style may have functioned as a means to distinctly separate the author's writing from literary and political conventions, as well as from his fellow authors' styles: "This satiric critique of capitalism, bourgeois morality and conventional culture is accompanied by a deliberately disorderly syntax, a 'spontaneous' typewriterese that creates its effect by a radical difference from smoother, more literary writing…" (Smith: para. 4)

In making his stance clear, Bukowski's portrayal of society seems arguably related to that of Henry Miller. In this respect Kessler points to certain parallels between Charles Bukowski and Henry Miller:

> Within the context of American literature, Bukowski is sometimes compared to Henry Miller. In their radical rejection of mainstream social values, their survival-oriented individualism, the buffoonery of their sexual obsessions, the unabashedly autobiographical/personal orientation of their texts and the sheer productivity of their typewriters, Miller and Bukowski clearly share some territory. (Kessler: para. 8)

Having introduced the major stylistic strategies detectable in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, in the following chapter I will examine in what way Bukowski describes society in his commentaries, especially with respect to the 1960s.

2. The Sixties & the Beats

Whereas a considerable number of columns in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* are presented as works of prose and may therefore be regarded as pieces of short fiction, other columns rather express Charles Bukowski's personal opinion on current affairs in politics as well as on the cultural status quo. Besides those commentaries on everyday topics, some short stories seem to conform to the concept of realism. In the following section both kinds of columns shall be drawn upon in order to illustrate Bukowski's view on the U.S. American society. Analyzing certain portrayals, I will particularly focus on the period of this publication – the nineteen sixties.

Charles Bukowski regards contexts like the racetrack as places where people resort to. The socially eclectic microcosm functions as an appropriate indicator of the average people's lives. The story "At the Racetrack" in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* gives insight into the columns' historical and social background:

> I will only say this, out of a background of factories, park benches, two-bit jobs, bad women, bad weather of Life – the reason the average person is at the racetrack is that they are driven screwy by the turn of the bolt, the foreman's insane face, the landlord's hand, the lover's dead sex; taxation, cancer, the blues; clothes that fall apart on a 3rd wearing, water that tastes like piss, doctors that run assembly-line and indecent offices, hospitals without heart, politicians with skulls filled with pus… (Bukowski, *Notes*: 41)

However brutal Bukowski's accounts may be, they almost always appear to be based upon close readings of US society. Bukowski accounts for the alleged roughness in referring to his highly realistic approaches. To put it bluntly, the author sees himself as a mere mediator: "I only photograph society. If it's decaying, if it's violent, then my writing will be decaying and violent. I don't want it to be that way. But if it is, there is nothing else I can call it." (Duval, "Evening": 158)

In the light of realism, the first section of the following chapter shall offer illustrative instances with respect to the United States of America in the nineteen sixties. Bukowski recurrently depicts harsh working conditions,

renders lowlife existences, and the individual's struggle for a more promising life – thus one might also detect reminiscences of naturalism.

On the basis of the portrayal of U.S. society, I will then move on to the field of art. Certain branches seemed to prosper during this age, because the sixties gave room to the emergence of a lively underground scene. Art was no longer to be found in institutionalized venues but took place on the streets, in bars, and other less prestigious locations. The developments enhanced Bukowski's scope as he began writing columns for the underground newspaper *Open City*, which in turn increasingly raised his reputation. In this chapter I will both exemplify the conditions of productions at *Open City* and briefly refer to City Lights publishing house, a company immanently connected to the Beat Generation.

The chapter to follow presents some views Bukowski held towards the Beat Generation. After comprehensively introducing the Beat Generation, I will provide examples of their possible encounters with Charles Bukowski and reveal allusions to the literary circle of friends in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*. As Bukowski devotes an entire column to Neal Cassady, a member of the Beat Generation and close friend of Jack Kerouac's, further details of the character central also in Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) will be offered in a separate chapter.

Finally, a highly important person in Charles Bukowski's personal and professional life will be introduced in a brief digression: Due to the translator's recent death on January 24, 2012, Carl Weissner's achievements shall be honored. In the sixties Weissner began translating American literature into German and is considered crucial for Bukowski's success both in Germany and throughout Europe. The most important figure in the promotion and reception of the U.S. American author's works in Germany also became a longstanding friend of Bukowski's.

2.1 USA in the Sixties

Not only were the nineteen sixties an era of youth counterculture and social reforms, but they also marked an increase in the number of art galleries as well as museums. Most important, the medium of television was mushrooming at the decade's beginning and almost ninety percent of all American homes had access to TV by 1960. In 1962 *Naked Lunch*, William S. Burroughs' most renowned work of fiction, was published first in the USA and the following year The Beatles had their first number one hit. John F. Kennedy, who had been inaugurated only two years earlier, was assassinated in Dallas and Lyndon Johnson succeeded him as president of the United States of America. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s civil rights march took place in Washington D.C., where he also delivered his famous speech. The *Los Angeles Free Press*, the newspaper Bukowski wrote his columns for a few years later, began publication in 1964 and in 1965 Malcolm X, founder of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, was assassinated in New York. Race riots were continuing when the USA attacked North Vietnam and the Flower Power movement emerged in San Francisco, marking the beginning of the hippie subculture. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated in 1968 and – as Bukowski mentions in one of his columns with *Open City* – Richard Nixon and Hubert Humphrey ran for presidency. In 1969 Neil Armstrong became the first man to set foot on the moon. (c.f. Phillips, *Beat*: 255-257)

David Sterritt in *Mad To Be Saved* (1998) observes considerable changes in U.S. society after World War II. Technological progress, strict measures against communism, political conformity and general consensus, as well as prevailing forms of neo-conservatism were forces that began stabilizing the U.S. American postwar society:

> A long-lasting economic boom started at the end of World War II and continued with varying degrees of strength throughout the '50s, '60s, and early '70s. This reinforced a superficial sense of power and even invincibility among Americans that was also fueled by other factors. One was the recent military victory by Allied forces and the American move into spaces formerly dominated by European imperialism. Another was a spate of new developments in science and technology, in the form of present realities and also of easily fantasized (and continually promoted) sources of increased

> ease and comfort in the imminent future. Still another was the fact that relative improvements in middleclass living conditions allowed many people to overlook ongoing inequities in the distribution of wealth. (Sterritt: 20)

As the United States entered the Vietnam War, peace rallies, demonstrations, or sit-ins arose as common forms of protest. Whereas poets like Allen Ginsberg became driving forces of counterculture and leader figures for many protesters in the sixties, Charles Bukowski did not participate in the endeavors mentioned: “It was impossible for him to speak on behalf of others, on behalf of the people, because he was a man of the crowd […]” (Duval, *Bukowski*: 63)

2.1.1 Counterculture

Jean-Francois Duval praises the Beat Generation, claiming that they triggered groundbreaking revolutionary developments, influenced most renowned artists, and introduced new socio-cultural and socio-religious ideas to the United States of America:

> In the 1950s the boost given by the core members of the Beat movement unleashed the baby-boom generation's revolt against the conventions of a rigid society, fossilized in its terror of the cold war, prudish, materialistic and alienating. […] Indeed we owe much to the Beats – Dylan, the Beatles, beatniks, hippies, LSD, Katmandu, protest, "Make love not war," Woodstock, demos, punks, renewal of interest in the East, in Buddhism and ecology […] (Duval, *Bukowski*: 16)

Especially the poet Allen Ginsberg appears to have participated, if not led, many demonstrations and peace rallies. Eliot Katz's "Radical Eyes: Political Poetics and 'Howl'" (2006) goes as far as to even ascribe to Ginsberg's poem "Howl" (1956) political power: By looking behind the society's curtains of conventional consensus, he actually revealed the repressive aspects affecting the young that aspired toward more satisfying lives and a more hospitable society. (see Katz: 184)

Generally speaking, the Beats may be regarded as an alternative to mainstream U.S. society. Lisa Phillips in "Beat Culture: America Revisioned" (1995) identifies the expansion of the originally literary Beat circle to the West Coast as the initial flourishing of a much broader as well as a lively and artistically oriented movement. Although many artists within this newly established network did not consider themselves part of a Beat culture, basic values and views were shared among them: "Together they formed a potent underground that offered another view of American reality as an alternative to the conformity and consensus of official culture." (Phillips, "Beat": 28)

Charles Bukowski frowned upon the emerging collective of bohemians and hipster artists as well as their commitment to peace rallies and political matters. The author even attacks the Beats Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs: "Pros seem to turn to pricks, finally. See Mailer, Genet, Burroughs, Ginsberg, who the hell else? showing at the Chicago Yippie thing. As giants of Humanity? Bullshit. As Giants of Publicity." (Bukowski, *Screams*: 339)

Jean-Francois Duval reveals that the event mentioned must have been a huge demonstration in Chicago on the occasion of the Democratic Convention August 24-29, 1968. In April of the same year Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, which triggered severe riots throughout the United States. The situation worsened when in June Robert Kennedy was killed too. Ten thousands gathered in the city of Chicago – Ginsberg and Burroughs among them. (see Duval, *Bukowski*: 32)

Drawing on his spiritual beliefs Allen Ginsberg reassured the mad crowd. When, due to police intervention, a sudden turmoil erupted he chanted:

> In an attempt to keep the peace Ginsberg got on the stage and sang Hare Krishna for a quarter of an hour accompanying himself on the harmonium, interpreting William Blake's "Grey Monk" that he had set to music. Suddenly there was an inexplicable rush from the police. Panic. The demonstration erupted. Ginsberg climbed to the top of a small mound and sat in the lotus position chanting the mantra "OMMM" Others joined him. The long vibration – which helped Ginsberg restore his inner peace – grew louder, taken up by thousands of voices! The chant – OOOMMMMMM OOOOOMM – lasted for seven hours!" (Duval, *Bukowski*: 32)

* * * * *

In a conversation between Charles Bukowski and Neeli Cherkovski, the author claims not to feel responsible for what is happening in Vietnam, neither does the killing affect him – Bukowski contends to feel sympathy rather for a dog being killed in the street or a man being slain in front of his eyes. In contrast, the deaths in Vietnam are mere information he hears of via the media. Concerning the protests against the war he takes a cautious stance, for the people screaming for peace might be the ones who will murder in the end. (cf. Cherkovski: 183)

> Bukowski liked to mock the counter-culture, having little time for drugs, pop music or radical politics. But many of the young writers and publishers who liked his work were deeply involved in these things and Bukowski was inevitably drawn into what was happening in the late 1960s. (Sounes, *Charles*: 83)

Charles Bukowski would never have participated in peace rallies or sit-ins. Nevertheless, as he commented on certain events in his columns, he clearly

expressed his convictions and beliefs. *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* contains a commentary on Robert Kennedy's assassination: "this guy in the army fatigues came up to me and said, 'now that it happened to Kennedy you'll have something to write about.' he claims to be a writer, why doesn't *he* write about it?" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 45)

Although the narrator at first appears reluctant to comment on the assassination, Bukowski carries on with his thoughts on society and hallmarks the nineteen sixties:

> I think we've got enough experts on the case now – that's what this decade is: the Decade of the Experts and the Decade of the Assassins. and neither one of them worth crystallized dog turds. the main problem with a thing like that last assassination is that we not only lose a man of some worth but we also lose political, spiritual and social gains, and there *are* such things, even if they do seem high-sounding. what I mean is, that in an assassination crisis the anti-human and reactionary forces tend to solidify their prejudices and to use all ruptures as a means of knocking natural Freedom off the goddamned end seat at the bar. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 46)

He cites parts of Governor Reagan's speech and challenges his fatherly tone and the authorial attitude. Bukowski questions Reagan's presumably superior position and the lofty language of his speechwriters. Furthermore, Bukowski detects certain parallels with all assassinations happening in the recent past:

> now the good governor is going to take away our toys and put us to bed without dinner. lord lord, *I* didn't murder Kennedy, either one of them. or King. or Malcolm X. or the rest. but it's fairly obvious to me that the Left Wing Liberal forces are being picked off one by one – *whatever* the reason (a suspect who once worked in a health food store and hated Jews) – *whatever* the reason, the left-wingers are being murdered and put into their graves while the right-wingers don't even get grass-stains upon their pantscuffs. and weren't Roosevelt and Truman also shot at? Democrats. how very odd. that the assassins are sick, I will admit, and that the Father-Image is also sick, I will also admit. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 47)

In spite of Bukowski's general disinterest in politics, the recent developments also left him bothering: "I am apolitical but with these murky curve-balls these reactionaries throw, I might get pissed and into the game yet." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 47)

Going on about Kennedy's assassination, Bukowski mocks the Los Angeles sportswriters who, he claims, are the worst writers of all. Especially when it comes to thinking, Charles Bukowski is convinced they lack mental capacity: "one sportswriter on our largest non-striking newspaper came on like

this, in part (while R. Kennedy was in surgery): 'The Violent State of America: A Nation in Surgery'" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 48)

Similarly, he pillories the psychotherapists' analyses and explanations. Bukowski puts it in a rather direct and non-euphemistic way: "what they *won't* tell us is that our madmen, our assassins *do* spring from our present mode of life, our good old All-American way of living and dying. Christ, that we are all not *outwardly* raving, that's the miracle!" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 51)

Whereas in "R. Kennedy" Bukowski draws on one particular event in order to illustrate his beliefs and opinions, in the beginning of the text "Revolution" he suggests a more general approach towards revolutionary movements and the society's unpleasant development:

> all the rivers are going to get higher, and yet it's tight, the schoolteachers whack you with rulers and the worms eat the corn; they are mounting the mgs on tripods and the bellies are white and the bellies are black and the bellies are bellies. men are beaten simply for the sake of *beating*, courts are places where the ending is written first and all that precedes is simply vaudeville. men are taken into rooms for questioning and come out half-men or no men at all. some hope for revolution but when you revolt and set up your new government you find your new government is still the same old Papa, he has only put on a cardboard mask. […] when you are given a choice between Nixon and Humphrey it's like being given a choice between eating warm shit or cold shit. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 62)

Bukowski then goes into more detail when he challenges Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs for supposedly leading those revolutions: "they hang in the parks with the Che idol, with pictures of Castro in their amulets, going OOOOOOOOMMMMM OOOOOOOMMM while William Burroughs, Jean Genet and Allen Ginsberg lead them." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 62-63)

Bukowski appears essentially displeased with the writers' misinterpreted role because they extend their scope onto the streets:

> these writers have gone, soft, cuckoo, eggshit, female – not homo but female – and if I were a cop I'd feel like clubbing their addled brains myself. hang me for that. the writer of the streets is getting his soul cock-sucked by the idiots. there is only one place to write and that is ALONE at a typewriter. a writer who has to go INTO the streets is a writer who does not does not know the streets. […] WHEN YOU LEAVE YOUR TYPEWRITER YOU LEAVE YOUR MACHINE GUN AND THE RATS COME POURING THROUGH. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 63)

As opposed to Ginsberg, who constantly showcased his works in poetry readings, Bukowski appears to never have liked performing. Yet, Charles

Bukowski had to give some performances to earn a living: “when some of my few friends ask, ‘why don’t you give poetry readings, Bukowski?’ they simply do not understand why I say ‘no.’” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 63)

The quotation also vaguely implies Bukowski’s preference for being and writing alone, rather than acting within a crowd or giving poetry readings in front of large audiences:

> Well, for me it was never hard to be alone. It always felt best… It’s natural. […] I’ve never been lonely. I’ve been depressed. I’ve been suicidal. But being lonely means another person will solve your problem. Loneliness means you need something or somebody, so I never had a loneliness in that sense. I never felt like another person would solve my problem. I always felt that I would solve my problem. So all I needed was myself. I had myself and I worked with myself, from myself. (Duval, “Evening”: 164)

In solitude and from a safe distance behind his typewriter, Bukowski in “Revolution” witnesses two peace movements in Europe and the United States: “and so we have Chicago and so we have Prague and it’s no different than it has ever been. the little boy is going to get his ass beat and when (and if) the little boy gets big he is going to beat on ass.” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 63)

Doubting the use of revolutionary movements, Charles Bukowski calls out a warning: “revolution sounds very romantic, you know. but it ain’t. it’s blood and guts and madness; it’s little kids killed who get in the way, it’s little kids who don’t understand what the fuck is going on.” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 64) Moreover, having acquired the wisdom of a middle-aged man, Bukowski advises the young and aspiring:

> but before you kill something make sure you have something better to replace it with; something better than political opportunist slamming hate horseshit in the public park. […] I’ve seen no solid leader or no realistic platform to insure AGAINST the betrayal that has always, so far, followed it. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 64)

Charles Bukowski most certainly intended to allude to Ginsberg and Burroughs leading the parade in Chicago. By comparing the Chicago movement to the nineteenth-century French Revolution in Paris, he also tries to mitigate the current notion of revolution during the late sixties:

> it’s one thing to talk about Revolution while three jackass writers of international fame have you dancing to the OOOOOOOOOOMMM game; it’s another thing to bring it

> about, it's another thing to have happen. Paris, 1870-71, 20,000 people murdered in the streets, the streets as red with blood as with rain, and the rats coming out and eating at the bodies, and the people hungered, ravaged, no longer knowing what it meant, coming out and yanking the rats off the corpses and eating the rats. and *where* is Paris tonight? and *what* is Paris tonight? (Bukowski, *Notes*: 65)

Charles Bukowski accuses the revolutionaries of pretense by mistaking marijuana for political activism: "and pot. they always equate pot with Revolution. pot just isn't that *good*. for Christ's sake, if they legalized pot half the people would stop smoking it." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 65)

> the rats are the true revolutionaries; the rats are the true underground, but they don't want your ass except to nibble on and they are not interested in OOOOOOOOOMMM. I'm not saying give up. I'm for the true human spirit wherever it is, wherever it has been hiding, whatever it is. but beware of the cowboys who make it sound so good and leave you out on a plateau with 4 hard-core cops and eight or nine national guard boys and only your bellybutton as a last prayer. the boys screaming for your sacrifice in the public parks are usually the furthest away when the shooting begins. they want to live to write their memoirs. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 66)

It remains plausible to assume that in this passage Bukowski again wanted to refer to the Beat writers Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs humming in the public parks. Nevertheless, Bukowski admits:

> Yet, old as I am, I am particularly pleased to live in this certain age. THE LITTLE MAN HAS SIMPLY GOTTEN TIRED OF TAKING TOO MUCH SHIT. it's happening everywhere. […] it's Man against govt. […] I like this time. I like this feeling. the young have finally begun to think. and the young have become more and more. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 68)

In late 1968 elections took place in the United States and Bukowski remarks in "Jack": "[…] we can choose between Nixon and Humphrey and Christ and be fucked anyway we turn […]" (Bukowski, *Notes*: 29)

* * * * *

In contrast to Ginsberg or Burroughs, Bukowski did not commit himself to any revolutionary movement of whatever objective; as pointed out above, he himself was on the verge of raging as he claims to have been deeply affected and could hardly bear the situation: "On one side there was the constellation of Beat writers […] On the other side there was a loner, a rebel for all causes, a total dissident even within the counterculture." (Duval, *Bukowski*: 24)

Despite their somewhat opposite stances towards the revolution, the Beats and Bukowski shared certain characteristics: “The Beats were more up-market; bums, but heavenly bums. They, too, put their hand to a range of jobs, led a bohemian lifestyle and spent time in prison.” (Duval, *Bukowski*: 24) Similar to Bukowski’s viewpoint, Kerouac distanced himself from the socio-political movements of the sixties:

> As for underground events and antiestablishment activities in the ‘60s, both remained apolitical and claimed their sole capacity as poet and writer. […] He considered the beatniks, hippies, proto-hippies, Maoïsts, protesters and ‘68ers as strange descendants that he could not have created […] (Duval, *Bukowski*: 37)

Due to Ginsberg’s and Burroughs’ strong commitment to political matters as well as due to the Beat’s emphasis on spiritual and religious practices they may have triggered certain socio-cultural postwar movements and countercultural phenomena. Duval suggests that the Beat Generation brought about the beatniks and hippies, followed by the punks. Bukowski’s public image appears not to have fitted tightly into either of the presented schemes. Nevertheless, parallels to the “trash and destroy” attitude of the punk movement may arise. (cf. Duval, *Bukowski*: 19-21)

As Neeli Cherkovski contends, many people considered Bukowski to be part of the whole youth-cultural movement. Yet, his attitudes presented in his columns imply that his opinions were formulated years earlier: “Young people who followed ‘Notes of a Dirty Old Man,’ often understood implicitly that an older voice spoke to them, one as defiant as they themselves strove to be.” (Cherkovski: 190)

2.1.2 Religion

“if you want to know where God is, ask a drunk.” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 165)

As revolution was looming, religion gained more and more importance and became a central aspect among the newly emerged protest movements. In “Revolution” Bukowski notices increasing overlaps between spiritual

alignments and political involvement: “the religious con boys are moving in with the revolutionary con boys and you cant tell asshole from pussy, brothers.” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 67)

If one considers the Beat Generation as the origin of all postwar socio-cultural movements, one will indeed find that religion and spirituality held an essential place with the group’s individuals. Although the Beat Generation neither fostered collective approaches nor possessed a proper manifesto, religion in the widest sense appears to have had crucial importance for many authors among the core group: “They experimented with all kinds of religions and mystical cults – Zen, the occult, yage, peyote, LSD, Catholicism, the Cabala – to attain an ecstatic radicalism, which they then transmitted through their art. This mystical strain was especially strong on the West Coast […]” (Phillips, “Beat”: 30)

As Ray Carney in “Escape Velocity: Notes on Beat Film” surveys, Buddhism occupied a prominent position among the Beat Generation:

> The Beats embraced a variety of Eastern religious practices in an effort to reestablish a relation to the spiritual side of everyday life. Zen Buddhism in particular appealed to them for several reasons: it was not premised on the existence of God to justify its beliefs and practices; and it esteemed nonrational, nonlogical states of mystical awareness (which tied in with the Beat interest in consciousness-altering drugs). At the same time, it was a religion that valued ordinary experiences. (Carney: 194)

Similarly, Sterritt stresses the unique promises Buddhism held for the Beat Generation: “Buddhism offered some of the Beats not only a guide to new sorts of behavior but also a means of seeking pure streams of thought wherein memory and expectation would be gloriously moot.” (Sterritt: 45)

Among the three figureheads of the Beat Generation, it may have predominantly been Allen Ginsberg who was committed most to Buddhism, whereas William S. Burroughs’ artistic approaches were closely linked to his drug addiction and dreamlike experiences. For Jack Kerouac it was Catholicism which functioned as primary source of inspiration. As John Leland points out in *Why Kerouac Matters: The Lessons of On the Road (They’re Not What You Think)* (2007), “[…] Kerouac had deepened in his Catholic faith, mixing it with his more recent enthusiasm for Buddhism. He wore the crucifix outside his shirt […]” (Leland: 149)

Accordingly, Duval underscores Jack Kerouac's notion of the Beat Generation as a religious movement: "Kerouac had his face constantly turned towards God, towards an assumed paradise. He believed in the celestial nature of his hobos and bums – the angelic generation is another name he gave the Beat generation […]" (Duval, *Bukowski*: 103)

Contrary to common belief, the Beats' role in spreading religious beliefs was less seminal than expected – Ginsberg and Kerouac did not introduce Buddhism to the United States of America:

> From a broader historical perspective, the Beats do not appear as innovative as they once seemed. For example, although they played a role in spreading the influence of Buddhism among white middle-class youth, [they] did not introduce Buddhism to the West. […] A century of importation of Pacific Rim labor […] brought these spiritual practices to the West coast, though they did not spread substantially beyond immigrant use until the convergence of several factors: the return of US servicemen from occupied Japan, often accompanied by Japanese Buddhist wives; the relaxation of immigration laws in 1960, which permitted religious leaders from India, Japan, and the forcibly secularized Tibet to enter the country; the publication and popularity of D.T. Suzuki's books on Zen. (Damon: 144)

As for Charles Bukowski, "[he] was afraid, above all, of deluding himself. He was a million miles away from the great hopes cherished by the Beats and the hippie generation: nothing less than changing the world!" (Duval, *Bukowski*: 64) Nevertheless, towards the end of his life having been afflicted by leukemia, Charles Bukowski appears to have found peace in meditating – he might have been influenced by his wife Linda, who also organized Bukowski's funeral ceremony to be led by Buddhist monks:

> Five or six month after leukemia was diagnosed, in 1993, Buk had a period of remission during which he set himself to studying transcendental meditation with Linda in the direction of Santa Monica. Twice a day, Hank sat in his armchair in the house in San Pedro, and he meditated for twenty minutes, reciting a mantra […] Hank was very calm. "He accepted." Tuberculosis (in 1988), death's approach, writing *Pulp*, and leukemia surely change a man. […] Buddha really was a friend of his, but Hank had no intellectual interest in him. Not the slightest inclination to undertake the slightest study, to read up on the subject, to go into it deeply. (Duval, *Bukowski*: 129)

In spite of his philosophical and spiritual disinterest in the study of Buddhism, Bukowski seemed to intuitively have liked Buddha, his correct attitude, and his upright and earthly posture. (see Duval, *Bukowski*: 130)

2.2 Underground Art

“He stated categorically that he did not feel a part of the underground, even as he became one of its heroes.” (Cherkovski: 194)

In the following section I will attempt to answer the question how Charles Bukowski became an underground hero. As already illustrated in the above chapters, Bukowski kept aloof from the socio-political and socio-cultural movements that emerged at that time. Therefore, it may have rather been his involvement in new artistic forms that contributed to this reputation. The Beat Generation’s achievements functioned as a basis for both West Coast and East Coast artists since the original group had generated collaborative approaches to art and literature, leaving increasingly space for performance:

> One of the most revolutionary achievements of the Beat era was a change of venue for art: out of the academies, museums, and concert halls and into the streets, coffeehouses, and nightclubs. Artists, filmmakers, jazz musicians, and poet-performers mixed in places like the Black Cat Café, and the Coexistences Bagel Shop in San Francisco, the Gashouse in Los Angeles, and the San Remo, the Cedar Tavern, Café Bizarre, and the Five Spot in New York. A fluid café scene created a setting for aesthetic exchange among artists in all media. Another part of the circuit of informal meeting places was the artist co-op gallery – a phenomenon of the fifties that flourished in San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles. (Phillips, “Beat”: 33)

Not that Bukowski himself participated actively in a soaring art scene, but the structural developments appear to have paved the way for his success as an author cherished by the so-called underground. The forum and the readership of the alternative newspaper *Open City* may thus be regarded with respect to this era’s previously attained artistic goals. “Although not the widest circulated underground newspaper in Los Angeles, it nonetheless made a significant impact on the counterculture. In his column, Hank covered whatever came to mind.” (Cherkovski: 188) Furthermore, the publishing house of City Lights run by Beat-associate Lawrence Ferlinghetti as well as the poetry readings Bukowski delivered, relate to the lively Beat scene.

2.2.1 *Open City*

The newspaper Bukowski wrote his “Notes of a Dirty Old Man” for, *Open City*, was established by John Bryan, who placed it as a quintessential underground medium on the market:

> John Bryan’s magazine, *Notes from Underground*, was short-lived and, after working for a while as managing editor of the *LA Free Press*, he decided to launch a newspaper. *Open City* would feature radical writing and politics in the tradition of the little magazines, but by selling through vending machines and news stands he hoped to reach many more readers. He asked Bukowski to write a weekly column. (Sounes, *Charles*: 85-86)

Not only did the newspaper seem to have been substantially hippie in alignment, but *Open City* was also actually sold by hippies on Sunset Strip. It contained articles about hip music and psychedelic drugs. (see Sounes, *Charles*: 86)

Julian Smith detects parallels between Charles Bukowski and the Beat writers and gives further insight into the newspaper’s coverage. While Bukowski’s column was first published by *Open City*, it was later taken over by the *L.A. Free Press*:

> In common with many other writers (Ginsberg, Burroughs, Snyder), Bukowski published in underground newspapers of the 1960s and 1970s; he became a prolific contributor to his local papers, *Open City* and *L.A. Free Press*, and his fiction took its place alongside coverage of student unrest, the New Left, black power, civic and police corruption, the draft resistance, drug information, and adverts for sexual contacts and services. (Smith: para. 2)

More precisely, it was in May 1967 when Charles Bukowski started his weekly column “Notes of a Dirty Old Man” for *Open City* and he would keep on contributing until 1969. The *L.A. Free Press* commenced publishing a sequel of the said column in January 1974. (see Roni, “Zeittafel”: 17)

The engagement with *Open City* had a sudden end when John Bryan asked Bukowski to edit a literary supplement. The columnist, who was generally given total freedom, chose a sexually explicit short story of an underage girl, that appeared in the seventeenth edition of the newspaper in September 1968. Bryan was arrested on obscenity charges and the case

remained unresolved until 1969. Notable writers like Allen Ginsberg sent letters of support to the story's author Jack Micheline. Although the accusations were ultimately dropped, *Open City* had to be closed down eventually. (see Sounes, *Charles*: 93)

At the same time a compilation featuring some of the columns that *Open City* had published under the headline "Notes of a Dirty Old Man" appeared. Its publication was due to the publishing company Essex House, whose initiative proved successful: "In January 1969, Essex House […] released a collection of Bukowski's *Open City* stories, *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*. It didn't take long for the twenty thousand copies printed to completely disappear from bookstore racks." (Cherkovski: 206)

In the preface to the collection *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* Charles Bukowski himself comments on the newspaper:

> More than a year ago John Bryan began his underground paper OPEN CITY in the front room of a small two story house that he rented. Then the paper moved to an apartment in front, then to a place in the business district of Melrose Ave. Yet a shadow hangs. A helluva big gloomy one. The circulation rises but the advertising is not coming in like it should. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 5)

Bukowski alludes to the fact that John Bryan himself had worked for the newspaper's major competitor: the *L.A. Free Press*. The business rival is assumed to have asserted its position:

> Across in the better part of town stands the *L.A. Free Press* which has become established. And runs the ads. Bryan created his own enemy by first working for the *L.A. Free Press* and bringing their circulation from 16,000 to more then three times that. […] Of course, the battle isn't simply OPEN CITY vs. FREE PRESS. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 5)

Bukowski claims that money played a minor role in contributing: "It's more fun and more dangerous working for OPEN CITY, perhaps the liveliest rag in the U.S. But fun and danger hardly put margarine on the toast or fed the cat. You give up toast and end up eating the cat." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 5)

At first, writing columns appeared to be a dusty and monotonous thing to do. However, Charles Bukowski gradually became fond of this opportunity, especially because he did not feel any pressure by the editor and was actually given absolute freedom, a fact that he greatly appreciated:

> So this strange idealist and romantic created OPEN CITY. “How about doing us a weekly column?” he asked off-handedly, scratching his red beard. Well you know, thinking of other columns and other columnists, it seemed to me to be a terribly drab thing to do. […] Then one day after the races, I sat down and wrote the heading, NOTES OF A DIRTY OLD MAN, opened a beer, and the writing got done by itself. […] There seemed to be no pressures. Just sit by the window, lift the beer and let it come. Anything that wanted to arrive, arrives. And Bryan was never a problem. I’d hand him some copy – in the early days – and he’d flit through it and say, “OK, it’s in.” […] Now he doesn’t even say, “It’s in.” I just hand him the copy and that’s that. It has helped the writing. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 6)

Charles Bukowski asserts that the publication *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* encompasses “[…] selections from about fourteen months worth of columns.” (6) Moreover, he refers to the fact that *Open City* might go down soon and implies that he did not have any specific intentions with this collection: “I hope that these selections help you. […] But I am just an old guy with some dirty stories. Writing for a newspaper, which, like me, might die tomorrow morning.” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 7)

2.2.2 City Lights & Poetry Readings

“The 6 Gallery in San Francisco was the site of the now legendary first reading of Ginsberg’s “Howl” in 1955 (sometimes cited as the beginning of the Beat movement) […]” (Phillips, “Beat”: 33)

Although Charles Bukowski openly admitted that poetry readings and the articulation of the written word somewhat contradicted his notion of being a writer, he perceived the readings as a welcome opportunity to earn some extra money, which eventually prompted his decision to resign from his job at the post office in 1970. Due to the development of the Beat culture and the now popular artistic formats and venues, poetry readings had become more frequent over time – a fact that Bukowski recognized:

> Partially because they saw it as a way for Hank to earn enough money that might hasten his liberation from the post office, friends convinced him to give his first poetry reading in the spring of 1969. Having no appreciation for the oral tradition, his reluctance to enter that arena was understandable. Once he took the plunge he

> recited his poems as if he had always been doing it. He didn't look forward to the event with much enthusiasm. The reading was held at the Bridge […] and more than three hundred people showed up. (Cherkovski: 205)

In the same year the Beat publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti acknowledged Bukowski's position as a poet and writer of short fiction in an exchange of letters, thus confirming the links between Charles Bukowski and the Beat Generation: "Ferlinghetti, famous as Beat poet and a major voice of the San Francisco poetry renaissance of the late fifties, earned equal fame as the publisher of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* under the City Lights imprint." (Cherkovski: 194-195)

By 1972 Charles Bukowski had gained increasing experience in giving poetry readings. He received an invitation from San Francisco's City Lights Poet's Theater. The reading was followed by a considerable number of readings in this city where Bukowski was expected to epitomize his previously established persona of the sex-obsessed drunkard. Linda King, who regularly accompanied the poet to his performances, and he himself stayed at Ferlinghetti's place directly above the City Lights publishing office in San Francisco. (see Cherkovski: 231-232)

Bukowski explicitly challenged Ginsberg and Burroughs in the column originally published in *Open City*, labeled "Revolution". The commentary was also resumed in the second edition of *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* in 1973 published by Ferlinghetti's City Lights. Nonetheless, Bukowski went on a reading tour with Allen Ginsberg in autumn 1974. At this point Charles Bukowski seems to have finally accepted both the tradition of poetry performances initiated by the Beat Generation in general and Ginsberg's first reading of "Howl" in particular. (cf. Duval, *Bukowski*: 52)

2.3 Bukowski and the Beats

John Clellon Holmes, who published the article “This Is The Beat Generation” in the *New York Times Magazine* on November 16, 1952, coined the somewhat ambiguous term “Beat”: Whereas the original Beat Generation was a mere circle of friends that gathered at Columbia University in postwar New York City, the term often denotes a much broader field and refers to the socio-cultural movement only partially instigated by the group’s figureheads Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac.

Since the Beat Generation as a literary group did not formulate common goals in a manifesto, the writers’ works appear highly diverse: While Ginsberg was predominately devoted to poetry (readings), as in “Howl” (1956), Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957) and William S. Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch* (1959) adopt different angles and approaches. Jack Kerouac’s autobiographically inspired novel renders the adventures of the writer, Sal Paradise, together with Neal Cassady as Dean Moriarty on the American roads. Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch* features aspects of drug addiction as well as experimental approaches to the composition of the individual chapters.

However eclectic the Beats’ works may be, the similarities shared among the writers become apparent when looking at the group’s very name. It derives from three distinct sources: First, the word alludes to the social status of the members, who often felt themselves as being rejected by the conservative U.S. American postwar society – they felt tormented, exhausted, beat. Second, in music in general and in jazz in particular the Beats discovered elements they could adopt for their writings – Kerouac, for example, compared the process of writing to the spontaneity of bebop and eventually modeled it on the music’s beat. Third, the religious connotation of the term “beatific” corresponds to the Beats’ interest in a vast number of religious practices, drugs, and dreamlike experiences.

Although there are certain conflations of the Beat culture’s youth movement and Bukowski, the latter can in no way be considered to have been part of the original core Beats. In fact, Charles Bukowski watched critically

and probably also enviously both the Beat Generation's success and their involvement in socio-political matters:

> He read Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* and Gregory Corso's poetry, like many other poets writing for the small poetry journals, or "littles," as he called them, but he was unimpressed. What annoyed him the most about the Beat poets was their engagement in social and political issues. He believed this hampered their poetry, that a true poet had greater concerns than tampering with current affairs. (Cherkovski: 118)

When critic Jean-Francois Duval met Ginsberg only a few months after Charles Bukowski's death in 1994, the Beat poet questioned the author's growing fame: 'Bukowski? I think his star probably will fade a little. Maybe there will be a couple of poems in an anthology of great poetry, I'm not sure,' he told me." (Duval, *Bukowski*: 11)

Although Ginsberg and Bukowski knew each other personally because they went together on a poetry reading tour in 1974 and although both were included in the *Penguin Modern Poets* series – Bukowski 1969 alongside Harold Norse and Philip Lamantia, who also identified with the Beats – their mutual respect as well as their willingness to acknowledge the other's achievements seem limited. (cf. Cherkovski: 200)

This could partly be due to the fact that Bukowski perceived the emerging socio-cultural movements and (pretentious) art scenes as inevitably having originated from the Beat Generation. In "New York", a column of *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, he describes his room near Greenwich Village, a spot usually associated with the Beats:

> I finally managed to ask one of them where the Village was and when I got to the Village I found a room and when I opened my wine bottle and took off my shoes I found that the room had an easel, but I wasn't a painter, just a kid looking for luck, and I sat behind the easel and drank my wine and looked out of the dirty window. when I went out to get another bottle of wine I saw this young guy standing in a silk bathrobe. he wore a beret and sandals, had half-diseased beard and spoke into the hall phone: "oh, yes yes, darling, I *must see* you, oh yes, I *must!* I shall slash my wrists otherwise…! yes!" I've got to get out of here, I thought. he wouldn't slash his shoelaces. what a sickening little snip. and outside, they sat in the cafes, very comfortable, in berets, in the get-up, pretending to be Artists. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 32)

However, the myth of the Beat-Village seems to be flawed anyway: "[…] the early Beats [had a preference] for less gentrified locales such as Times

Square and environs, not to mention their strong presence in San Francisco, a continent away." (Sterritt: 170)

Nonetheless, Bukowski expresses further dislike towards the Beats in another column, "Jack", when he claims William S. Burroughs to be the only junky who can make it because of his background:

> […] the only junky who can make it is Wm. Burroughs, who owns the Burroughs Co., almost, and who can play it tough while all along being a sissy fat wart-sucking hog inside. this is what I hear, and it's kept very quiet. is it true? for it all, true or not, Burroughs is a very dull writer and without the insistence of knowledgeable pop in his literary background, he would be almost nothing […] (Bukowski, *Notes*: 31-32)

Charles Bukowski did not spare the third of the three Beat figureheads, Jack Kerouac, either: In *Hollywood* Chinaski in a conversation with Sarah discredits him for being a rodeo rider rather than a writer:

> 'Well, Pheasant came over and he told me about this movie he produced. It's about a writer who couldn't write but who got famous because he looked like a rodeo rider.'
> 'Who?'
> 'Mack Derouac.'
> (Bukowski, *Hollywood*: 20)

In spite of their different views and their obvious animosities, Bukowski and the Beats nonetheless seem to have possessed considerable similarities: Besides their shared cultural background, their explicit portrayals of sex, drugs, and alcohol, as well as their strong focus on marginalized figures, their works are intrinsically autobiographical:

> All the Beat writers are autobiographical by nature. And it is clear that Bukowski's prose texts and poems, even when he presents Henry Chinaski, do not escape this rule. It's the same whether the narrators call themselves Duluoz (Kerouac), Chinaski (Bukowski) or Mr. Miller (Henry Miller in *Sexus*). The events and the gestures of the characters/narrators are the same as the authors' […] (Duval, *Bukowski*: 95)

2.3.1 Neal Cassady in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*

> With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road. Before that I'd often dreamed of going West to see the country, always vaguely planning and never taking off. Dean is the perfect guy for the road because he actually was born on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City in 1926, in a jalopy, on their way to Los Angeles. (Kerouac, *Road*: 1)

In the very beginning of *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac presents the novel's central character Dean Moriarty, he had modeled on Neal Cassady. Whereas Charles Bukowski was biased against the Beat Generation, Neal Cassady was the sole Beat figure he greatly admired.

> Cassady was the former drifter and railroad worker who had been the lover of Allen Ginsberg and, more famously, the basis of the character Dean Moriarty in Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*. […] Bukowski admired Cassady because, apart from his ambivalent sexuality, he was a man after his own heart – someone who had worked factory jobs, been in jail and liked to drink beer and bet on the horses. So when Cassady passed through LA just after Christmas, 1967, Bukowski was pleased to meet him. (Sounes, *Charles*: 91)

On the occasion of their encounter in early 1968, Bukowski devoted one of his columns in "Notes of a Dirty Old Man" to Neal Cassady. The author claimed that Jack Kerouac supposedly misinterpreted the latter's character in depicting Dean Moriarty. Cassady, in fact, was much more ordinary than presented in Kerouac's *On the Road*. (cf. Duval, *Bukowski*: 68-69)

The story headlined "Neal Cassady" sticks to the factual account presented above. Charles Bukowski's column in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* sets a temporal frame and first portrays Cassady according to the image conveyed in *On the Road*:

> I met Kerouac's boy Neal C. shortly before he went down to lay along those Mexican railroad tracks to die. his eyes were sticking out on ye old toothpicks and he had his head in the speaker, jogging, bouncing, ogling, he was in a white t-shirt and seemed to be singing like a cuckoo bird along with the music, *preceding* the beat just a shade as if he were leading the parade. I sat down with my beer and watched him. I'd brought in a six pack or two. Bryan was handing out an assignment and some film to two young guys who were going to cover that show that kept getting busted. whatever happened to that show by the Frisco poet, I forget his name. anyhow, nobody was noticing Neal C. and Neal C. didn't care, or he pretended not to. when the song stopped, the 2 young guys left and Bryan introduced me to the fab Neal C. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 23-24)

Presumably only after a few minutes of drinking together, Bukowski notices that Neal Cassady's personality did not correspond to the one presented in Kerouac's *On the Road*. He accuses the Beat author for misreading Cassady when forging the character of Dean Moriarty. Furthermore, the narrator acknowledges that the image established in Kerouac's novel still lingers. However great Kerouac's influence on Cassady's public image may be, Bukowski intends to differentiate between the autonomous person of Cassady and the fictitious road character of Moriarty: "you liked him even though you didn't want to because Kerouac had set him up for the sucker punch and Neal had bit, kept biting. but you know Neal was o.k. and another way of looking at it, Jack had only written the book, he wasn't Neal's mother. just his destructor, deliberate or otherwise." (Bukowski, *Notes*: 24)

When John Bryan suggests a boxing match between the two of them, Bukowski refuses, acknowledging Cassady's much better physical constitution. Moreover, as Charles Bukowski – born in August 1920 – admits his current age, the story's setting in 1968 becomes plausible:

> "you want to try him, Bukowski?" asked Bryan.
> "yeah, ya wanta go, baby?" he asked me.
> again, no hatred. just going with the game.
> "no, thanks. I'll be forty-eight in August. I've taken my last beating."
> I couldn't have handled him.
> (Bukowski, *Notes*: 24)

After checking whether Neal Cassady and Jack Kerouac are still in touch, Bukowski accepts Bryan's invitation to have dinner. The story reaches its climax when Cassady speeds along the slippery roads, almost hitting the parking cars:

> "when was the last time you saw Kerouac?" I asked.
> I think he said 1962, 1963. anyhow, a long time back. […] when we got outside a very light rain was just beginning to fall. the kind that really fucks up the streets. I still didn't know. I thought Bryan was going to drive. but Neal got in and took the wheel. I had the back seat anyhow. B. got up in front with Neal. and the ride began. straight along those slippery streets and it would seem we were past the corner and the Neal would decide to right or a left. past parked cars, the dividing line just a hair away. it can only be described as hairline. a tick the other way and we were all finished. after we cleared I would always say something ridiculous like, "well, suck my dick!" and Bryan would laugh and Neal would just go on driving, neither grim or happy or sardonic, just there – doing the movements. I understood. it was necessary. it was his bull ring, his racetrack. it was *holy* and necessary. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 25)

The ecstatic ride rendered in “Neal Cassady” conforms to the numerous adventurous episodes featuring Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*. The narrator, Sal Paradise, surveys Moriarty’s behavior when they depart on yet another road trip:

> It was drizzling and mysterious at the beginning of our journey. I could see that it was all going to be one big saga of the mist. “Whooee!” yelled Dean. “Here we go!” And he hunched over the wheel and gunned her; he was back in his element, everybody could see that. We were all delighted, we all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one and noble function of the time, *move*. And we moved! (Kerouac, *Road*: 134)

In spite of Bukowski’s assumption that Kerouac might have distorted Cassady’s image reshaping it in the character of Dean Moriarty in his novel *On the Road*, the two passages cited above underscore the main character’s ever-present compulsion of moving and the joy he finds in speed.

As the end of Bukowski’s “Neal Cassady” suggests, only a few days after their hazardous experience on the road Bryan calls Bukowski to inform him of Cassady’s death. Cassady presumably had died under the influence of drugs and alcohol, walking home along a railroad track in Mexico after a wedding party:

> “Neal’s dead, Neal died.”
> “oh shit, no.”
> the Bryan told me something about it. hung up. that was it. all those rides, all those pages of Kerouac, all that jail, to die alone under a frozen Mexican moon, alone, you understand? […] the only night I met him I said, “Kerouac has written all your other chapters. I’ve already written your last one.” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 26)

Not only did Neal Cassady function as a model for Kerouac’s heroic character of Dean Moriarty, but he was also presented as the prototypical male womanizer. Since the road in general and the road genre in particular facilitate the invention of ever-new personalities, the characters may become anybody as they travel. Dean Moriarty welcomes a vast number of erotic opportunities, and irresponsible as he occurs, soon after their encounter he leaves the women he meets on his trips. (cf. Leland: 90)

In contrast, neither Bukowski nor his characters seem to have solved such problems by simply hitting the road. They lacked the hopes and aspirations, and more essentially the spirit to depart on journeys like the ones

described in *On the Road*. While Charles Bukowski rarely departed on trips without a specific goal or destination and thus remained basically rooted in the state of California, the freedom-loving Beats recklessly explored the continent, traveling for the sake of motion.

For Cassady the very brief stays in various cities most often come with flirtatious adventures: Allen Ginsberg worships Neal Cassady's reputation as a heartbreaker and womanizer in his poem "Howl":

> […]
> who went out whoring through Colorado in myriad stolen
> night-cars, N.C., secret hero of these poems,
> cocksman and Adonis of Denver – joy to the memory
> of his innumerable lays of girls in empty lots
> & diner backyards, moviehouses' rickety rows
> on mountaintops in caves or with gaunt waittresses [sic]
> in familiar roadside lonely petticoat upliftings
> & especially secret gas-station solipsisms of
> johns, & hometown alleys too,
> […]
> (Ginsberg: 4)

Not only was the "Adonis of Denver" notorious for his innumerable heterosexual encounters, but he also had a homosexual love relationship with Allen Ginsberg – homosexuality was an omnipresent and frankly treated topic among the Beats. Although explicitly and unambiguously depicted in his works, Bukowski's heterosexual orientation has also been disputed. (cf. Duval, *Bukowski*: 77-79)

2.3.2 Homosexuality

> I've never said this before but I am now high enough as I write this to perhaps say that Ginsburg [sic] has been the most awakening force in American poetry since Walt W. It's a god damn shame he's a homo. […] Not that it is a shame to be a homo but that we have to wait around and let the homos teach us how to write. (Charles Bukowski, "A Rambling Essay on Poetics and the Bleeding Life Written While Drinking a Six-Pack (Tall).", in: *Ole*, 2/March, 1965. Qtd. in: Cherkovski: 167)

Despite the openly homophobic undertone displayed in the above example, Bukowski affirms that being a homosexual is not a disgrace. Although the writer generally appears willing to handle the topic frankly, respectfully, and

open-mindedly, he relapses into a somewhat ambivalent and conservative attitude. In his writing he often takes a rather defensive stance towards homosexuality in order to rid himself of the accusation of being gay. “Jack”, a column in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, gives further insight into Bukowski’s angle and line of argument:

> every man is afraid of being a queer. I get a little tired of it. maybe we should all become queers and relax. […] there are too many people afraid to speak against queers – intellectually. just as there are too many people afraid to speak against the left wing – intellectually. I don’t care which way it goes – I only know: there are too many people afraid. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 28)

Nevertheless, the Beat Generation seems to have honestly addressed controversial topics, as Gordon Ball argues in “Wopbopgooglemop: ‘Howl’ and Its Influences” (2006). Whereas Ginsberg tackled homosexuality, Burroughs often rendered his experiences as a heroin addict. The confession of their deepest feelings, preoccupations, concerns, and anxieties may have contributed to the fact that those subjects were increasingly being discussed in national debates. (see Ball: 97)

Bukowski overcame his prejudice when he met Harold Norse, who he grew fond of. (Sounes, *Charles*: 93) Norse held the opinion that Bukowski’s bias functioned in order to shield himself from the accusations of bisexuality:

> The homophobia irritated Norse and he believes it may have been a cover for Bukowski being bisexual. Norse claims that when Bukowski was drunk he sometimes got his cock out and asked to see Norse’s cock. This did not appear to be meant as a joke. […] There was no physical contact, no move by Bukowski to have contact, or sign from Norse he would welcome it. […] And Sam Cherry’s son, Neeli Cherkovski, recalls an occasion when Bukowski was drunk and asked if he wanted to get into bed with him. (Sounes, *Charles*: 95-96)

Notes of a Dirty Old Man features Bukowski’s account of an incident when he accidentally had anal sex with a male visitor. In the story “Baldy M.” Bukowski finds himself awakening drunk in his bed. The protagonist apparently intends to have anal sex with the woman sleeping next to him:

> some cunt had decided to stay with me – that was love, that was bravery. shit, who could really stand me? anyone who could stand me had a lot of forgiveness of soul. I just had to REWARD this sweet, little dear deer for having the guts and insight and courage to stay with me. what better reward than to fuck her in the ass? […] I had never done it that way and it was working on my mind. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 145)

In the middle of the act the true nature of his counterpart is revealed to the protagonist. He is taken aback and decides to wait until morning: “then in the excitement the blanket fell back. I saw more clearly the head. the back of the head and the shoulders – it was one Baldy M. American MALE! all went limp. I fell back in indecent horror. I fell back sick, staring at the ceiling, and not a drink in the place.” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 147)

The next morning Baldy M. does not leave Bukowski’s room and stays on for two or three more weeks. The desperate protagonist calls Baldy’s mother to pick up her son in order to get rid of him eventually.

Another rendition of Bukowski touching upon the subject matter of homosexuality is given in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*: In “The Lather & the Brush” Bukowski makes contact with a woman in a somewhat dubious establishment. Briefly after they begin having sexual intercourse, another male intervenes:

> she looked all right. I put the thing in. I put in what I had. “oooh,” she said, “it’s good! you’re so curved! like a gaff!” “accident I had when I was a child. something with the tricycle.” “oooooh…” I was just going good when something RAMMED into the cheeks of my ass. I saw flashes before my eyes. (Bukowski, *Notes*: 23)

Bukowski, who hardly recalls how he got there, describes the place in Pasadena as follows as : “it was very dark in there but I smelled grass. and ass. I stood there and let my eyes adjust. it was mostly guys. licking assholes. reaming. sucking. it was not for me. I was square.” (Bukowski, *Notes*: 22)

Therefore, the utterance made in the very last sentence confirms the assumption that Bukowski in this respect generally conforms to square norms and conservative virtues as well as heterosexuality. Nonetheless, Charles Bukowski seems inclined to accept other sexual orientations and, as Howard Sounes sums up, the author simply enjoyed teasing the homosexuals Harold Norse and Neeli Cherkovski. However, his ample experiences with women are evidence of his enthusiastic heterosexuality. (cf. Sounes, *Charles*: 96)

2.4 Carl Weissner

Charles Bukowski owes much of his success to his German translator Carl Weissner. At the beginning of this year – on January 24, 2012 – Weissner died in Mannheim, Germany at the age of 71. In the following and last part of this diploma thesis Weissner's major achievements with respect to Charles Bukowski will thus be pointed out. Not only did they collaborate as the German translated Bukowski's works, they also had a longstanding friendship.

Carl Weissner, who specialized in American studies, learned English in school and on the streets. After World War II his neighborhood was occupied by U.S. American troops. When Weissner got in touch with one of the GIs stationed there, he became interested in the English language and in jazz. Later he studied in Heidelberg and Bonn, Germany, focusing on contemporary American literature. Among the first books he had read was *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac. The Beat Generation became one of Weissner's prior fields of interest. (see Cherkovski: 172-173)

In the years to come Weissner specialized in international avant-garde forms of contemporary literature: "As to the forms contemporary literature took, Weissner was equally at home with the pros cut-ups of William Burroughs as with the direct, linear sensibility of Bukowski: in both he saw a true rebellion against the established order." (Cherkovski: 174)

After having gotten into contact via mail in the year of 1966, Weissner eventually went to L.A. in 1968 in order to meet Bukowski in person:

> Weissner walked onto the porch and saw a note on the door which read:
> Carl. Don't bother to knock. I'm probably in transit. Just step through the door. It's broken anyway. Welcome to the United States.
> Weissner tried the door. Just as Hank had said, it was unlocked. The environment seemed perfectly suited to his image of Bukowski. Window shades shut the world out. The room reeked of dirty socks and prolonged bouts of beer guzzling and cigar smoking. (Cherkovski: 176)

Weissner seemed particularly impressed by the way Bukowski spoke: What the translator would describe as clarity of expressions – the laconic and simple language – matched Bukowski's writing style devoid of literary adornments. (cf. Cherkovski: 178)

> In the fall of 1969, Bukowski mailed a copy of *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* to Carl Weissner in Mannheim, Germany, who had already read many of the individual pieces in *Open City*. Seeing them together in one volume made quite an impact on him. […] *Notes* appeared in the spring of 1970 under the Melzer imprint. (Cherkovski: 207)

Notes of a Dirty Old Man was Bukowski's first book to appear in German and also marks the beginning of the fruitful collaboration with Carl Weissner. Horst Schmidt considers it a seminal event in the reception of Bukowski's works:

> Bukowski's […] Kolumnen »Notes of a Dirty Old Man« erschienen 1969 beim kalifornischen Kleinverlag Essex House und 1970 in der deutschen Übersetzung von Carl Weissner unter dem Titel »Aufzeichnungen eines Außenseiters« beim Melzer-Verlag in Darmstadt – womit ein neues Kapitel der Bukowski-Rezeption seinen Anfang nahm. Die »Aufzeichnungen eines Außenseiters« waren nicht nur das erste Buch Bukowskis im deutschsprachigen Raum, sondern zugleich auch das erste Zeugnis der Zusammenarbeit von Bukowski und Carl Weissner, der fortan als Europa-Agent Bukowskis fungierte, die meisten von dessen im deutschen Sprachgebiet erschienen Werken übersetzte und zudem einige Artikel und Interviews über Bukowski publizierte. (Schmidt, *»Germans«*: 15)

In the early seventies Carl Weissner also translated Bukowski's debut novel *Post Office*. Publishing a full-fledged novel should help build up an audience in Germany. However, the edition that appeared with a major publisher in Cologne sold very slowly; so did the first paperback edition of *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*. Hence, Weissner decided to focus on poetry translations. The translator's strategy proved successful when in 1974 he edited *Poems Written before Jumping out of an 8 Story Window*, that penetrated the German market. (see Cherkovski: 235-236)

> It was also Bukowski's good fortune to have in Carl Weissner someone who took infinite care translating his unusual style of poetry and prose into readable and entertaining German. It was not always a straight-forward job. 'He is easy to translate when he is colorful and uses a lot of adjectives,' explains Weissner. 'But he is difficult when his language becomes very bare, short sentences and stuff.' (Sounes, *Charles*: 174)

Much of Bukowski's increasing reputation and fame in Germany in particular and Europe in general was due to his translator Carl Weissner. A trip to Europe became inevitable. On May 8, 1978, Charles Bukowski and Linda Beighle arrived in Frankfurt am Main. Bukowski was to give a poetry reading in Hamburg and welcomed the opportunity to meet his friend Carl Weissner

as well as his uncle Heinrich Fett, who lived in Andernach am Rhein, Germany. (see Cherkovski: 266-267)

Bukowski's *Shakespeare Never Did This* offers a detailed description of each day on his trip. The travelogue also features photographs by Michael Montfort, who accompanied the author and Linda Beighle on their journey. Together they went to visit Carl Weissner: "The next day we went to the train station to find a train to Mannheim, Germany, where I was to see my friend and German translator, Carl Weissner." (Bukowski, *Shakespeare*: ch. 10)

As his scheduled reading in Hamburg approached, Bukowski once more affirmed that he actually did not like to perform: "I still disliked poetry readings; I got drunk and fought with the audience. I never wrote poetry to read it but it sure got the rent. All the poets I had ever known, and I had known too many of them, liked to give readings." (Bukowski, *Shakespeare*: ch.11)

During the journey an awkward feeling overcame Bukowski. Although being of German descent, he felt very much an alien in Europe: "I felt much more the tourist than the visiting American writer of German birth…" (ch. 14) Bukowski's feeling of being foreign in his parents' home country relates back to the first chapters of this diploma thesis – the starting point of Bukowski's biography and his place of birth:

Although Bukowski's uneasiness appears inevitably linked to location, it is in fact barely a geographically rooted rather than a psychological and emotional state. Did not Charles Bukowski feel rejected and alienated from early childhood on? The regular beatings by his father he had to endure and the scars that remained on his face are only two instances to corroborate such hypothesis. Similar to the characters the author would later invent, Bukowski himself felt very much the outsider at society's bottom. In contrast to the Beats, the marginalized author never hit the road in order to escape and travel for the sake of motion. He bore hopeless situations as they were, always remaining in a specific spot. Desperate as he sometimes must have been – he claims to have attempted suicide several times – Bukowski in certain periods in his life clung to the consumption of alcohol and regularly frequented bars and similar establishments. While the location of the bar has been presented as the antechamber to the home in Bukowski's texts, one

may plausibly infer that Bukowski himself rarely felt *at home*, neither in his shady apartments, nor at work at the American postal service. Hence, the mature author's trip to Germany in 1978 may possibly be understood as an attempt to finally come to terms with this lack of proper home and virtual emotional homelessness. As the title of John Dullaghan's documentary, *Bukowski: Born into This*. (2003), suggests it is even this crucial sense of belonging that seems to have been missing for a very long time in Bukowski's life and may have caused many of the author's anxieties and preoccupations that were ultimately mirrored by his texts. When Bukowski entered the stage in the Markthalle in Hamburg on May 18, 1978, he appears slightly relieved as he welcomes the crowd with a poignant statement: "'Hello,' I said, 'it's good to be back.'" (Bukowski, *Shakespeare*: ch. 16)

Finally, Bukowski got to visit his only remaining relative he could remember, Heinrich Fett: "Andernach where I had been born 8-16-20 was right off the Rhine and in this town lived my uncle Heinrich, aged 90 and so we went to see him." (ch. 18) After an emotional reunion his uncle begins talking about the past: "'See that house over there?' he pointed across the street. 'That's where you lived… You were like the wind… you never stopped… you ran over here… 'Uncle Hein! Uncle Hein! you'd scream at me…'" (Bukowski, *Shakespeare*: ch. 18)



Figure 11: House of birth: Andernach am Rhein.

Conclusion

Notes of a Dirty Old Man offers ample evidence for the autobiographical strategies used by its author Charles Bukowski. Many columns feature episodes and anecdotes retraceable in the author's biography: For example, the author writes about his troubled childhood in "The Frozen Man"-trilogy, describes how he lost virginity to an overweight prostitute in "The 300 Pound Whore", recounts his parents' funerals in "The Funeral", and presents his views on the nineteen-sixties' youth movements in "Revolution".

Drawing on illustrative examples from the movie *Barfly* and the novel about the film's production, *Hollywood*, proved especially helpful, as certain columns seem to have been carried over onto the screen and into the novel. Such parallel scenes can be found in the columns "Mary" or "Philly". In contrast to the movie *Barfly* and the novel *Hollywood*, the crucial character's name, Henry Chinaski, is not used in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*. Although in the feature film as well as in the novel the character of Henry Chinaski is referred to as such, Bukowski adapted his columns to certain scenes in his screenplay and so the character's foundation remained unaltered. Drawing on these autobiographical models, Bukowski in turn bases his characters upon real figures, such as Jane Baker, who became Wanda in *Barfly*, and Mary in the column of the same name.

Nonetheless, as certain columns comprise highly fictitious renditions, the border between fact and fiction becomes blurred. Adding to the columns' characters, the motifs Bukowski employs function jointly in order to establish the distinct atmospheric framework the stories' individuals rely on. Space and locations most generally mark them as belonging to a particular social sublevel where elements of alcohol, sex, and physical violence prevail. However, the motifs vary according to the columns' genre and the degree of realistic presentation. Some columns seem to feature a rather misogynist and stereotypical way of depicting women, whereas other female characters, as has been demonstrated, are fully fleshed out as they are based upon real figures. The motif of alcohol sketches the protagonists' mediocre lives as they habitually resort to drinking; yet, its inebriating effects may play only minor

roles in Bukowski's imagery. Due to the columns' brevity Bukowski basically draws on a rather stereotypical set of motifs that builds on a callow, simple, and unadorned style.

After closely defining the term "Beat", the authors Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs were introduced. Whereas the three Beat writers engaged in peace rallies and protest movements, the author of *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* assumed a rather detached stance. He presents his thoughts on revolution and counterculture in the columns "Revolution" and "R. Kennedy", where he frowns upon the revolutionaries. Nevertheless, he generally welcomes the commitment of the youth movements and appears highly dissatisfied with the political, social, and cultural status quo of the nineteen sixties. As a professional author Charles Bukowski regards it his duty to write on his typewriter rather than lead the mob.

In an era of flourishing countercultural forces, Bukowski did not comply with the Beats' proposed religious practices and worldviews. However, Buddhism seems to have had a reassuring quality as Charles Bukowski began meditating towards the end of his life. When poetry readings and other sorts of art forms became increasingly popular, Bukowski commenced publishing his weekly column "Notes of a Dirty Old Man" with the alternative newspaper *Open City*. While he only gave poetry readings reluctantly, these regular contributions helped him gain an extraordinary reputation.

Neal Cassady has been presented as the last convergence of the Beats and Bukowski in this paper. Not only did Cassady serve as a model for the protagonist of Kerouac's *On the Road*, Dean Moriarty, but he also became the central character in Charles Bukowski's column "Neal Cassady". While some of the Beats were homosexual, Charles Bukowski was shown not to have been bisexual – but enthusiastically heterosexual.

In the last brief chapter Carl Weissner, Bukowski's translator, was introduced and his importance for the author's reception stressed. The photograph of Bukowski's house of birth was taken in May 2012, when retracing Bukowski roots in and around Andernach, Germany.

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Table of Figures

Figure 1: Introducing *Barfly*'s settings. 30
Figure 2: Charles Bukowski miming a barfly. 31
Figure 3: Barflies in *Barfly*. 32
Figure 4: Chinaski: Writing, drinking, thinking. 33
Figure 5: Henry and Wanda: Encounter, liquor store, spare keys, drinking... 35
Figure 6: *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*: Overview. 45
Figure 7: Professional Writing: Chinaski and Tully. 53
Figure 8: Fistfights: Chinaski vs. Eddie. 54
Figure 9: Motifs in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*. 62
Figure 10: Same scene: *Barfly* and "Mary". 71
Figure 11: House of birth: Andernach am Rhein..... 124

Sources (LTR):

Figure 1: Schroeder, *Barfly*: TC 00:00:27, 00:0022, 00:00:47, 00:00:58
Figure 2: Schroeder, *Barfly*: TC 00:21:30, 00:22:30
Figure 3: Schroeder, *Barfly*: TC 01:26:36, 01:30:09, 00:08:11, 00:38:35
Figure 4: Schroeder, *Barfly*: TC 00:09:51, 00:10:04, 00:12:36, 00:44:50
Figure 5: Schroeder, *Barfly*: TC 00:21:43, 00:25:42, 00:32:56, 00:37:52
Figure 7: Schroeder, *Barfly*: TC 00:59:25, 00:41:07, 01:08:02, 01:12:46
Figure 8: Schroeder, *Barfly*: TC 00:03:22, 00:02:37, 00:17:07, 00:18:07
Figure 10: Schroeder, *Barfly*: TC 00:48:37, 00:48:44, 00:50:26, 00:50:38

Abstract / Zusammenfassung

The major objective of „*Notes of a Dirty Old Man*: Bukowski. The Sixties. The Beats.“ was to demonstrate features of autobiographical writing in Bukowski's collection of columns published first in 1969, to unveil the most compelling literary devices applied, as well as to reveal convergences with the Beat Generation's literary works. After a comprehensive short biography of the author Charles Bukowski, the composition of *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* was presented to encompass several literary genres under the textual label of the column. By analyzing the short stories, commentaries, and short poems with respect to Bukowski's movie script *Barfly*, the feature by Barbet Schroeder, and to the novel *Hollywood*, aspects of autobiographical writing were illustrated and backed up by screenshots. In order to properly identify each piece of writing comprised in *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* the individual columns were given appropriate titles and a thorough overview was drafted in order to offer insights into the most prominent literary features: title, narrative mode, major characters, setting, and tense. In a further survey five motifs were drawn upon to highlight certain atmospheric conventions detectable throughout Bukowski's oeuvre. In the second section of this diploma thesis the Beat Generation was introduced and its links with Charles Bukowski exemplified. The observations made support the hypothesis of Bukowski's works being highly autobiographical. However, with many columns it proved essentially difficult to tell apart fictitious and autobiographical accounts. A distinct set of motifs and setting contribute to an idiosyncratically bizarre atmosphere that is both dismal and ironic. Contrary to some of the Beat Generation's members, Bukowski showed limited interest in current affairs, politics, and revolutionary movements – he commented on the Beats in his columns of *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*. To conclude, Carl Weissner's influential role was stressed and by recounting Bukowski's trip to his place of birth the very last chapter ties in with the beginning of this diploma thesis.

Das vorrangige Ziel dieser Diplomarbeit mit dem Titel „*Notes of a Dirty Old Man*: Bukowski. The Sixties. The Beats.“ ist es, die autobiographischen Aspekte der oben genannten Kolumnensammlung, welche erstmals im Jahre 1969 veröffentlicht wurde, aufzuzeigen. Außerdem sollen die prägnantesten literarischen Stilmittel herausgearbeitet und mögliche Parallelen zwischen Bukowski und der Beatgeneration verdeutlicht werden. Auf eine Kurzbiographie des Autors folgt eine allgemeine Präsentation der Kolumnensammlung *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, welche Texte verschiedenartiger literarischer Genres umfasst, die allesamt unter dem journalistischen Terminus der Kolumne zusammenzufassen sind. Nach einer eingehenden Analyse der Kurzgeschichten, Kommentare und Gedichte werden die Strategien des autobiographischen Schreibens illustriert. Hierbei ist insbesondere der in den Texten inhärente, unmittelbare Bezug zu Bukowskis Drehbuch *Barfly*, dem gleichnamigen Spielfilm von Barbet Schroeder und dem Roman *Hollywood* im Fokus der Analyse, welche mithilfe repräsentativer Szenenfotos aus *Barfly* fundiert wird. Um die ursprünglich titellosen Kolumnen von *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* eindeutig zuordnen zu können, wurden sie in einem vorbereitenden Arbeitschritt mit Überschriften versehen und schließlich in einer umfangreichen Überblickstabelle zusammengefasst. Diese soll die markantesten Merkmale unterstreichen: Titel, Erzählperspektive, Charaktere, Schauplatz und Zeit. Um die atmosphärischen Besonderheiten von Bukowskis Texten zu verdeutlichen, werden zudem fünf ausgewählte Motive einer genauen Untersuchung unterzogen: Eine einzigartige Motivik und düster-bedrückende Schauplätze evozieren eine bizarre wie ironische Stimmung, die sich sowohl in den fiktiven als auch autobiographischen Kolumnen wiederfindet. Im zweiten Abschnitt dieser Diplomarbeit wird die Beatgeneration als literarischer Freundeskreis definiert. Neben persönlichen sowie künstlerischen Berührungspunkten werden auch wesentliche Unterscheidungsmerkmale zwischen den Beatliteraten Allen Ginsberg oder William S. Burroughs und Charles Bukowski dargelegt. Abschließend wird die einflussreiche Rolle des Übersetzers Carl Weissner beleuchtet und Bukowskis Reise an seinen Geburtsort Andernach am Rhein als Indiz emotionaler Heimatlosigkeit interpretiert.

Index

"Aftermath of a Lengthy Rejection Slip" (Bukowski) 11
alcohol 5, 6, 14, 23, 29, 48, 60, 61, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 80, 83, 84, 92, 114, 117, 123, 125
All the Assholes in the World and Mine (Bukowski) 18
Andernach 7, 8, 123, 124, 126, 135
"A Rambling Essay on Poetics and the Bleeding Life Written While Drinking a Six-Pack (Tall)" (Bukowski) 17, 118
"At the Racetrack" (Bukowski) 41, 61, 94
"Baldy M." (Bukowski) 43, 61, 64, 119
"Barbara" (Bukowski) 43, 56, 57, 61, 64
Barfly (Bukowski/Schroeder) 4, 6, 12, 21, 22, 24, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 59, 68, 70, 71, 84, 125, 134, 135
Beat culture 5, 98, 110, 112
Beat Generation 5, 14, 95, 98, 104, 105, 106, 107, 111, 112, 113, 115, 119, 121, 134, 135
Beats 5, 36, 94, 98, 104, 105, 106, 112, 113, 114, 118, 123, 126, 134, 135
Beighle, Linda Lee 20, 21, 75, 106, 122, 123
Black Sparrow Press 7, 18, 20, 21, 89
Blazek, Douglas 17, 25, 26
Bryan, John 19, 38, 40, 108, 109, 110, 115, 116, 117
Buddhism 98, 105, 106, 126
Bukowski, Charles 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 108, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 134, 135
Burnett, Whit 11
Burroughs, William S. 5, 15, 96, 98, 99, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 108, 111, 112, 114, 119, 121, 126, 135
California 7, 18, 20, 29, 118
Cassady, Neal 40, 95, 112, 115, 116, 117, 118, 126
Cherkovski, Neeli 6, 9, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 25, 28, 46, 52, 74, 89, 99, 104, 119, 120
Chinaski, Henry 4, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 53, 54, 55, 56, 59, 60, 73, 74, 85, 92, 114, 125
City Lights 95, 107, 110, 111
Confessions of a Man Insane Enough to Live with the Beasts (Bukowski) 17, 25, 26
Cooney Baker, Jane 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 21, 31, 35, 36, 69, 74, 125
Corso, Gregory 14, 15, 113
counterculture 96, 97, 98, 103, 107, 126
Crosby, Caresse 11, 52
Crucifix in a Deathhand (Bukowski) 16, 17
Dunaway, Faye 35, 36, 38
Essex House 19, 109, 122
Factotum (Bukowski) 11, 20, 25
Ferlinghetti, Lawrence 14, 15, 107, 111
"frozen man" 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51
Frye, Barbara 13, 56, 57, 59
"Gas Station" (Bukowski) 44, 61, 90
Germany 5, 7, 10, 73, 95, 121, 122, 123, 124, 126
Ginsberg, Allen 5, 14, 15, 97, 98, 99, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 115, 118, 119, 126, 135
"Gold With Green Polka Dots" (Bukowski) 42, 61, 81, 82
Hamburg 73, 122, 123, 124
Ham on Rye (Bukowski) 21, 25
Hollywood (Bukowski) 4, 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 36, 37, 114, 125, 134, 135
Holmes, John Clellon 112
homosexuality 118, 119, 120
"Howl" (Ginsberg) 98, 110, 111, 112, 113, 118, 119
Howl and Other Poems (Ginsberg) 111
It Catches My Heart in Its Hands (Bukowski) 16
"Jack" (Bukowski) 40, 61, 64, 91, 103, 114, 119
Kerouac, Jack 5, 95, 104, 105, 106, 112, 114, 115, 116, 117, 121, 126
King, Linda 20, 111
"L." (Bukowski) 42, 61, 64
L.A. Free Press 89, 96, 108, 109
Laugh Literary and Man the Humping Gun 19
Los Angeles 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 19, 21, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33, 35, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 49, 51, 57, 58, 96, 100, 107, 115
"Lou" (Bukowski) 44, 61
Loujon Press 16, 18
"Mailbox" (Bukowski) 43, 61
Marina 15, 16, 45, 51
Martin, John 18, 19
"Mary" (Bukowski) 44, 61, 69, 71, 125
"Maxfield" (Bukowski) 44, 61, 82
"Meggy" (Bukowski) 43, 61, 64, 89
Mimeo Press 17, 18, 25
Moriarty, Dean 112, 115, 116, 117, 126
"Moss & Anderson" (Bukowski) 41, 61, 75, 76
"Mr. Business Man" (Bukowski) 41, 61, 64, 85
"Mr. McCuller" (Bukowski) 41, 61, 81
Naked Lunch (Burroughs) 96, 112
"Neal Cassady" (Bukowski) 40, 61, 64, 115, 117, 126
"New Orleans" (Bukowski) 44, 61, 66
"New York" (Bukowski) 41, 61, 64, 65, 113
Norse, Harold 113, 119, 120
"Notes of a Dirty Old Man" 18, 38, 104, 108, 109, 115, 126
Notes of a Dirty Old Man (Bukowski) 4, 5, 6, 19, 22, 23, 38, 39, 45, 46, 50, 51, 56, 60, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 68, 70, 72, 74, 75, 79, 80, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92 93, 94, 95, 100, 109, 110, 111, 113, 115, 119, 120, 122, 125, 126, 134, 135
Ole 17, 25
On Going Out to Get the Mail (Bukowski) 18
On the Road (Kerouac) 95, 105, 112, 115, 116, 117, 118, 121, 126
Open City 4, 18, 19, 38, 39, 51, 52, 59, 60, 78, 84, 85, 95, 96, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 122, 126
"Paper Wings" (Bukowski) 40, 61, 80, 81
Paradise, Sal 112, 117
Philadelphia 11, 21, 30, 32, 44, 50, 51, 52, 56, 74, 85, 92
"Philly" (Bukowski) 42, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 61, 125
physical violence 5, 6, 60, 61, 70, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84, 125
"Pink Panties" (Bukowski) 42, 61, 64, 76

Poems Written before Jumping out an 8 Story Window (Bukowski) 122
poetry reading 73, 110, 113, 122
Portfolio: An International Review 11, 52
Post Office (Bukowski) 11, 12, 13, 19, 20, 25, 26, 57, 65, 122
post office 10, 12, 13, 19, 57, 75, 110
Pulp (Bukowski) 21, 22, 25, 79, 81, 106
"Red" (Bukowski) 42, 61, 72
religion 104, 105
"Revolution" (Bukowski) 41, 61, 102, 104, 111, 125, 126
"R. Kennedy" (Bukowski) 41, 61, 101, 126
Rourke, Mickey 36, 37, 38
San Francisco 14, 96, 107, 110, 111, 114
Schroeder, Barbet 4, 6, 21, 22, 27, 28, 29, 30, 68, 134, 135
Shakespeare Never Did This (Bukowski) 123
"Shirt Cardboards" (Bukowski) 44, 61
sixties 5, 23, 46, 89, 94, 95, 96, 97, 100, 102, 104, 126
Smith, Frances 15, 16
space 5, 22, 63, 64, 66, 125
"Steam Bath" (Bukowski) 44, 61, 82
"Stirkoff" (Bukowski) 45, 61, 83, 91
style 5, 6, 23, 39, 86, 87, 89, 91, 92, 93, 121, 122, 126
"Suicide" (Bukowski) 42, 58, 59, 61, 64, 85
"The 300 Pound Whore" (Bukowski) 44, 50, 61, 85, 125
"The Cardboard Shack" (Bukowski) 43, 61, 64
The Dance of Jim Beam 28, 36
"The Demon" (Bukowski) 45, 62, 64, 90
"The Elf" (Bukowski) 40, 61, 64
"The Frozen Man I" (Bukowski) 45, 46, 49, 62
"The Frozen Man II" (Bukowski) 45, 46, 49, 51, 62
"The Frozen Man III" (Bukowski) 45, 46, 51, 62
"The Funeral" (Bukowski) 43, 61, 88, 92, 125
The Girls – For the Mercy-Mongers (Bukowski) 18
"The Lather & the Brush" (Bukowski) 40, 61, 120
"The Olympic" (Bukowski) 41, 61, 88
The Outsider 14, 15, 16
"The Stripper" (Bukowski) 45, 61, 64
"The Tailor" (Bukowski) 42, 61, 81
To Kiss the Worms Goodnight (Bukowski) 18
True Story (Bukowski) 18
Tully 53
"Twenty Tanks from Kasseldown" (Bukowski) 11
"Unsigned" (Bukowski) 43, 61, 77, 78, 85, 91
Wanda, Wilcox 12, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 54, 55, 56, 125
Webb, Jon Edgar & Gypsy Lou 14, 15, 16
Weissner, Carl 5, 95, 121, 122, 123, 126, 134, 135
"What Time Is It Now?" (Bukowski) 42, 61
Women (Bukowski) 20, 25, 74
women 5, 6, 60, 61, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 125
writing 5, 6, 23, 60, 61, 84, 85

Résumé

Mag. phil. Matthias K. Heschl,
October 19, 1986 (Austria)

- Certificate Program Kulturkonzepte, Vienna (October 2011-October 2012)
- Mag. phil. in Theater-, Film-, and Media Studies, University of Vienna (Diploma Thesis: “Beat – Jim Jarmusch und Tom Waits auf den Spuren einer Generation.”) (November 2010)
- KWA-Scholarship (Diploma Thesis), New York City (March 2010)
- Enrollment in English and American Studies & Theater-, Film-, and Media Studies, University of Vienna (October 2006)
- French Summer Program, Université Sorbonne, Paris (Summer 2006)
- Professional Business School for Product Management and Presentation, Mödling – Passed with Distinction (2001-2006)

- Project Management & Guest Office, Crossing Europe 2013 Film Festival, Linz (December 2012-April 2013)
- Freelancer, Marketing/Press, Filmladen (since May 2012)
- Press/Guest Office, Crossing Europe 2012 Film Festival, Linz (March-April 2012)
- Publishing Project, Layout, Hollitzer Wissenschaftsverlag (October 2011-January 2012)
- Film Journalist and Critic, Celluloid Filmmagazin (since December 2009)
- Internship: Guest Office, Arcana Festival for Contemporary Music, St. Gallen/Gesäuse (July-August 2010)
- Internship: International Program Sales, ORF (October 2009-January 2010)
- Internship: TV-Productions, Cinevision (March 2009)