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**Portrayal of the Self in Charles Bukowski's Autobiographical Fiction:
Case Study of *Women* (1978) and *Ham on Rye* (1982)**

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and Civilization.

Submitted by:

Supervisor:

HALOUI Rayane

Dr. GASMI Fatima Zohra

MEHAIBIA Soundous

Board of examiners:

Chairwoman: Mrs. BOUREGAA Merriam

University of 8 Mai 1945 - Guelma

Supervisor: Dr. GASMI Fatima Zahra

University of 8 Mai 1945 - Guelma

Examiner: Mrs. BRAHMIA Lilia

University of 8 Mai 1945 - Guelma

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated with heartfelt sincerity,

To me.

To the star of this academic journey.

To the cosmic explorer, the starry-eyed dreamer.

To the stargazer, the seeker of celestial wonders.

May this thesis mark the beginning of a lifelong exploration.

May it fuel your passion for the infinite unknown,

And inspire you to reach for the stars, on your own.

Haloui Rayane

Dedication

Alhamdulillah, thank you Allah for providing me with the strength and faith to complete my thesis. Without Allah's compassion, I would never have achieved anything of this.

I dedicate this work to those who have genuinely loved, cared for, and eventually wished me the best of success without a single prejudice in their hearts.

I give this work to my most precious Omi and Abi, who are too essential to be acknowledged with everyone else. I love you and hope that one day I will be the strong daughter you always hoped.

Last but not least, I want to thank me for believing in me, for doing all this hard work, for never quitting, for taking care of me. I thank myself for always being a giver, and for trying to give more than I receive, for trying to do more right than wrong, for making it to this day, for surviving. I want to thank me for being me all the time.

Sundus.

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Abstract

Autobiographical novels rose to prominence in postmodern literature. Henry Charles Bukowski is one of the postmodern writers who excelled at using this type. The German-American novelist described key events of his daily life through the eyes of his alter ego and protagonist, Henry Chinaski, also known as Hank. Many of Bukowski's writings include the character as a protagonist. This thesis sheds light on two of the author's prominent works, *Women* (1978) and *Ham on Rye* (1982). This research, which employs a psychoanalytic approach, demonstrates the various ways the character represents and reflects the author's personality and views in both novels. Moreover, it looks at the author's early experiences and childhood traumas and how they molded his personality and affected his writing. Coming to the point of how the character's dramatic life, as well as that of the author, can be temporarily relieved by drinking, fighting, making love and most importantly, writing.

Keywords : Autobiographies, Alter Ego, Charles Bukowski, Transgressive Fiction, Dirty Realism.

ملخص

ارتفعت شهرة روايات السير الذاتية في الأدب ما بعد الحداثة و هنري تشارلز بوكوفسكي هو أحد كتاب ما بعد الحداثة الذين تميزوا في استخدام هذا النوع. وصف الروائي الألماني الأمريكي الأحداث الرئيسية لحياته اليومية من خلال عيون شخصيته البديلة والبطل هنري تشيناسكي المعروف أيضاً باسم هانك. تتضمن كثير من كتابات بوكوفسكي الشخصية باعتبارها البطل. تلقي هذه الأطروحة الضوء على عمليين بارزين للكاتب وهما "نساء" (1978) و"الشطيرة" (1982). تظهر هذه الدراسة، التي تعتمد نهجاً نفسياً، الطرق المختلفة التي يمثل بها الشخصية ويعكس فيها شخصية الكاتب وآرائه في كلا الروائين. وعلاوة على ذلك، تنظر في تجارب الكاتب وصددمات طفولته المبكرة وكيف أنها شكلت شخصيته و أثرت على كتاباته. وصولاً إلى نقطة تفكير حول كيف يمكن تخفيف الحياة الدرامية للشخصية وكذلك للكاتب مؤقتاً بالشرب والمقاتلة و ممارسة الجنس والأهم من ذلك كله، الكتابة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السير الذاتية، الذات البديلة، تشارلز بوكوفسكي، الرواية المتعدية الحدود، الواقعية الفذرة.

Résumé

Les romans autobiographiques ont pris de l'importance dans la littérature postmoderne. Henry Charles Bukowski est l'un des écrivains postmodernes qui excellait dans l'utilisation de ce type. Le romancier Germano-Américain a décrit des événements clés et sa vie quotidienne à travers les yeux de son alter ego et protagoniste Henry Chinaski, également connu sous le nom de Hank. De nombreux écrits de Bukowski comprennent le personnage comme protagoniste; cette thèse met en lumière deux des œuvres les plus importantes de l'auteur, *Women* (1978) et *Souvenirs D'un Pas Grande-Chose* (1982). Cette recherche, qui utilise la psychanalyse, démontre les différentes façons dont le personnage représente et reflète la personnalité et les points de vue de l'auteur dans les deux romans. De plus, elle examine les premières expériences et traumatismes de l'enfance de l'auteur et comment ils ont façonné sa personnalité et affecté ses écrits. En arrivant au point où la vie dramatique du personnage, ainsi que celle de l'auteur, peuvent être temporairement soulagées par l'alcool, la bagarre, le sexe, et surtout, l'écriture.

Mots-clés : Autobiographies, Alter ego, Charles Bukowski, Fiction transgressive, réalisme sale.

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Introduction

Around the turn of the twentieth century, autobiographies blossomed into a literary style that combines narratives such as books, letters, diaries, and memoirs with postmodernism. More than five thousand autobiographies were published in the United States alone between the year 1945 and 1980 (Bergland 1). Many writers of this era liked to share their life stories, narrate their experiences, and perspective on particular events during their lifetime; Charles Bukowski is one of these writers.

Charles Bukowski (1920-1994) was born Heinrich Karl Bukowski Jr. in Andernach, Germany, on August 16th to a miserable, poor family. His father, Henry Bukowski, was a sergeant in the United States Army who met his mother, Katharina Fett, while stationed in Germany after World War I. Bukowski and his family moved to the United States when he was two years old, settling in Los Angeles. Charles had a traumatic childhood. He was neglected and often abused by his father, chronicled Bukowski in his autobiographical novel *Ham on Rye* (1982). He was also bullied and ridiculed by his classmates for his heavy accent, the fact that his family was poor, and because he had severe breakout of acne and no girl was interested in him. He attended Los Angeles City College from 1939 to 1941, then dropped out and went to New York City to become a writer. His lack of publication success at the time led to his retirement from writing in 1946 then came back after ten years of heavy drinking (“About Charles Bukowski”). Despite having such difficult life and not being expected to achieve literary success or live long, Bukowski’s life story reveals how he overcame those challenges and managed to have a long successful life and became a famous writer.

Bukowski wore his heart on his sleeves in both his personal life and his art. Although many people were offended by his writings, which are still regarded as controversial today, others were impressed of how he was able to reflect the urban life of his home city Los Angeles and his captivating life. He was always seen as a rebel by many academics and

literary organizations, who labeled him as aggressive and anti-poetic. His straightforward way of living and writing is still too often seen as simplistic or vulgar (“Charles Bukowski”).

Bukowski's writing is known for its gritty, unvarnished depictions of life in Los Angeles. He often explores themes of love, sex, alcoholism, and the human condition. He is perhaps best known for his semi-autobiographical novel *Post Office* (1971) which tells the story of a disillusioned postal worker named Henry Chinaski, who is the same protagonist in other notable works of his like *Factotum* (1975), *Women* (1978), and *Ham on Rye* (1982).

Ham on Rye and *Women* are two important works of American literature that have contributed to our understanding of American culture. One of the most significant contributions of *Ham on Rye* is its portrayal of the working-class experience during the great depression. Bukowski's vivid descriptions of poverty, alcoholism, and violence show us the harsh realities of life for those on the margins of society. The novel's raw portrayal of the hardships faced by working-class Americans has helped to shed light on the inequalities that still exist in our society today. As for *Women*, the focus is rather on the portrayal of gender roles and relationships. Bukowski's portrayal of women challenges traditional gender stereotypes and shows us the complexity and diversity of the female experience. Through his characters, Bukowski depicts women as strong, independent, and capable of making their own decisions. The novel's unapologetic exploration of sexuality and desire has also helped to challenge taboos around female sexuality.

Despite his difficult early life and lack of formal education, Bukowski achieved great success as a writer; He published over 45 books of poetry and prose during his lifetime, and his work continues to be widely read and studied today. He won numerous awards and accolades throughout his career, including National Endowment for the Arts grant in 1974; Loujon Press Award; Silver Reel Award. He also won Golden Quill Award from the Poetry Society of America in 1986; Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Poetry in 1986; National

Book Critics Circle Award nomination in 1988 for *Hollywood*; Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Fiction in 1989 for *Pulp*. In addition to these awards, Bukowski's work has had a profound impact on American literature and continues to be studied today (“Charles Bukowski Analysis”).

Charles Bukowski had a tough life, yet he was able to channel his experiences into a body of work that has left an indelible mark on American literature. His unvarnished picture of Los Angeles urban life, as well as his willingness to address forbidden subjects such as sex, booze, and poverty, have made him a popular and controversial figure in the world of literature. Bukowski remained devoted to his working-class roots despite his fame, and his legacy continues to inspire new generations of authors and readers.

All of Bukowski's works had been vastly criticized; especially *Women* as it is one of the most prominent of his novels. Several writers, reviewers, and readers analyzed it from a feminist viewpoint and criticized how Bukowski portrayed women in his book.

In his introduction to Bukowski's *Ham on Rye* (2000), Roddy Doyle states that the women in Charles Bukowski's books are “mean and devious, sex-mad and lazy, just like the men” (Doyle ix). Likewise, Dr. Joseph Suglia in his article “Women by Charles Bukowski– A Review by Dr. Joseph Suglia” (2019) reviews that the book eventually represents the author's misogynistic, misanthropist and ugly side (Suglia).

In her doctoral dissertation “Henry Chinaski's Futile Road from Self-Protection to Self-Destruction in the Works of Charles Bukowski” (2003), Javier Avila argues that in order to comprehend Chinaski as a character, one must be aware of the influences on him as well as the biography of the author who came up with him. Because Bukowski's characters and almost all of his literary works are basically a mirror of his own life, it is much easier to grasp his work if one is familiar with his real experiences in life (Avila 1).

Again, Roddy Doyle in his introduction to *Ham on Rye* (2000) assumes that Bukowski's writing is so clumsy, ugly, awkward, relentless and close to speech (Doyle viii). In his article "Charles Bukowski: The Godfather of Lowlife Literature" (2021), Vincent Wood reconfirms that Bukowski's writing is startlingly vulgar but yet incredibly honest and accessible because it captures the poor, often violent, working class America that he knew so well from his personal experience (Wood).

It is highly noticeable that *Women* (1978) and *Ham on Rye* (1982) have been studied only from a feminist point of view, and little emphasis was placed on the psychological side or even sometimes neglected especially in the novel *Women* (1978). The significance of this research chiefly lies in analyzing the psychological problems that Henry Chinaski, the main character in Charles Bukowski's novels, endured. This thesis also sheds light on the language and how the life of the author inspired his unique style of writing; as well as how Hank, being his Alter Ego, is influenced by the childhood traumas of Bukowski himself.

This study employs two primary literary approaches. On the one hand, a biographical approach is used to connect the author's life and views to his works. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, which is a theory used to analyze personalities and explain their behavior, is applied in the current research to examine both Charles' psychological issues and their implications on his works, as well as Henry's psychological problems and their effects on his way of living.

The main aim of this thesis is to analyze the traumas that the author experienced as a child, and how it affected shaping his personality, writings, and as a result, the attitude of his protagonist and alter ego Henry Chinaski by demonstrating how the character represents the other self of the writer.

This study seeks to answer the following questions: How have Charles Bukowski's personal experiences in life influence his writing? How do the two novels reflect the author's life? Why does the author write in this particular style and uses blunt language, graphic, sexual and violent imagery? What explains the vulgar behavior of the characters, particularly the protagonist Henry Chinaski, in his works?

The current thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is entitled "Postmodern American Autobiography, Employed Psychological Concepts, and Literary Movements" It provides an overview of postmodern American literature and the evolution of literary genres especially autobiographies, as well as a list of notable writers who used this genre. It briefly defines the concept of Defense Mechanisms in psychoanalysis; as well as the concept of Alter Ego in both psychology and literature highlighting its use in American postmodern fiction. Moreover, it introduces and compares the two literary movements, transgressive fiction and dirty realism.

The second chapter, "A Psychoanalytic Reading of the Protagonist in *Women* (1978)" examines the life of the protagonist and alter ego Henry Chinaski from a biographical and psychoanalytic point of view, relating the author's life to his alter ego. Then it delves even deeper into how Bukowski's life eventually influenced his language and works in accordance with the movements he was dubbed the "godfather" of, dirty realism and transgressive fiction.

The final chapter, "A Psychoanalytic reading of the protagonist in *Ham on Rye* (1982)" is quite similar to the second chapter. It analyses the psychological problems of the literary alter ego of Bukowski and how he manages to cope with his traumas. It also compares Bukowski's self-portrayed image with his public persona. Finally, it discusses the impact of the author's life on his writing that is considered to be controversial and dirty.

Chapter One: Postmodern American Autobiography, Employed Psychological Concepts, and Literary Movements

The first chapter aims at presenting a comprehensive theoretical foundation related to the present study. It provides an overview of postmodern American literature and the evolution of its literary genres across time. It focuses on the emergence of autobiographies in the United States during the postmodern era, and highlights noteworthy writers who have employed this genre. Additionally, it provides an explanation of two psychological concepts, defense mechanisms and alter ego, in both psychoanalysis and literature, and their usage in postmodern American fiction. Furthermore, the chapter clarifies the definitions of transgressive fiction and dirty realism and includes a comparison of these two literary movements.

1.1 An Overview of Autobiographies in Postmodern American Literature

Autobiographies emerged as a genre in American literature during the postmodern period due to the fundamental connection between postmodernism's intellectual foundations and its exploration of personal narratives. During the postmodern era, there was a widespread rejection of grand narratives, with an increased emphasis on individual experiences and perceptions. Therefore, autobiographies became an outlet for writers to express their own identities and question society's prominent narratives because of their personal and unique nature.

1.1.1 Postmodern American Literature and Its Genres

There is no specific or single definition of postmodern literature that everyone agrees upon, but there are several characteristics that are commonly associated with the genre. According to Dr. Raja Masood, these may include fragmentation, non-linear narrative structures, intertextuality, metafiction, irony, parody, and the use of unreliable narrators (Raja). In their scholarly article “Common Themes and Techniques of Postmodern Literature

of Shakespeare”, the researcher Ramen Sharma and Dr. Preety Chaudhary reconfirm this, “Postmodern literature, like postmodernism as a whole, is hard to define and there is little agreement on the exact characteristics, scope, and importance of postmodern literature. However, unifying features often coincide with Jean-François Lyotard's concept of the ‘metanarrative’ and ‘little narrative’” (189).

Postmodernism is a broad cultural, intellectual, and artistic movement that emerged in the late 20th century and is characterized by a skepticism toward grand narratives and a focus on fragmentation, discontinuity, and difference. Jean-François Lyotard was a prominent postmodern philosopher who played a significant role in the development and popularization of postmodernism. He is best known for his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, which was published in 1979 and became a seminal text of postmodern theory. Lyotard's work focused on the way that knowledge is constructed and the challenges that arise when different forms of knowledge come into conflict. He argued that in the postmodern era, there is no single, “meta narrative” or “grand narrative” that can explain everything. Instead, we are left with a plurality of different narratives, each with their own claims to truth.

The origins of postmodern American literature can be traced back to the early 1950s, when a group of writers began to challenge the dominant literary conventions of the time. This movement was part of a larger cultural and intellectual shift in America that rejected the traditional values of the post-World War II era and embraced new forms of expression and thought; postmodern literature is often seen as a reaction against the modernist movement. One of the key figures in the emergence of postmodern American literature was the writer William S. Burroughs, who published his seminal novel *Naked Lunch* in 1959 (Sharma and Chaudhary 191-192). The Beat Generation was a literary movement that emerged in the 1950s in the United States and was characterized by a rejection of mainstream culture and traditional values; Burroughs, along with fellow Beat Generation writers, Jack Kerouac and

Allen Ginsberg, rejected the conventions of mainstream literature and sought to create a new kind of writing that reflected their experiences of the counterculture.

According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, another important influence on postmodern American literature was the French literary movement known as the “Nouveau Roman” which emerged in the 1950s and rejected the traditional narrative structures of the novel. The work of writers such as Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute emphasized the importance of form over content and introduced new techniques such as stream-of-consciousness narration and fragmentation of plot (“French Literature”). In his research *Postmodernism and Donald Barthelme's Metafictional Commentary on Contemporary Philosophy*, Lord Timothy argues that in the 1960s and 1970s, postmodern American literature began to take shape as a distinct movement. Writers such as Thomas Pynchon, Donald Barthelme, and John Barth challenged the conventions of the novel and experimented with unconventional narrative techniques, such as nonlinear storytelling, metafiction, and intertextuality (Lord 22). Postmodern American literature reached its peak in the 1980s and 1990s, with the publication of landmark works such as Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), and David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996). These writers continued to push the boundaries of narrative form and explore new ways of representing the complexities of contemporary life.

Literary genres have evolved over time as writers experiment with new forms, themes, and techniques. According to Kristy Littlehale's article on literary genres, during the Classical period (8th century BCE – 4th century CE) the focus was on myths, folklore, heroic narratives, and philosophical enquiries; as a result, Literary genres such as epic poetry, lyric poetry, and drama emerged. Next, the Medieval period (5th century – 15th century) saw the rise of new literary genres such as chivalric romance, religious literature, and allegory. This period was profoundly impacted by religion and chivalry. Literary works focused on religious devotion,

moral lessons, courtly love, and the idealized concept of knighthood. Then, the Renaissance period (14th century – 17th century) saw a resurgence of classical literature and the emergence of new literary genres such as the sonnet, the essay, and the novel. This era glorified humanism, individuality, and knowledge. Literature stressed human potential, love, beauty, self-exploration, and the power of reason. The Enlightenment period (17th century – 18th century) highlighted reason, logic, and the quest of knowledge even more. Literary genres such as non-fiction, satire, the encyclopedia, and the novel of ideas emerged. Non-fiction is a genre of writing that presents factual information about the world, rather than a made-up story or fictional characters. It included a wide variety of sub-genres, such as autobiography, biography, essay, diaries and journals and narrative nonfiction (Littlehale). While non-fiction has existed in various forms throughout history, it wasn't until the Enlightenment period that it began to be recognized as a distinct genre. Next, the Romantic period (late 18th century – mid-19th century) saw a resurgence of poetry and the emergence of the Gothic novel. Romanticism emphasized individualism, emotions, nature, and the supernatural. This period's literature highlighted strong personal experiences, and the power of the imagination. The Victorian period (mid-19th century – early 20th century) reflected the social and cultural values of the time. The novel continued to be the dominant literary genre, but new sub-genres emerged, such as the social novel and the sensation novel. This period also saw the rise of biographies and memoirs. Moving on, the Modernist period (early 20th century – mid-20th century) saw a rejection of traditional literary forms and a focus on experimentation and innovation. New literary genres such as stream of consciousness and the absurdist play emerged. According to Oregon State University Senior Instructor of Literature, Liz Delf, “Stream of consciousness is a narrative style that tries to capture a character’s thought process in a realistic way” (Delf). It is basically a writing attempted to capture the flow of thoughts and impressions in the mind of a character. The absurdist play, such as Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953), were

labelled as “anti-plays” because they rejected traditional plot structures and explored themes of existentialism and the human condition (Laws).

During the Postmodern period (mid-20th century – present), there was a blurring of traditional genres and a focus on intertextuality and self-reflexivity. Consequently, a new literary genre such as the postmodern novel, the metafictional novel, and the graphic novel has emerged. This period saw the proliferation of various forms of non-fiction as well, including autobiographies, memoirs, and investigative journalism. The rise of the internet and social media has also led to the emergence of new forms of non-fiction, such as blogs and personal essays. Hence, while non-fiction and autobiographies are not traditionally considered literary genres in the same way that poetry, drama, and fiction are, they have a long and rich history of their own, and have continued to evolve alongside other forms of writing. Autobiographies emerged from a rising interest in individual stories and a desire to record personal experiences. They give first-hand accounts of people's lives, revealing their thoughts, feelings, and historical contexts.

The term “autobiography” comes from the Greek words “autos” which means “oneself,” “bios” meaning “life,” and “graphia” meaning “writing.” An autobiography is a literary genre that tells the story of the author's life, experiences, and perspectives in a subjective and first-person point of view (Murray 101). According to the article “What’s the Difference between a Memoir, a Biography, and an Autobiography?” on Blurb’s blog, it typically includes personal reflections, memories, and emotions, as well as the author's interpretation of events and people in their life. Autobiographies can take various forms, such as a chronological narrative of the writer's life, a collection of personal essays, or a memoir that focuses on specific events or themes. The purpose of an autobiography is for the writer to share their personal experiences, perspectives, and reflections with the reader. They can

provide insight into a person's life and experiences, and can also offer a glimpse into the historical, cultural, and social context in which they lived.

In their article “Autobiographies of Renowned Personalities for Inculcating Values among Secondary School Students,” Prof. Jaya Jaise and the research scholar, Soumya Premkumar, defined autobiography as follow:

An autobiography is a self-written account of the life of a person. The word “autobiography” was first used deprecatingly by William Taylor in 1797 in the English periodical *The Monthly Review*, when he suggested the word as a hybrid, but condemned it as “pedantic”. However, its next recorded use was in its present sense, by Robert Southey in 1809. Despite only being named early in the nineteenth century, first-person autobiographical writing originates in antiquity. (1)

According to their definition, Premkumar and Jaise explain that the term autobiography was initially used in a negative context by William Taylor in 1797 where he suggested it was a combination of words and criticized it as overly academic. Later on Robert Southey (1774 - 1843), an English poet, who referred to the biography of the Portuguese painter Francis Vieira (1699 -1783) as an autobiography; used the term in its current sense in 1809. They also mentioned that although the term autobiography was coined in the early nineteenth century, people have been writing first-person accounts of their lives since ancient times. Such as Julius Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* and Saint Augustine's *Confessions*. However, the modern form of the autobiography as we know it today emerged during the Renaissance period, with works such as Benvenuto Cellini's *Autobiography*.

1.1.2 The Importance of Autobiographies in Postmodern American Literature

Autobiographies have been an important component of American literature for many decades, and postmodern writers have made significant use of this form to explore themes of

identity, memory, and truth. In postmodern literature, the boundaries between fact and fiction are often blurred, and autobiographical narratives are frequently used to explore the subjective nature of truth and the construction of identity. One of the key features of postmodern literature is its self-reflexivity, which is the tendency for writers to draw attention to the artifice of the text itself, and the ways in which it is constructed (Raja). Autobiographies are particularly well-suited to this approach because they are inherently self-referential; they are narratives that tell the story of the author's own life, and as such, they are always already a kind of commentary on the act of storytelling itself.

Postmodern writers have often used autobiographical narratives to challenge traditional notions of authorship and subjectivity. For example, in his novel *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), Gertrude Stein presents a fictionalized account of the life of her companion, Alice B. Toklas, in which Toklas is the author of the autobiography. Similarly, in his novel *Invisible Man* (1952), Ralph Ellison tells the story of a nameless narrator who struggles to define his identity in a society that often seeks to erase his existence. *Post Office* (1971) by Charles Bukowski is loosely based on Bukowski's own experiences working as a mail carrier for the U.S. Postal Service. It uses a fragmented, non-linear structure to explore the monotony and absurdity of the job, as well as the narrator's disillusionment with the American dream.

Other postmodern writers, such as Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo, have used autobiographical elements in their work to create a sense of disorientation and uncertainty. In Pynchon's novel *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) for example, the narrator's identity is constantly shifting, and the reader is never quite sure whether the events described in the novel are real or imagined. The groundbreaking memoir *The Woman Warrior* (1976) by Maxine Hong Kingston blends autobiography, folklore, and fictional elements to explore the experiences of Chinese-American women in the United States. Through a series of interconnected stories,

Kingston examines issues of cultural identity, family history, and the role of women in society. Similarly to Pynchon's novel, in DeLillo's novel *White Noise* (1985) the protagonist's identity is constructed through his experiences of consumer culture and media, suggesting that our sense of self is always already mediated by external forces. The candid and humorous memoir *Postcards from the Edge* (1987) by Carrie Fisher details the experiences of the famous actress and writer as she navigates addiction, mental illness, and the pressures of Hollywood. Written in a fragmented, non-linear style, the book challenges traditional notions of narrative structure and authorial authority. In Charles Bukowski's novel *Hollywood* (1989) Bukowski satirizes the film industry and its excesses, drawing on his own experiences working as a screenwriter in the 1980s. The novel uses a fragmented, episodic structure to explore the absurdity and cynicism of Hollywood culture, and its critiques of American consumerism and celebrity culture. In all of his works, Bukowski focused on the underbelly of American society using vernacular language and stream-of-consciousness narration. Other important examples of autobiographical narratives in American postmodern literature include works such as *The Bell Jar* (1963) by Sylvia Plath, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) by Malcolm X and Alex Haley, and *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker.

It is noticeable that autobiographies were an important genre in postmodern literature because they offered a way for writers to explore their own experiences and identities in a world that was increasingly fragmented and uncertain. In the postmodern era, the traditional narrative structures and identity categories that had defined American society were being questioned and deconstructed, and autobiographies offered a way for writers to explore these issues in a personal and subjective way. Autobiographical narratives in the postmodern era often challenged traditional notions of what it meant to be American, exploring themes such as race, gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity in new and provocative ways. By sharing their own personal stories and struggles, writers were able to give voice to marginalized

communities and to challenge the dominant cultural narratives of the time. Overall, Autobiographies played an important role in reflecting the changing nature of American life in the 20th century. As the country underwent significant social, political, and economic transformations, writers turned to their own experiences to make sense of these changes and to explore the ways in which American society was shifting.

1.2 Alter Ego and Defense Mechanisms: Between Psychoanalysis and Literature

Psychoanalysis is a psychological theory and therapeutic method created by Sigmund Freud in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It relies on the idea that unconscious processes and conflicts impact our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The goal of psychoanalysis is to investigate and comprehend the unconscious mind, which is made up of repressed memories, desires, and unresolved conflicts that influence our personality and behavior. According to Freud, our unconscious mind has a huge influence on our ideas and actions. It consists of repressed or forgotten memories and experiences, usually from childhood, that might impact our behavior in ways we are unaware of. These unconscious processes have the potential to cause psychological problems and symptoms.

1.2.1 Introducing Defense Mechanisms

One of the key concepts in psychoanalysis is Defense mechanisms. According to *Britannica*, The term was first coined by Sigmund Freud in his paper “The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence” (1894) to describe a set of unconscious psychological processes that people use to protect themselves from uncomfortable ideas, memories, or urges (“Defense Mechanism”). The use of defense mechanisms prevents overwhelming anxiety and stress from reaching conscious awareness which as a result, helps maintaining psychological equilibrium, stability and balance.

Sigmund Freud's daughter, Anna Freud, listed the ten defense mechanisms mentioned by her father in her book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, which was published in 1936. Both Sigmund and Anna Freud outlined a number of techniques that people use to avoid threatening or unpleasant thoughts and emotions. Among the first defense mechanisms they discovered were repression, denial, regression, projection, sublimation or displacement, and rationalization. According to the *Healthline* website, this theory has evolved over time and nowadays it claims that certain actions and behaviors, like defense mechanisms, are not always under a person's conscious control. In fact, most people do them unconsciously ("Top 10 Defense Mechanisms").

Defense mechanisms play an important role in literature since they investigate the various, sometimes unconscious, ways in which individuals cope with emotional problems and shield themselves from uncomfortable thoughts or sensations. These defense mechanisms, first proposed by Sigmund Freud, have been intensively researched and implemented in psychology and psychoanalysis, but they also have important value in literary analysis. In literature, defense mechanisms refer to psychological strategies that characters employ to protect themselves from various forms of emotional pain or discomfort. These defense mechanisms are frequently portrayed as techniques for individuals to cope with difficult, stressful, and harmful situations.

1.2.2 Definition of Alter Ego and Self-Portrayal

Marcus Tullius Cicero, a first-century BC Roman senator, and philosopher was the first documented person to discuss the concept of Alter Ego in his intellectual works, as a philosophical construct. Jeffery Henderson provided Ceciro's *Laelius De Amicitia* which was written around 44 BC and is generally known as *On Friendship* (1839). The death of his friend Titus Pomponius Atticus prompted the creation of this work, which was handled in a

dialogue format with one hundred two sections. The conversation was about the nature of friendship and its importance in human life, yet he referred to it as “a second self, a trusted friend.” (“Alter Ego: Definitions”). The dialogue continues with the eightieth passage:

ita pulcherrima illa et maxime naturali carent amicitia per se et propter se expetita, nec ipsi sibi exemplo sunt, haec vis amicitiae et qualis et quanta si ipse enim se quisque diligit, non ut aliquam a se ipse mercedem exigat caritatis suae, sed quod per se quisque sibi carus est; quod nisi idem in amicitiam transferetur, verus amicus numquam reperietur: est enim is qui es tamquam alter idem. (qtd in. Henderson)

The precise passage that included the meaning of the Alter Ego is “verus amicus numquam reperietur: est enim is qui es tamquam alter idem” it was translated by William Armistead Falconer in his book *Cicero. De senectute, De amicitia, De divinatione*, into “so there will never be a true friend; for this is, as it were, our second self” (“Alter Ego Literary”).

The term appears for the first time in English in 1537, in a letter written by Richard Layton, dean of York, to Thomas Cromwell on the suppression of monasteries: “Ye muste have suche as ye may trust evyn as well as your owne self, wiche muste be unto yowe as alter ego” (Martin). It is derived from the Latin word “alter” and “ego” which means “the other I”; the other side of your personality than the one that most people see (“Alter Ego | Etymology”). It is argued that the persona that the actors typically take on in movies or on television is their Alter Ego. This idea was referred to in Todd Herman’s book *The Alter Ego Effect*:

Now, here’s a riddle for you: Everyone knows that Superman and Clark Kent are the same. But which one is the alter ego? I’ve asked this question for the past fifteen years, countless times in front of audiences around the world, and 90 percent of the audience immediately yell out, “SUPERMAN!” It sounds right. Because when you

think of “alter egos,” you think of superpowers, heroism, and epic battles. All the qualities of a superhero like Superman. Except—it’s wrong. The alter ego isn’t Superman; it’s Clark Kent. Superman is the real person. He created the alter ego, mild-mannered reporter Clark Kent, as a useful persona to go unnoticed day-to-day on earth and blend in to help him achieve a crucial goal: understanding humans. Superman would flip between his alter ego and the S on his chest at precisely the moments when he needed each persona the most. (Herman 10-1)

The above quote reveals that Todd Herman has always been enthralled by comic books and comic book characters, and the realms they occupy. Because of the character's backstories, antagonists, and epic battles, he was constantly drawn into their worlds. When he was younger, he enjoyed the Christopher Reeve “Superman” movies. He thought such 80s productions might be mocked nowadays. He gave an example riddle about the identity of Superman and Clark Kent being known to everyone, yet the query was: who exactly was the alter ego, Clark Kent or Superman? Over the years, he has posed this riddle in front of audiences all over the world, and most of them had the same answer as to who the Alter Ego was: “SUPERMAN!”, because alter egos can possess superhuman characteristics such as heroic acts, supernatural power, and epic fights.

As a source of inspiration, psychoanalysis has developed an interest in literature. They can both be used to enrich and illuminate each other. Jelinek and Engelstad pointed out that literature is an effort to bring to light what has been hidden from the view in our psyche, and it sets us free of our social and cultural norms. Moreover, both scholars of literature and psychoanalysis are interested in uncovering hidden and underlying meanings in literature and psychoanalysis. Accordingly, many concepts have been discovered to be used in both fields (qtd in. Sandbæk).

In his article “The Alter Ego in Literature,” Luciano Duarte demonstrated the alter ego as “a term of multiple senses, can, in psychology, expose an interesting and complex deviation of personality, in literature usually exposes a personality obsessed with himself: the author” (Duarte). The Alter Ego is frequently portrayed in literature through characters with many identities or personas. In psychology, it is known as split personality where the real ego and alter ego are in contradiction uniting two lives and two sides of personality in order to create a unified identity. There are many examples of this in the literature such as *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) by Robert Louis Stevenson, and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844) by Alexander Dumas (“Alter Ego: Definitions”).

However, it was thought that the Alter Ego is equivalent to the term “self-portrait” which was first used in 1822. It combines the two main words “self” as an individual's temporary behavior or character, and “portrait” as a figure, drawn or painted. In other words, it is “a portrait of oneself, by oneself.” The act of revealing or drawing hidden sides of one's nature and aiding in the growth of a person's true self (“Self-Portrait”). In his book *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, Professor Michel Beaujour says:

I'm not satisfied with the word self-portrait. It evokes Rembrandt, Van Gogh, and Francis Bacon rather than Montaigne or Michel Leiris. In a literary context, self-portrait remains obstinately met-metaphorical; and, while self-portraitists often write that they “paint themselves,” this metaphor cannot be spun out indefinitely into a description of their texts. (1)

Beaujour claims that Self-portraits are closer to Rembrandt, Van Gogh, and Bacon than Montaigne or Michel Leiris, and they remain figurative in literary contexts. Self-portraitists frequently claim that they “paint themselves,” and that's what was meant by “a portrait of oneself, by oneself”; however according to Beaujour, this metaphor cannot be used to

describe their work indefinitely. This is comparable to literature in that it is a self-description; i.e. description of oneself given by oneself. It is another concept that is frequently discussed in both areas. The process of comprehending oneself through observation and analysis in psychoanalysis. While in literature is frequently represented through autobiographical works or characters who are thinly veiled representations of the authors.

The psychologist Linda Sandbæk mentioned in her article “The relationship between Literature and Psychoanalysis,” the reflections of authors on the roots of their creative writing show how literature and psychoanalysis connect in their interest in the unconscious as it appears in language. Literature and psychoanalysis are both intrigued by unconscious thinking as it manifests itself through words. Psychoanalytic methods and approaches can assist authors in developing a more in-depth understanding of themselves and their characters, resulting in more powerful and honest creative works.

1.2.3 The Use of Alter Ego in Postmodern American Fiction

In her book introduction *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern American Fiction*, Professor Paula Geyh noted that Postmodern American fiction was marked by the emergence of two new presences: the author within the narrative and the multiple “others” in the narrative. The author was a formal, metafictional development, initially mostly, white men who joined their characters and reflected on what was going on in their lives as individuals and in their community (Geyh 1).

According to the article “10 Famous Authors’ Fascinating Alter Egos” on the *Flavorwire* website, the use of the Alter Ego appears in a variety of literary genres, including novels, short tales, poems, and plays. For instance, Ernest Hemingway wrote about his life through the eyes of his Alter Ego, Nick Adams. His works were published in 1972 as *The Nick Adams Stories*. Another prominent literary application of the Alter Ego is to explore the

opposing elements of a character's psyche. For example, *Happy Baby* (2004), Stephen Elliott's novel, is a Roman about his childhood of abandonment and abuse. As an Illinois state ward, Theo his Alter Ego was frequently raped by his caseworker and lived in perpetual fear. Willa Cather's masterpiece *My Ántonia* (1918) features a male Alter Ego named Jim Burden. Their tales are similar in that they both moved west at the same time and lived on their grandparents' farm. In *The Bell Jar* (1963), both Sylvia Plath and her Alter Ego Esther Greenwood received magazine scholarships and were rejected and institutionalized from a known writer's class, which led to Plath's suicide after her novel was published and the death of Greenwood.

Furthermore, in *The Savage Detectives* (1998), by Roberto Bolaño and Arturo Belano the protagonist and the author's Alter Ego, and in *My Life as a Man* (1974) by Philip Roth and his fictionalized self, Nathan Zuckerman. A.S. Byatt's four novels starting with *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978) and ending with *A Whistling Woman* (2002), she has one protagonist as her alter ego known as Frederica Potter. Moreover, Kurt Vonnegut's Alter Ego, Kilgore Trout, was a writer, yet his writing career paralleled Vonnegut's through a melodramatic perspective. Six of Vonnegut's novels featured Trout. *Galápagos* (1985), *Cat's Cradle* (1963), *Mother Night* (1962), *Player Piano* (1952), *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), and *Timequake* (1997) (“Analysis of Kurt Vonnegut”).

Last but not least, Charles Bukowski and Henry Chinaski have a lot in common, including childhood, career, love, and alcoholic tendencies. Five of Bukowski's six novels are based on his experiences and include Henry Chinaski; *Post Office* (1971), *South of No North* (1973), *Factotum* (1975), *Women* (1978), and *Ham on Rye* (1982), a low-life idol and extremely thinly veiled self. Even his Alter Ego makes an appearance in Bukowski's sixth and only genuinely fictitious novel, *Pulp* (1994). It would not be a Bukowski novel without Henry Chinaski (Mambrol).

As evidenced by the works highlighted above the Alter Ego is a powerful literary device that is used to examine the ambiguities of human identity and how it might perform itself as a reaction to the experiences that it has had. Duarte states in his article:

I cannot think of literature that does not contain, to a great extent, the weight of the author's reality. It is simply impossible for me to imagine a writer writing by giving up his impressions of life, his experiences, his judgments about himself and others, the details of existence that only he notices, the observations he makes about the environment in which he lives. If he is painting an environment, for he will take as his basis an environment he has already witnessed or imagined. (Duarte)

To Duarte, literature cannot be established without the author's reality, just as writing cannot be done without the author's impressions of life, experiences, judgments about himself, and his perceptions about the world around him. Thus, it enables authors to construct reflected characters who represent the complexities of their true selves. Overall, the usage of Alter Ego in American postmodern fiction gives the reader a clear picture of the author's genuine identity.

1.3 Transgressive Fiction and Dirty Realism as Literary Movements

1.3.1 Introducing Transgressive Fiction and Dirty Realism

Contemporary American literature has seen the emergence of various literary movements in the post-modern era. Dirty realism and transgressive fiction are two movements that gained significant attention in the literary world during the 1980s and 1990s. Both of these literary movements depict the harsh realities of life, challenge social norms, and explore the dark side of human nature.

Dirty realism is a literary movement that emerged in the 1980s and gained popularity during the 1990s. The term "dirty realism" was coined by Bill Buford in *Granta Magazine* in

1983 “in reference to the short fiction of what he thought of as ‘a new generation of American authors’” (qtd. in Whitmore). He described the works of a group of American writers who focused on the gritty, mundane aspects of everyday life, often set in working-class or lower-middle-class settings. Dirty realism's primary focus is on depicting the harsh realities of life, such as poverty, crime, drug addiction, and domestic violence. The language and style of writing in dirty realism is simple, raw, and direct, often stripped of any literary embellishments. Furthermore, the setting is often in the suburbs or small towns, and the stories tend to be plotless, portraying ordinary events in everyday life. The language is straightforward, and the narrative is often bleak, without any happy endings or moral lessons.

In his research, Alejandro López Hernández provided a quote by Bill Buford where he described dirty realism as:

—unadorned, unfurnished, low-rent tragedies about people who watch day-time television, read cheap romances or listen to country and western music. They are waitress in roadside cafes, cashiers in supermarkets, construction workers, secretaries and unemployed cowboys. They play bingo, eat cheeseburgers, hunt deer and stay in cheap hotels. They drink a lot and they are often in trouble: for stealing a car, creaking a window, pickpocketing a wallet. They are from Kentucky or Alabama or Oregon, but mainly, they could just be from anywhere: drifters in a world cluttered with junk food and the oppressive details of modern consumerism. (qtd. in López 6)

Buford in this quote explains that dirty realism is vacant and plain. That it often reflects the basic problems of working-class or lower-middle-class protagonists, and the unpleasant realities of their lives. He sheds light on the social environment of dirty realism and how these

characters are influenced by postmodern materialism and consumerism. Bufford also gives us the impression that the characters are defined by their dirty behaviors such as drinking, eating junk food, stealing...etc.

The term transgressive fiction was widely popularized in the 1990s as well; this was partly due to the publication of several high-profile novels that were identified as transgressive, such as Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991) and Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996). The term "transgressive fiction" was first used by Michael Silverblatt, a literary critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, in 1993. In his article titled "Shock Appeal: Who Are These Writers, and Why Do They Want to Hurt Us?" Silverblatt described transgressive writers as those who intentionally incorporate disturbing or offensive content to challenge readers (Silverblatt). In her Phd Thesis, *Brutal Bodies: Exploring Transgression through the Fiction of Chuck Palahniuk, Poppy Z. Brite, and Bret Easton Ellis*, Coco d'Hont argues that "Existing criticisms of the concept frequently regard transgression as a performance (or series of performances) solely intended to shock mainstream society and lack any social or political agency" (11). She also adds that the term referred to "a wide variety of shocking and extreme works of art which frequently contested social norms by explicitly depicting deviant sexual acts and extreme violence." (11). From her description we can distinguish that transgressive fiction is a sort of controversial art or literature that does not respect the morals of the society and intentionally tends to break them to "shock" the reader. Since then, many literary critics and theorists used the term to describe a movement and a genre of literature that seeks to push the boundaries of conventional morality and challenge social norms.

Transgressive fiction is a literary movement that emerged in the 1990s, building upon the themes and style of dirty realism. It explores the dark side of human nature, focusing on taboo subjects such as drug abuse, sexual deviance, and extreme violence. It is characterized by the use of graphic and explicit language, the narrative tends to be non-linear and

fragmented, and the characters often defy social norms. Coco d'Hont quotes the famous transgressive writer Chuck Palahniuk while he was in an interview at a conference in Edinboro University, Pennsylvania; where he described transgressive fiction as a genre of fiction in which characters usually “misbehave and act badly” and “sort of commit crimes or pranks as a way of either feeling alive, or sort of as political acts of civil disobedience.” (qtd. in d'Hont 7). Many reviewers and critics often described transgressive fiction texts as being “sophomoric, misanthropic and psychotic, as too hackneyed, too boring and too despicable to have any claims to literary or cultural merit” (Hoey 27-28). In simple words, these writings are thought to be immature, hateful, and crazy. They are also seen as unoriginal, uninteresting, and terrible, and therefore have no value as works of literature or culture.

1.3.2 Comparison of the Two Literary Movements

Dirty realism and transgressive fiction are two literary movements that emerged in the United States in the late 20th century. While both styles share some similarities, there are also notable differences that set them apart. First, the two movements have different historical contexts. Dirty realism emerged in the aftermath of the Vietnam War and the economic recession of the 1980s (Price 173-174), while transgressive fiction emerged in the 1990s at a time of relative prosperity and stability in the United States. This historical context helps to explain some of the thematic differences between the two movements, as well as their differing approaches to literary style and form.

Dirty realism often shares a common definition with literary minimalism, which involves using a concise language and minimizing the use of adverbs. Dirty realist writers avoid excessive writing and tends to have fewer descriptive details than some readers may prefer. In addition, there are no extended metaphors or internal monologues in this style of writing (Baldwin). Dirty realism is characterized by a focus on the lives of working-class people, especially those living in rural areas. Dirty realist writers often use spare, unadorned

language to describe the lives of their characters emphasizing the gritty reality of their experiences. The characters in dirty realism tend to be disillusioned, alienated, and struggling to get by, often without hope for a better future. Some of the most well-known dirty realist writers include Charles Bukowski, Raymond Carver, Tobias Wolff, and Richard Ford. On the other hand, transgressive fiction is characterized by a focus on taboo subjects, such as sex, violence, and drug use. Characters in transgressive literature speak about philosophical topics, addressing the reader. Conversations can cover a wide range of topics, including the purpose of existence, war, human beings, morality and immorality, male-female interactions, human sexuality, and so on. In most cases, the answers to such questions cause readers to be perplexed and shocked, as they are extremely unusual and immoral from the perspective of rationality and generally accepted human values (Gorbova and Davydenko 407).

Transgressive fiction often features “antiheroes”, social outcasts, and “flawed” characters who engage in a behavior that is considered immoral or illegal, and who often exist outside of mainstream society (Aria). The writing style of transgressive fiction is often experimental, incorporating elements of surrealism, satire, and other unconventional techniques. Some of the most well-known transgressive writers include Chuck Palahniuk, Bret Easton Ellis, and Irvine Welsh.

One of the main differences between dirty realism and transgressive fiction is their focus. Dirty realism, like American naturalism, is primarily concerned with portraying the lives of working-class people; the reader will encounter characters who are experiencing various forms of suffering. These characters may be working in mundane jobs, struggling with addiction, or facing other types of hardship. They may be dealing with physical or emotional desperation that they must overcome (Baldwin). While transgressive fiction is more concerned with pushing the boundaries of what is considered acceptable in literature. Dirty realism tends to be more straightforward and realistic in its portrayal of characters and their

lives, while transgressive fiction often incorporates elements of satire and surrealism to make a point. Another difference between the two movements is their tone. Dirty realism tends to be more somber and melancholy about people living a “sad lifetime”, emphasizing the struggles and hardships of their everyday life (Kita 385). Transgressive fiction, on the other hand, often has a more irreverent and confrontational tone, challenging societal norms and values. While both movements are concerned with exploring the darker side of human experience, they approach this task in very different ways.

Chapter Two: A Psychoanalytic Reading of the Protagonist in *Women* (1978)

The second chapter is a psychoanalytic study of Charles Bukowski's work *Women* (1978). It analyses Bukowski's alter ego and examines the relationship between Charles Bukowski's public persona and his portrayal of himself by comparing and contrasting their lives. The chapter also explores the impact of Bukowski's life on his work, with a particular emphasis on the language he uses in *Women*. The chapter investigates how this vocabulary ties to the transgressive fiction and dirty realism movements. It provides insight into Bukowski's mind by analyzing his traumas, language, Alter Ego, and public persona.

2.1 Bukowski's Portrayal of the Self in *Women*

Charles Bukowski's semi-autobiographical novel *Women* was published in 1978. It recounts the journey of Henry Chinaski, a fictional version of Bukowski himself, as he navigates the Los Angeles literary scene while maintaining multiple romances. Bukowski's experiences and views of the world around him are depicted in the novel in their raw and uncensored form. It is well-known for its erotic and explicit scenes of sex, violence, and alcoholism, as well as its dark humor and dirty realism. Chinaski struggles with his alcoholism and his relationships with women throughout the novel, covering topics such as loneliness, disconnection, and the hardships and triumphs of modern life. Bukowski's unique style is obvious throughout the novel, which features conversational language and an unwavering attitude toward life. Despite its controversial nature, *Women* has been lauded for its honesty and sincerity, with many reviews hailing it as a powerful and appealing read. The novel is largely considered as Bukowski's most-read work.

2.1.1 The Author's Alter Ego in the Novel

Henry Chinaski, the protagonist, and the Alter Ego, symbolize various elements of the author's personality. The characters' unconscious motivations and desires can be analyzed using a psychoanalytic approach. Bukowski's main character, Henry Chinaski, is a depiction

of himself. He is a broken individual with a tragic history, battling alcoholism and constantly searching for meaning and purpose in life. He was abused physically and emotionally as a child, which undoubtedly molded his personality features. His mistrust of women and fear of communication can be traced to his mother's neglect and emotional abuse. Henry Chinaski reflects Bukowski's more sensitive and creative side. He is a successful writer whose demeanor and personality sharply contrast with Charles's problematic characteristics. Henry appears to reflect Bukowski's more idealistic and hopeful self, whereas Charles depicts his hardships and difficulties.

Furthermore, the women in the novel reflect Henry's dread of intimacy and incapacity to make lasting bonds. They also represent his objects of desire. Bukowski frequently depicts these women as stereotypical and shallow, focusing on their outer beauty and sexual appeal rather than their underlying traits. This attitude can be traced back to Charles's difficult childhood when women were frequent sources of pain and frustration. Subsequently, the novel's major themes of masculinity and power reflect Bukowski's ongoing difficulties with his own self-worth and identity. The protagonist's frequent drinking, gambling addiction, and unpredictable behavior are all manifestations of his underlying anxiety about his manhood and self-worth. Ultimately, Bukowski's novel, *Women*, is an investigation of his own psychological problems, allowing for a psychoanalytic understanding of the protagonist and alter ego. Bukowski addresses his hidden fears and desires through the representation of Henry, women, and the themes of masculinity and power, providing a peek into his persona.

According to *Los Angeles Times* Bukowski met Frances Dean Smith in 1963 and fell in love, and Smith moved in with him. Their daughter was born a year later, Marina Louise Bukowski; and Smith left three years later, looking for “a calmer environment” in which to raise her child (Noland).

Bukowski opens the first chapter of *Women* narrating:

I was 50 years old and hadn't been to bed with a woman for four years. I had no women friends [...] but I looked at them without yearning and with a sense of futility [...] but the idea of having a relationship with a woman-- even on non-sexual terms-- was beyond my imagination. I had a 6-year-old daughter [...] She lived with her mother [...] I had been married years before at the age of 35. That marriage lasted two and one-half years. My wife divorced me. I had been in love only once. She had died of acute alcoholism [...] my wife had been 12 years younger than I. I believe that she too is dead now. (2)

This quote reveals the main character's loneliness, lack of intimacy, and previous relationships. The narrator Chinaski is in his fifties and has not had sexual or emotional contact with a woman in many years. He also mentions that he has a daughter, implying that he may not be involved in her life just like Bukowski's real daughter Marina Bukowski, his only child. The protagonist's personal challenges and prior traumas are highlighted further by the revelation of a previous failed marriage and the death of a loved one. Aside from a peek at Bukowski's life seen in Chinaski's, this passage lays the stage for the novel's themes of loneliness and inner struggle.

When Chinaski discusses his experiences working as a post office agent in the novel, he demonstrates the connections between Henry Chinaski and Charles Bukowski's real-life. For numerous years, Bukowski has worked in the post office and written extensively about his experiences in his poetry and prose. As states in various chapters throughout the novel:

I was still working each night on the first novel. I never started writing until 6:18 pm. That was when I used to punch in at the Terminal Annex Post Office [...] it was 4:14 am. I sat and watched the clock. It was like working in the post office again. Time was

motionless while existence was a throbbing unbearable thing. I waited. I waited. I waited. I waited. Finally it was 6 am. I walked to the corner to the liquor store[...]Henry Chinaski, former post office clerk turned writer[...]It was good to be out of the post office[...]There was a fistfight. The boys at the post office would never believe this[...]It was an early book of poems, poems I had written while working at the post office[...]. (2, 25, 55, 98, 101, 129)

Chinaski describes his job as monotonous and frustrating, as well as the petty politics and hierarchies that prevailed inside the postal office. He also discusses how this job has sapped him of his creativity and energy, leaving him imprisoned and desperate. This sense of imprisonment characterizes Bukowski's writing, as he frequently writes about how society and the limits of modern life destroy the spirit and creativity of outcasts and misfits like himself, this is clarified in chapter one hundred and four in his statement: "I thought, well, I'm alone again. I ought to get some fucking writing done or go back to being a janitor. The postal service will never take me back. A man must ply his trade, as they say" (207). Chinaski is burdened by loneliness and the need to earn a living. He recalls his previous career with the postal service and realizes he will never be able to return. He realizes that he must work hard at his writing, or be content with being a caretaker. Chinaski's remark regarding his profession implies that he appreciates hard effort and dedication. Despite his difficulties, he is dedicated to his profession and motivated to achieve.

2.1.1.1 Chinaski's Use of Literature and Alcohol as Defense Mechanisms

Bukowski and Chinaski grappled with addiction and self-destructive conduct, both of which are addressed in *Women*. Chinaski's alcohol, cigarette, and sex addictions are a constant source of friction in his life. Bukowski portrays Chinaski's addictions as both a means of coping with the agony and loneliness of everyday life, as well as a destructive force that impedes his ability to create meaningful connections. Chinaski's addiction is presented as a

self-destructive behavior that drives him to distance himself from the few people who care about him and eventually takes him to a dark place of despair.

A. Chinaski's Use of Literature as a Defense Mechanism

Women is a story about Henry Chinaski and his prolific quest for women and literature. The author, Bukowski, uses Chinaski to examine his own writing experiences and to show the problems that often face a writer such as poverty, unemployment, drug use, and relationships. He uses literature and writing as a coping technique and source of income for *Women*, as well as the influence of other authors on his writings and his perspectives.

Women's protagonist, Henry Chinaski, is a struggling writer whose writings and poems that reflect his daily routine and attempts to cope with life's obstacles. He is continually writing and altering his work. His writings, both published as well as unpublished, allow him to communicate his thoughts and emotions in ways that would be impossible to express directly through conversation or interaction with others. Chinaski's writings tackle subjects such as loneliness, sexuality, drunkenness, love, and despair from his unique and grumpy perspective.

Chinaski earns money via writing, yet he is never entirely successful at it. His poems and stories are either rejected or inadequately compensated, leaving him to work odd jobs to make ends meet. Despite his financial difficulties, Chinaski never stops writing. He declares "There's no way I can stop writing, it's a form of insanity" (64). He continues to write, hoping that one day he will be recognized for his talent. In this sense, even if it is not a source of revenue, writing gives Chinaski hope.

In chapter eighty seven Chinaski has a conversation with his English literature teacher where she asks him about his favorite authors, he answers:

"John F--a--n--t--e. Ask the Dust. Wait Until Spring, Bandini."

[...] "Why did you like him?"

"Total emotion. A very brave man."

"Who else?"

"Celine."

"Why?"

"They ripped out his guts and he laughed, and he made them laugh too. A very brave man."

[...] "Hemingway?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Too grim, too serious. A good writer, fine sentences. But for him, life was always total war. He never let go, he never danced." (141)

Chinaski admires authors who are able to convey strong emotions and who exhibit bravery in their writing, such as John Fante and Celine. In *women* he was not a fan of Hemingway's style, finding it too serious and lacking joy. Overall, he values writers who are unafraid to lay themselves bare on the page and explore the darker side of the human nature. In *Women* Chinaski demonstrates a strong awareness and comprehension of multiple writers who have affected his writing of *Women*. He draws heavily on the works of Ernest Hemingway and John Fante. These authors appear to be Chinaski's mentors and role models. He admires their work for its honesty and simplicity, as well as its ability to present stories that are authentic and true to the human experience. Chinaski also mentions other writers, such as Dylan

Thomas, whom he admires but finds overly stylized and divorced from the ordinary lives of people like himself.

According to Chinaski, writing and language are strong tools for transferring personal experiences and feelings. Where he believes that “Most people are much better at saying things in letters than in conversation” (47). He also thinks “People were usually much better in their letters than in reality” (130). He feels there is a schism between the written word and real experience. Bukowski suggests that people have a tendency to embellish or overthink their creative writing, whereas when communicating candidly through letters, they are able to express themselves more authentically. Bukowski also implies that for some, writing creatively requires a level of skill and craftsmanship that they may not possess. Ultimately, Bukowski is pointing out the difficulty of creating something that truly captures the essence of reality and human experience, and how this difficulty can lead to pretension and inauthenticity in writing. For him, writing is a tool to discover meaning and purpose in life, not just an intellectual or academic pursuit. Chinaski likes writing that is honest and sincere that stems from personal experience. He criticizes literature that is overly stylized or detached from common people's experiences. Throughout *Women*, Chinaski emphasizes that words when used correctly may create powerful emotions and provide significant insights into the human experience.

Chinaski uses writing as a defense mechanism that falls in the category of sublimation, which is basically when a character or a person, redirects his negative emotions and traumas into a positive one; which is in Chinaski's case, arts and literature. He uses literature to deal with life's grief and frustration, as well as a source of income. He is influenced by other writers and their writing techniques, which he frequently quotes in his own work. Moreover, Chinaski cherishes the authenticity and honesty of writing that stems from personal experience, thinking that words may have a tremendous impact on people when

utilized correctly. Rather than writers who write for money and fame giving empty cold words and caring about how many copies had been sold.

Bukowski clearly declines the philosophy of writers who believe that their greatness is measured by how unpopular their writings are rather than how famous they are. He states in chapter sixty-three “The truth, however, was there was very little greatness. It was almost nonexistent, invisible. But you could be sure that the worst writers had the most confidence” (95). Bukowski shows his disdain for writers and their inflated egos. He believes that many writers have an exaggerated sense of self-importance, regardless of the success of their writing. He also implies that many writers are not actually talented, despite their confidence, and suggests that their desire for camaraderie with other writers is not good for their writing. Overall, Bukowski seems to view writers as pretentious and unproductive, and he tries to distance himself from them as much as possible.

Bukowski's attitude toward earning a living as a poet is reflected in chapter ninety-three where he states “It was ridiculous to be going off somewhere to get paid for reading poetry. I didn't like it and I could never get over how silly it seemed. To work like a mule until you were fifty at meaningless, low jobs, and then suddenly to be flitting about the country, a gadfly with drink in hand” (163-164). Given that Chinaski had toiled at menial occupations until he was fifty years old, he considers the idea of being paid to read poems and travel throughout the country ludicrous. This idea of employment appears frivolous to him, and he regards himself as a “gadfly with a drink in hand”. Despite his reservations, he continues to travel and write poetry as a hobby. Henry Chinaski's experience highlights the power of written words to improve our lives, he managed to survive and run away from his thoughts by writing and reading. Literature helped unconsciously both Bukowski and Chinaski to overcome their traumas, and move on with life.

B. Chinaski's Use of Alcohol as a Defense Mechanism

Most of Charles Bukowski's works are primarily about alcoholism and the difficulties of life. His fondness for alcohol is evident throughout the novel, he proclaims in one of the scenes; in chapter one hundred and four "I think I need a drink. Almost everybody does only they don't know it" (209). Chinaski suffers from alcoholism while navigating the nuances of love and relationships through his usage of alcohol, which serves as a defense mechanism for Chinaski. He drinks to escape the reality of his life, which has included rejection, failure, and disappointment, as he asserts in chapter thirty-eight "I was drawn to all the wrong things: I liked to drink" (68). Alcohol also gives him the guts and confidence to approach women, which is an important element in the novel. Chinaski's heavy drinking affects not only him but also those around him, including his lovers and acquaintances.

Chinaski's alcoholism stems from his horrible childhood experiences. Bukowski employs flashbacks to dive into Chinaski's history, where he had an abusive father who beat him on a regular basis; this was described in details in his *Ham on Rye* (1982). Chinaski's use of alcohol is his way of dealing with the grief and trauma he endured as a child.

Throughout the story, Chinaski's use of alcohol has a profound impact on his relationships. His alcoholism causes him to want romantic relationships with women who have had similar experiences as him. These women are likewise addicted, which makes it easier for Chinaski to connect with them. He seeks refuge and comfort in drink and these women understand his problems. His addiction, though, ultimately impedes his capacity to develop a long-term, healthy connection with a woman.

Chinaski is aware that drinking has a bad impact on his relationships. He frequently admits to the toxicity of his drinking habits, but he continues to use alcohol. He refuses to give up his addiction because he believes that without it, his life would be mediocre; as he

clearly states in chapter seventy-six “That's the problem with drinking, I thought, as I poured myself a drink. If something bad happens you drink in an attempt to forget; if something good happens you drink in order to celebrate; and if nothing happens you drink to make something happen” (118-119). Bukowski emphasizes the truth of human struggle, suffering, and coping techniques through Chinaski's alcohol addiction; as a key issue. In chapter eighty he contends:

I took my bottle and went to my bedroom [...] Nothing was ever in tune. People just blindly grabbed at whatever there was: communism, health foods, zen, surfing, ballet, hypnotism, group encounters [...] Catholicism [...] painting, writing, sculpting, composing, conducting, backpacking [...] gambling, drinking, hanging around [...] suicide [...] New York City, and then it all evaporated and fell apart. People had to find things to do while waiting to die. I guess it was nice to have a choice. (123)

Alcoholism influences Chinaski's character development and alters his relationships throughout the story. Chinaski's alcoholism serves as a metaphor for the hardships and grief that people face in their lives. Bukowski's story offers an honest and realistic depiction of alcoholism and how it affects a person's life and relationships.

2.1.1.2 Henry Chinaski's Philosophy on Human Relationships

Bukowski portrays Chinaski in the novel as a man who is aware of his defects and admits them but seems incapable of changing his habits. He explores topics of solitude, loneliness, and the difficulties of intimacy via human and social connections. He mentions these thoughts in several chapters; in chapter eighteen, he admits “I didn't like anything. Maybe I was afraid. That was it - I was afraid. I wanted to sit alone in a room with the shades down. I feasted upon that. I was a crank. I was a lunatic” (33). Then, in Chapter eighteen, he has an argument with one of his lovers, Dee Dee, in which she asks him why can't he be decent to people and his answer was “Fear” (34). He also mentions in chapter thirty-seven “I

never felt right being alone; sometimes it felt good but it never felt right” (65-66). Moreover, in chapter thirty-eight, he states “I was settled into nothingness; a kind of non-being, and I accepted it. It didn't make for an interesting person. I didn't want to be interesting, it was too hard. What I really wanted was only a soft, hazy space to live in, and to be left alone” (68).

Chinaski was in a relationship with Tammie, one of his lovers, who is portrayed as a confident, independent, and sexually liberated woman. Their relationship is based on sex and the desire for physical connection, emphasizing Chinaski's difficulty with emotional intimacy. Chinaski's lack of emotional development is shown by the fact that the sexual aspect of their relationship is the only sort of connection he feels comfortable with, while his connection with other writers does not seem like something he reaches first when he admits “Writers were to be avoided, and I tried to avoid them, but it was almost impossible. They hoped for some sort of brotherhood, some kind of togetherness. None of it had anything to do with writing, none of it helped at the typewriter” (95). Chinaski's social contacts reflect his sense of isolation and his inability to connect with people. Chinaski, for example, interacts with other writers, such as Lydia, but their relationship is characterized by competition rather than collaboration. Chinaski feels isolated as a result of his inability to make meaningful connections with his peers.

Chinaski views human relationships as a tool for exploring themes like solitude, loneliness, and the difficulties of intimacy. One such relationship is his friendship with Lydia Vance, a fellow writer. Lydia is described as a self-assured and independent writer, making her a prospective companion for Chinaski. Their relationship is passive, with neither party committing. Because of this lack of commitment, both of them feel lonely.

In chapter thirty-seven, he describes human relationships as “strange” when he talks about how they can change easily and how unusual they are. “Where a significant amount of

time is spent with another person, sharing meals, living together, traveling and chatting with them, and loving them. But then, suddenly, it all comes to an end” (65). He adds later, “Being alone, on the other hand, never seemed right to you. Although it felt delightful at times, it was never right for you” (66). The complexity and flexibility of human connections emphasize the unusual and sudden shifts that can occur in personal relationships, and how people can go from inseparable to strangers in a short period of time. It also emphasizes the typical impulse to seek friendship and the discomfort that might result from being alone. Overall, he implies that relationships are unpredictably unpredictable and that people seek human connection, even if it is ephemeral.

In chapter ninety-six, Bukowski states:

Strangers when you meet, strangers when you part [...] People with no morals often considered themselves more free, but mostly they lacked the ability to feel or to love. So they became swingers. The dead fucking the dead [...] Morals were restrictive, but they were grounded on human experience down through the centuries. Some morals tended to keep people slaves in factories [...] Other morals simply made good sense.
(176)

This quote demonstrates Bukowski's conviction that those who participate in casual sex with no emotional connection or commitment are unable to properly feel or love. He perceives them as living dead, engaged in pointless activity devoid of the essential elements of desire and affection. Bukowski recognizes the value of morals but believes that people should be careful about which morals they choose and which they reject. Overall, the passage demonstrates Bukowski's conviction that morality and emotional attachment are essential components of a full and meaningful life. *Women* is a fascinating story that looks into the

human condition, focusing on the difficulties of relationships and the sense of isolation and loneliness that can result from them. through Henry Chinaski's persona.

2.1.1.3 Women in Chinaski's Life

The women in Henry Chinaski's life are described as complex, flawed, and even unpredictable. He regards them as objects for desires, but also with disgust and frustration. Chinaski's female lovers include his multiple sexual romances, his dominating ex-wife, and his new lover, Lydia. Bukowski depicts these women as reflections of a culture that frequently marginalizes and objectifies women.

Chinaski is attracted to women because they provide him with a sense of excitement and pleasure that he cannot find anywhere else. He enjoys the sexual encounters and the thrill of the chase, but he also recognizes that this lifestyle may be exhausting and ultimately unsatisfying. Women frequently frighten him because of their emotional power over him. He battles his own vulnerabilities, insecurities, and worries, which are frequently aggravated by his connections with women.

Bukowski's depictions of women are immensely objectifying and sexualized. He is very concerned with their personal beauty, particularly their hair, wild and insane eyes, and lips. He also frequently makes remarks about their age and wardrobe choices. His vocabulary is frequently vulgar and filthy, implying that he sees these women as sexual objects rather than sophisticated humans with their own thoughts and feelings.

Cassie was one of his lovers, he claimed that: "she reminded me of how my mother looked in 1935 (although my mother had been much more beautiful)" (141). Cassie lacked Bukowski's mother's inner beauty and strength, despite their physical similarities. Cassie was beautiful, but she was shallow and materialistic, and he did not want to spend his life with someone like that. Bukowski's perspective emphasizes how our own experiences and

connections may shape our perceptions of beauty. Despite Cassie's physical resemblance with his mother, he is drawn to her in a different way owing to her attitude. It serves as a reminder that true beauty transcends physical appearance and encompasses the qualities that make a person truly admirable.

Chinaski's love affairs and sexual exploits reflect Bukowski's turbulent and tumultuous relationships with women. Throughout the novel, he writes honestly about his attitude towards sex and women; in chapter ninety-four he states:

Each woman I looked at I imagined being in bed with [...] Women: I liked the colors of their clothing; the way they walked [...] They had it over us: they planned much better and were better organized. While men were watching professional football or drinking beer or bowling, they, the women, were thinking about us, concentrating, studying, deciding--whether to accept us [...] no matter what they did, we ended up lonely and insane. (171)

This quote exemplifies Chinaski's objectification of women, as he views them only as sexual objects to fill his time during airport delays. He also admires women's beauty and power, recognizing their superior ability to plan and organize than men. However, his attitude toward women eventually becomes cynical, as he implies that regardless of the outcome of their relationships, males wind up lonely and insane. The quote emphasizes Bukowski's depiction of masculinity and interpersonal issues in his literature.

Bukowski's hatred for casual sex and the hedonistic lifestyle of Los Angeles elites is clearly described in chapter ninety-six "I detested that type of swinging, the Los Angeles [...] Strangers when you meet, strangers when you part a gymnasium of bodies namelessly masturbating each other. People with no morals often considered themselves more free, but mostly they lacked the ability to feel or to love" (96). He believes that sex should be more

than just a physical act between faceless strangers. He feels that a lack of values and a desire for independence can impair one's ability to feel true emotions and connect with people. His own experiences and ideas inform Bukowski's perspective on sex and relationships since he frequently wrote about his own issues with love and intimacy with women.

Women's plot is underlined by Bukowski's real-life interactions with multiple women. It details his long-term on-again, off-again relationship with girlfriend Linda King, named Lydia Vance in the novel, and Bukowski's connection with Linda Lee Beighle called Sara in the novel, whom he subsequently marries until his death in 1994 ("Best Quotes"). Chinaski mentioned Lydia in his first chapter where he meets her at his first poetry reading, at a bookstore on Kenmore Ave, she intimidated him at first, but he still wants to have sex with her. Their next encounter is at his house, where Lydia comes with a friend of his named Peter; she is also a writer, and he enjoys her reading, but he does not like her poems, which he describes as "badly written" yet "They were interesting, full of humor and sexuality, but badly written" (3). Lydia's sculpting of Chinaski's head lits the spark that ignited their romance. Their love is shattered as their minds, and throughout the novel, they continued cutting each other off, and their relationship is far from flawless or calm; Chinaski mentioned this in chapter nine:

Lydia and I were always fighting [...] when my male friends came by to visit and Lydia was there I could hear her conversation become intimate and sexual [...] It was my drinking that irritated Lydia. She loved sex and my drinking got in the way of our lovemaking [...] We split up at least once a week [...] but always managed to make up, somehow. She had finished sculpting my head and had given it to me. When we'd split I'd put the head in my car next to me on the front seat, drive it over to her place [...] That head went back and forth. (20)

Bukowski's relationship with Lydia is clearly filled with problems, such as jealousy, mistrust, and anger. The fact that they broke up so frequently implies that they are mismatched in many respects, but they keep going back to each other for reasons that were unclear. As he describes their relationship “Still, I kept thinking about Lydia. The good parts of our relationship felt like a rat walking around and gnawing at the inside of my stomach” (32). Despite their differences, their interactions have a sense of fun and black humor, as illustrated by Chinaski's tale of the carved skull they pass back and forth. This shows that even in the middle of disagreements and hardships, Bukowski and Lydia have a connection and intimacy that eventually keeps them together, even as they push each other away.

2.1.2 Bukowski's Self-Portrayal Vs. His Public Persona

Charles Bukowski is noted for his semi-autobiographical writing style, in which his characters frequently reflect his own life experiences. One such example is Henry Chinaski, a character in Bukowski's novels and poetry whose experiences and persona match Bukowski's own. Bukowski was born in Germany in 1920 and immigrated to America with his family when he was two years old. He grew up in poverty and suffered from his father's cruelty. Bukowski's childhood was characterized by seclusion, rejection, and alienation from mainstream culture. These experiences influenced his work and the development of his alter ego. Chinaski, like Bukowski, come from a similar background. He is portrayed as a recluse who struggles to connect with others and is always looking for meaning in his life. He, like Bukowski, is heavily affected by his early experiences and portrays a life dominated by poverty, abuse, and estrangement from mainstream society. Chinaski, like Bukowski, is frequently seen drowning his sorrows in alcohol and women. Thus, it is clear that Bukowski draws significantly on his own life experiences when developing the character of Chinaski.

However, Chinaski's character does not fully match Bukowski's life experiences. Bukowski published his first story when he was about twenty-four years old and he did not

begin writing poetry until he was in his thirties and had already achieved some success in the corporate world. Chinaski, on the other hand, is portrayed as a struggling writer who is turned down by publishers and lives in poverty. While Bukowski undoubtedly drew inspiration from his own rejection from publishers and poverty, Chinaski's life is a more exaggerated and fictionalized depiction of his own experiences.

The article “Charles Bukowski Quotes on Horse Racing” mentions that Bukowski was known for his passion for horse racing, as a substitute for drinking; due to his fiancée’s suggestion, Bukowski went to a horse track. He thought it is crazy at first but learned to appreciate it. He then reverted to drinking, and he kept himself busy with both drinking and horse racing. However horse racing was not a significant component of Chinaski's personality, yet it reflects his gambling addiction, which he battled throughout his life and frequently wrote about in his work. Chinaski, on the other hand, appears to be more concerned with drinking and women. Charles Bukowski's Alter Ego, Chinaski, reflects his own experiences with poverty, abuse, and detachment from mainstream culture. However, there are differences between the two, such as Bukowski's professional success and passion for horse racing, which Chinaski's picture does not reflect.

2.2 The Impact of Charles Bukowski’s Life on his *Women*

Charles Bukowski's life had a big influence on his writing, especially his work *Women*. His own life experiences are widely addressed throughout the novel, allowing readers to understand and accept his writings. He is a prolific writer whose harsh manner and depiction of American society's lowlife underbelly gave him an enduring reputation as a literary iconoclast. Most of his writings are considered controversial because of the way he portrays life in his novels, he does not hide or filter any aspect that people would usually consider unacceptable.

2.2.1 The Language of Charles Bukowski in *Women*

Bukowski's encounters with women had a significant impact on his writing and are important to *Women*. Bukowski is a known womanizer, and his relationships were frequently turbulent and tumultuous. He writes about his relationships with many women, including his ex-wife and various lovers, in *Women*. He depicts these women as multifaceted and imperfect individuals who are frequently deceptive and self-destructive. Bukowski's own relationship issues are represented in the novel, as he fights with the difficulties of love and fidelity.

Bukowski's drinking was also a significant part of his life and his writings, and it is featured strongly in *Women*. Bukowski was a heavy drinker, and the novel reflects his love for alcohol and the atmosphere of bars. He would frequently spend long evenings drinking with pals, and *Women* is filled with vivid, and at times frightening, depictions of booze-fueled debauchery. However, Bukowski's drinking has a darker side, and his difficulties with alcoholism and despair are portrayed in the book's gloomy and somber tone.

Therefore, Bukowski's interactions with the literary community constitute a significant element of his life and work. Bukowski is a writer who frequently finds himself on the periphery of the literary establishment, and his work is not always favorably appreciated by mainstream reviewers. Despite this, he continues to write and publish, and his books are well-known among readers. In *Women*, he discusses his interactions with publishers, critics, and other writers, revealing his delicate relationship with the literary world. Bukowski is noted for his raw, honest, and unfiltered writing style, which reflects life's brutal reality. As a result, his language in *Women* is frequently explicit, vulgar, and profane. He uses slang, curse words, and harsh language to depict the personalities and attitudes of his characters. He states "I never pump up my vulgarity. I wait for it to arrive in its own terms" (125).

Likewise, Bukowski's writing in *Women* is marked by short, concise sentences that mirror his straightforward attitude, to create a deep and dramatic reading experience; he frequently employs short and choppy phrases, fractured grammar, and repetition like the word "women" which is repeated one hundred times. Bukowski's language often includes detailed descriptions of the character's physical appearance, surroundings, and emotional states. He employs metaphors, similes, and other literary methods to depict the inner thoughts and feelings of his characters; such as "I was King Kong and they were lithe and tender" (49). Nonetheless, the language of *Women* is assertive, vivid, and typical of Bukowski's own voice and writing style.

2.2.2 Transgressive Fiction and Dirty Realism in the Novel

Charles Bukowski's novel *Women* is a classic example of transgressive fiction and dirty realism. On the one hand, dirty Realism is a literary term that was first used in the 1980s to describe a writing style that focuses on the raw, rough, and unpleasant facets of reality. The word was created to designate a generation of American writers who attempted to reflect modern society's disillusionment and isolation. Charles Bukowski, one of that generation's best-known writers, is noted for his shamelessly raw and honest description of life on the margins of modern civilization. In *Women*, Bukowski combines dirty realism techniques to explore issues of loneliness, love, and insanity. However, he prefers to concentrate on the issues rather than the solutions. He does not express any political stance in his writing, implying that dirty realism has no political ambitions, yet argues that he is not interested in politics or religion by stating in chapter thirty-eight "I was drawn to all the wrong things I liked to drink, I was lazy, I didn't have a god, politics, ideas, ideals. I was settled into nothingness, a kind of non-being, and accepted it. It didn't make for an interesting person" (68).

Women recounts the life of Henry Chinaski, a character frequently portrayed as a self-portrait of Bukowski himself. Chinaski is a womanizer, alcoholic, and an aspiring writer whose existence is constantly at odds with poverty, rejection, and boredom. He lives in a decaying flat and spends most of his time drinking, gambling, and sleeping with women. Dirty realism is evident in the representation of Chinaski's surroundings. Bukowski depicts in full Chinaski's life in the dirty, sordid world of bars, and hotels. The author's attention to the seedy and rotting districts of Los Angeles is an effective approach to convey the novel's sense of despair and gloom. The emphasis on the lives of marginalized and destitute people is another feature of dirty realism. In *Women*, Bukowski focuses on the lives of women with whom Chinaski interacts and builds ties. He portrays the everyday life struggles that his female characters go through such as poverty, addiction, and abusive relationships, exposing the bleak realities of life in a gritty and merciless manner.

Bukowski's works frequently combine gloomy and sarcastic humor that borders on the bizarre. This is particularly visible in *Women*, as Bukowski's characters utilize humor to cope with their gloomy situations, as a demonstration of his humor. He says "I went to the kitchen and felt-up the turkey. It showed me its legs, its pubic hair, its bunghole, its thighs; it sat there. I was glad it didn't have eyes. Well, we'd do something with the thing. That was the next step. I heard the toilet flush. If Iris didn't want to roast it, I'd roast it" (173).

Bukowski's characters often represent members of the working class, depicted as disillusioned and disgusted with the American dream. This is demonstrated in *Women*, where the protagonist is a poor writer who works blue-collar jobs to make ends meet. Moreover, Bukowski's writings frequently criticize contemporary American culture, showing its flaws and errors. *Women* examine a patriarchal society's sexual politics, exposing the different ways in which women are objectified, abused, and exploited. This can clearly be seen in this passage:

The street to my left was backed up with traffic and I watched the people waiting patiently in the cars. There was almost always a man and a woman, staring straight ahead, not talking. It was, finally, for everyone, a matter of waiting. You waited and you waited- for the hospital, the doctor, the plumber, the madhouse, the jail, papa death himself. First the signal red, then the signal was green. The citizens of the world ate food and watched TV. and worried about their jobs or lack of the same, while they waited. (150)

Bukowski's novel, *Women*, is a prime example of dirty realism. Bukowski explores the lives of people on the outskirts of society through the character of Henry Chinaski, depicting their problems with honesty and compassion. The author's emphasis on the filthy and shady aspects of existence generates a sense of bleakness and misery that is characteristic of the dirty realism movement. Nonetheless, there are moments of beauty and optimism throughout Bukowski's work, indicating an artist who was truly committed to the human experience in all its complexities.

On the other hand, transgressive fiction is a literary genre that has developed over time. Its distinguishing characteristics include going beyond typical moral or societal norms, typically depicting forbidden issues like drug usage, sex work, and violence. *Women* is usually recognized as a notable example of the transgressive fiction genre. Through his behavior and actions, Chinaski continuously challenges society and cultural standards. He defies conventional notions of what it means to be a writer, a lover, and a man, establishing himself as a rebel figure. However, by portraying women as complex individuals with their own interests and motivations, the novel challenges established gender stereotypes. Bukowski investigates the power dynamics in sexual interactions and questions the stereotypes of the obedient woman and the dominant man.

Bukowski's novel questions the authority of government, religion, and morality, as well as the vulnerability of individuals who are supposed to preserve these institutions. Henry Chinaski rejects traditional sources of authority in favor of human freedom and self-expression. Bukowski gives a platonic view of existence in the absurdity of life, portraying the human condition as fundamentally meaningless. The work delves into themes of solitude, alienation, and despair, emphasizing the absurdity of the human condition.

Women's characterization and narration are crucial in demonstrating how the novel embodies the transgressive fiction genre. Henry is portrayed as a nasty, self-centered, and unapologetic figure. Despite his critics, Henry's character is also humorous, underlining the follies of society's expectations for masculinity and gender roles. Bukowski's use of a vulgar and filthy narrator to convey the story exemplifies the transgressive fiction genre's unusual approach to writing. Furthermore, Bukowski's use of humor in the story contributes to its rebellious aspect. The humor is frequently dark and sardonic, attacking traditional moral values and cultural norms. The plot of the story is similarly non-linear, obscuring the chronology of events. Bukowski's use of non-linear story development contributes to the novel's overall chaotic mood, which is typical of the transgressive literature genre.

Women, is a novel that takes advantage of several aspects of the transgressive literature genre, most notably its depiction of taboo issues such as drinking and sexual scenes. Bukowski's storytelling style and approach in the novel only serve to emphasize these features. Despite its very contentious portrayal of women, the novel is an important example of transgressive writing, demonstrating the genre's potential to challenge traditional morality and standards.

Chapter Three: A Psychoanalytic Reading of the Protagonist in *Ham on Rye* (1982)

The third chapter delves into a psychoanalytic reading of the protagonist and alter ego in Charles Bukowski's novel *Ham on Rye* (1982). It explores how Bukowski portrays himself in *Ham on Rye*, focusing on the author's alter ego, Henry Chinaski, and his life struggle. It analyses his traumas pointing out to his harmful defense mechanisms; comparing and contrasting Bukowski's self-portrayal with his public persona. Additionally, it examines the impact of Bukowski's life on his writing, specifically looking at the language used in *Ham on Rye* and how it relates to Transgressive Fiction and Dirty Realism in the novel.

3.1 Bukowski's Portrayal of the Self in *Ham on Rye*

Published in 1982, Charles Bukowski's *Ham on Rye* is a window into the past as it details the author's upbringing in poverty amid the backdrop of the Great Depression. In typical Bukowski fashion, this novel features stark prose that explores various themes such as social isolation brought about by bullying and grappling with illness like acne. While navigating these difficulties during adolescence, we see how these formative experiences inform Bukowski's decision not to fight for a country that failed him. In *Ham on Rye*, Charles Bukowski masterfully weaves together social commentary about American society during the challenging period of the Great Depression. Themes regarding isolation, trauma, and war permeate this work in a way that engages readers at a deep level. Through his unique form of first-person narrative that involves blunt honesty and brutal revelations about life's truly arduous conditions, Bukowski provides vivid descriptions of people and places which allow for full immersion in his prose style.

3.1.1 The Author's Alter Ego in the Novel

In Charles Bukowski's *Ham on Rye* (1982), the protagonist and author's alter ego, Henry Chinaski, serves as the primary vehicle for exploring the complexities of Bukowski's own life and personality. It is widely acknowledged that Henry Chinaski is the literary

persona through which Bukowski channels his experiences and perspectives in *Ham on Rye*. Just like Bukowski, Chinaski is a heavy drinker, womanizer, and struggling writer. The novel follows Chinaski's journey from a childhood marked by poverty, neglect, and bullying, to adulthood, where he struggles to find his place in society while coping with personal demons. Through the character of Chinaski, Bukowski is able to explore his own personal struggles and experiences in brutal honesty. He does not shy away from discussing taboo topics such as violence, sex, and alcoholism.

3.1.1.1 Henry Chinaski's Rough Childhood

A. Relationship with His Father

The dedication of the book: “for all the fathers” (v), is what initially attracts the attention of any reader of *Ham on Rye* because of how straightforward and how deeply meaningful it is. It is a powerful statement that reflects the central theme of the novel. Throughout the novel, Bukowski depicts the fathers of his characters as messed up and damaged individuals who are frequently unable to offer their children the love, support, and guidance they require. Bukowski's father was an abusive drinker who abused him and his mother, and the author's life and work were profoundly influenced by these events.

In the initial chapters, it is shown that Chinaski's father is violent and appears to always give orders to his wife and kid; their relationship is based on fear and hatred. In the first chapter, when little Chinaski was enjoying playing the piano at his grandmother's house, his father asked him to stop ““will you stop that?” My father said loudly.” He added later ““why don't you get that thing tuned?”” (3). The reader can picture an image of him saying this in an angry tone to a child. In chapter three, Chinaski and his parents were on the road to visit his uncle Ben who has two weeks left to die of Tuberculosis. While talking about him, the wife mentioned that maybe Leonard, Henry's Father and Chinaski's grandfather, is

helping him with the hospital bills. At this moment Chinaski says “I like Grandpa Leonard” his father replied with a brutal phrase saying that ““Children are supposed to be seen not heard”” then he continued, ““Ah, that Leonard, the only time he was good to us children was when he was drunk . He’d joke with us and give us money. But the next day when he was sober he was the meanest man in the world”” (11). The passage reveals that throughout the story, there is an on-going circle of fathers who do not treat their children properly. Leonard was a horrible father to Henry, and unsurprisingly, Henry is also a bad father to Chinaski. Matter of fact, he is treating his child in the same manner as his father treated him, if not worse. In chapter five, Chinaski admits “I had begun to dislike my father. He was always angry about something” (22). These scenes set the tone for the rest of the novel and highlight the themes of trauma, pain, isolation, and alienation that are central to Chinaski's character.

In chapter eight, Chinaski narrates one of the most brutal scenes in the novel after his parents received a note from his teacher. He says:

I heard my father come in. He always slammed the door, walk the heavily, and talked loudly. He was home. After a few moments the bedroom door opened. He was six feet two, a large man. Everything vanished, the chair I was sitting in, the wallpaper, the walls, all of my thoughts. He was the dark covering the Sun, the violence of him made everything else actually disappear. He was all ears, nose, mouth, I couldn't look at his eyes, there was only his red angry face. (39)

This passage describes a moment in which Henry's father has come home, instilling him with a sense of fear and intimidation. The description of his father's entrance is established with a tone of aggressiveness and dominance. Henry's response to the entrance of his father is one of total obedience and terror. Henry describes the father's physical size as being enormous and how everything else seems to vanish in his presence. The father is represented as a violent, evil entity who has the ability to make everything else vanish. The phrase “all ears, nose, and

mouth” used to describe his father's features underlines both his intimidating presence and the fact that Henry is too terrified to look his father in the eyes. The last description of his “red angry face” only serves to emphasize how frightening he appears. After that, his father asked him to enter the bathroom and to take down his pants and shorts; Henry states that his father reached out and grabbed a “razor strop” to beat him with:

He lied on the strap. The first blow inflicted more shock than pain. The second hurt more. Each blow which followed increased the pain. At first I was aware of the walls, the toilet, the tub. Finally I couldn't see anything. As he beat me, he berated me [...] I tried not to scream. I knew that if I did scream he might stop, but knowing this, and knowing his desire for me to scream, prevented me. The tears ran from my eyes as I remained silent ... Finally, like something jerked into action, I began to sob, swallowing and choking on the salt slime that ran down my throat. He stopped. He was no longer there. I became aware of the little window again and the mirror there was the razor stop hanging from the hook, long and brown and twisted. (39-40)

In this quote, Henry's father is shown beating him with a razor strop in a graphic depiction of physical violence. The beating's physical sensations are described in great detail, with the pain getting worse with each strike and Henry losing consciousness of his surroundings. He attempts to control his desire to scream as a way to avoid satisfying his father's desire for him to do so, which raises questions about the psychological effects of the beating. The situation changes dramatically when the narrator eventually starts crying and the father suddenly stops beating him. The phrase “long and brown and twisted” used to describe the razor strop is a powerful one that highlights the brutality of the abuse.

In chapter twenty, Chinaski describes how good it felt to hang out with his one and only friend, Frank. Mentioning how they used to “hitch-hick” everywhere and how he never got into fights with him. They were both just as curious; they watched movies, visited places

and had fun together. The beginning of the chapter is all fun and games until he admits “I got some beatings from my father for running off with Frank but I figured I was going to get some beatings anyhow so I might as well have the fun” (98). Chinaski’s attitude regarding these beatings is shown in the second part of the quotation. He knows that no matter what he does, he would be punished, so he may as well enjoy himself while he can. This implies that he has grown somewhat resilient and defiant in the face of physical abuse and that he sees it as inevitable.

Barbet Schroeder, who is a film director, recorded and put together a series of brief interviews with Charles Bukowski titled “The Charles Bukowski Tapes”, which were initially released in 1985. The video documentary has a tape with an interview in Bukowski’s house. Bukowski presented the house as “the house of horrors, the house of agony” and pointed to the bathroom in which his father used to beat him as “the torture chamber”. Bukowski states that the place holds some memories and it is “a terrible place to stand and talk about it”. Every corner of that house seems to be haunted with dark memories and nightmares of the beatings that young Bukowski had to endure. Bukowski also declares in the interview “of course, you can’t help screaming, especially when you’re six years old, seven years old. As I got around to be about ten or eleven or twelve, I screamed less. In fact, the last beating I got I didn’t scream at all. I just didn’t make a sound, and I guess that terrorized him because that was the last one, when I didn’t make a sound” (“The Charles Bukowski Tapes”).

B. Chinaski’s Physical Appearance

Charles Bukowski wrote in a very honest way about every person, event, and detail in his life as Chinaski, his alter ego. In his biography about Bukowski, Howard Soundes maintains that “he faced himself squarely in the mirror each day, writing about himself with extraordinary candour even when the reflection was unflattering. Personal honesty shines through all of the writing, making Bukowski an author one learns to trust and indeed comes to

love” (1). For instance, in chapter twenty-eight Chinaski declares that in 8th and 9th grade he “broke out with acne” he says “many of the guys had it but not like mine. Mine was really terrible. I was the worst case in town. I had pimples and boils all over my face, back, neck, and some on my chest” (145). Next, in chapter twenty-nine he declares:

The boils got worse and worse. They were as large as walnuts and covered my face. I was very ashamed. Sometimes at home I would stand before the bathroom mirror and break one of the boils. Yellow pus would spurt and splatter on the mirror. and little white hard pits. in a horrible way it was fascinating that all that stuff was in there. But I knew how hard it was for other people to look at me. (151)

Both quotes highlight Chinaski's struggle with acne and boils and the shame and embarrassment that come with it.

Given the circumstances, the character's fascination with the pus that comes out of the boils is both horrifying and understandable. The grotesque image of the yellow pus spurting and splattering on the bathroom mirror is a strong, vivid and memorable image. Later on in chapter thirty-two after he started to get a treatment which did not help, he writes; “When one boil vanished another would appear. I often stood in front of the mirror alone, wondering how ugly a person could get. I would look at my face in disbelief, then turn to examine all the boils on my back. I was horrified” (165). This exactly explains what Sounes meant when he said that Bukowski was beyond honest and wrote about himself with “extraordinary candour” (1). In chapter thirty-nine he notes “I didn’t want to be seen wearing swimming trunks because my back was covered with boils and scars. Outside of that, I had a good body. But nobody would notice that. I had a good chest and great legs but nobody would see that.” (Bukowski 199). From the quotes above we can distinguish that Chinaski's concept of self in *Ham on Rye* is heavily impacted by his physical appearance, which he sees as ugly, disgusting, and a cause of shame. Chinaski's fixation with his looks, particularly his acne, reveals his preoccupation

with his image and desire to be perceived as desirable and handsome. His attempts to change his looks by using medication or treatment, simply serve to reinforce his sense of inadequacy and failure.

3.1.1.2 Chinaski's Use of Literature, Alcohol, and Violence as Defense Mechanisms

A. Literature as a Defense Mechanism

Throughout the novel, Chinaski uses literature as a defense mechanism for the harsh world he lives in; which also acts as an outlet for his self-expression, self-education and self-discovery. Reading and writing as means of escapism are one of the novel's primary themes. From a young age, Chinaski turns to reading and writing for comfort as a way to escape the tough situations in his life. He frequently employs vivid and poetic language while writing about his experiences, feelings, and views. Chinaski uses writing as a tool to construct his own universe, one in which he may express himself freely and without concern about criticism or rejection. He also uses writing as a way of self-discovery. Chinaski's writing serves as a vehicle for him to examine his identity and comprehend where he fits into the world as he matures and becomes more reflective. His writing assists him in making sense of his struggles with neglect, loneliness, and isolation. Chinaski discovers his own sense of self via writing, and he starts to view writing as a form of self-expression and a method to interact with other people.

The first time the theme of writing appears in the novel is in chapter nineteen; Chinaski narrates the story of his teacher asking the students to write about the then-president's visit to his town via the perspective of his alter ego Henry Chinaski. He was unable to go since his father has him carefully trim, edge, and mow the grass every Saturday, he says; "every Saturday I got a beating with the razor strop because my father found a hair" (93). He could no longer play football or baseball with his friends for the same reason.

Despite not actually seeing the president, the young Chinaski imagines the event and describes it nonetheless; “That Sunday I took some paper and sat down to write about how I had seen the president” (93). The next day he turns his essay to his teacher, and the day after that Mrs. Fretag discusses the essays and declares “for those who could not attend, I would like to read this essay by Henry Chinaski” (95). Chinaski notes that she found his essay very creative; when Mrs. Fretag began to read his essay to the class, he describes:

The word sounded good to me. Everybody was listening. My words filled the room, from blackboard to blackboard, they hit the ceiling and bounced off, they covered Mrs Fretag shoes and piled up on the floor. Some of the prettiest girls in the class begin to sneak glances at me. All the tough guys were pissed. Their essays hadn't been worth shit. I drank in my words like a thirsty man. I even begin to believe them. (95)

Chinaski here is experiencing a sense of empowerment from the attention and admiration he is receiving for his words. He feels proud for gaining the attention of his peers especially “the pretty girls” and the jealous “tough guys”. He also mentions that even he begin to believe in his words as if he really went and saw the president although it was all a figment of imagination. The following quote from young Chinaski seems to capture the essence of his point of view at the time and moving forward in his life “So, that’s what they wanted: Lies. Beautiful lies. That’s what they needed. People were fools. It was going to be easy for me” (96).

In chapter thirty-five Chinaski discovers a library nearby that he ends up going to everyday. He read a book each day, and loved discovering new writers and styles. He admits “I went back for more. I read each book in a single evening” (182). Chinaski found peace, hope and tranquillity reading those books. For instance, his passion is apparent when he reads Hemingway. He describes Hemingway's work as a source of joy and thrill that can take the reader above their misery and troubles he states “Words weren't dull, words were things that

could make your mind hum. If you read them and let yourself feel the magic, you would live without pain, with hope, no matter what happened to you” (183).

In chapter fifty-three Henry declares that he had written ten or twelve short stories. “Give a man a typewriter and he becomes a writer,” he says. “I had hidden the stories under the paper lining of my shorts and stockings drawer” (302). This quote is about Henry's early writing experiences. He recalls how simple it was for him to become a writer after acquiring a typewriter. He does; however, indicate a sense of guilt or secrecy about his writing, since he kept his works in a drawer. This might indicate a fear of being judged or a lack of confidence in his ability as a writer. In the same chapter, Henry's father finds his short stories and he kicks him out of the house as he wrote about how brutal his father treated him.

B. Alcohol as a Defence Mechanism

In the twenty-second chapter, Chinaski first tried wine at the home of his friend, Baldy. “Why hadn't someone told me?” he asks joyously. “Life was great. With this, a man was perfect, nothing could touch him” (111). Chinaski believes that getting drunk would fix all of his problems, and thus began his adventure with alcoholism. He drank more frequently to feel better. He often declares throughout the novel that wine can solve any issue; “As long as a man had wine and cigarettes he could make it. I finished off my glass and poured another” (325). This quotation implies that Henry seeks comfort in everyday pleasures like wine and cigarettes. It suggests that he is prepared to give up materialistic ambitions in favour of looking for happiness in these basic comforts. He appears to think that as long as he has access to these basic pleasures he will be able to survive or deal with life's obstacles, which is one interpretation of “making it”. However, this statement may also be a reflection of his tendency to use drugs and alcohol as an escape rather than confronting his problems. Henry's sense of helplessness and desire to escape his situation is evident in chapter fifty-six; “I could make it. I could win drinking contests, I could gamble. Maybe I could pull a few hold ups. I

didn't ask much, just to be left alone. I finished the first bottle of wine and started in on the second.” (326). He thinks he can make it through by winning drinking contests and gambling...etc. He has given up on more traditional routes to achievement favouring a solitary, minimalist lifestyle. The phrase conveys a general sense of despair and resignation to a gloomy future.

C. Violence as a Defense Mechanism

It should be noted that *Ham on Rye* includes graphic violence and may not be appropriate for all readers. For instance throughout the novel, Henry Chinaski gets into fights with his peers, bullies, and other individuals he meets in his daily life. These conflicts allow Henry to vent his rage and displeasure with the world around him. He seems to like having those fights as he feels a sense of pride and rebellion in his transgression. He also liked being addressed as a bad boy because he was bad, he didn't just pretend to be. Chinaski confirms in chapter twenty-one “I liked being picked up as one of the bad guys. I liked to feel bad. Anybody could be a good guy, that didn't take guts [...] I didn't want to be like my father. He only pretended to be bad. When you're bad you didn't pretend. It was just there. I liked being bad. Trying to be good made me sick” (108). The quote highlights Chinaski's rejection of conventional morality; he didn't like to conform to society's norms. Every time Chinaski had a fight his violent and aggressive behavior towards others reflects his repressed anger and wrath toward his father, mother, and society as a whole.

In chapter twenty-six Chinaski narrates “I liked being alone. One day I was playing one of my games. There was a clock on the mantle with a second hand and I held contest to see how long I can hold my breath. Each time I did it I exceeded my own record. I went through much agony but I was proud each time I added some seconds to my record” (132). This statement says a lot about Chinaski's character and philosophy of life. His opening line, “I liked being alone,” hints at his introverted personality and enjoyment of solitude. In the

second part of the quote, the protagonist sets a goal to test how long he can hold his breath. He appears to enjoy the physical pain of holding his breath for greater durations of time, which may be a sign of masochism. Now if we relate this to what have been said earlier, Chinaski's aggressive behaviour and excessive engagement into fights might be because he is a masochist who actually enjoyed being beaten up in those fights.

In chapter thirty-three Chinaski emphasizes:

I didn't have a job, I didn't go to school. I didn't do anything. I was bandaged, I was standing on the corner smoking a cigarette. I was a tough man, I was a dangerous man. I knew things. Sleeth has suicided. I wasn't going to suicide. I would rather kill some of them. I'd take four or five of them with me. I'd show them what it meant to play around with me. (175)

This quote seems to reflect Henry's frustration and rage. He sounds helpless and powerless in his current condition, as indicated by him being uneducated, unemployed, and bandaged because of his treatment of the boils. He appears to be portraying an image of toughness and danger, maybe as a coping mechanism against feeling vulnerable or weak. Chinaski appears to view himself as a tough, dangerous man who is capable of violence. He rejects the concept of suicide but instead he displays a desire to drag others down with him if he were to lose control of his life, which suggests that he is considering using violence to recover power and control. The quote offers an insight into the Henry's unstable mentality and his potential for harmful behavior.

Overall, Chinaski may have developed unhealthy coping methods, such as substance abuse and aggressive behavior, as a result of his early traumas. Chinaski's acts might be interpreted in this way as a kind of self-protection or defense mechanism. He is taking back control of a world that has continually hurt him.

3.1.1.3 Chinaski's Depiction of the Great Depression Era

Bukowski uses Chinaski to critique the society and culture in which he grew up. Through Chinaski's eyes, we see the flaws and injustices of the capitalist system, the hypocrisy of the middle-class, and the inherent brutality of human nature. Bukowski perfectly depicted the Great Depression era in *Ham on Rye*.

A. Financial Struggles

Bukowski describes the financial struggles that people went through during that era like unemployment and poverty. For example, in chapter twenty Chinaski becomes a 6th grader, and he starts to think about running away from home, but the only thing that prevents him from doing so was money. Or basically a job so he can afford to live on his own. He decides that “if most of our fathers couldn't get jobs how in the hell a guy under five feet tall get one?” (100). He later on stresses “my mother had a low-paying job somewhere” (101). These lines seem to make a comment on the challenging economic circumstances of the time and the difficulties that individuals had in finding employment. Henry appears to be implying that if even able-bodied males, who presumably have greater opportunities for employment than someone under five feet tall, are finding it difficult to get a job, then it must be considerably more difficult for someone who is physically disadvantaged. The phrase also conveys a sense of frustration, possibly even hopelessness about the likelihood of finding a job during that era in the United States.

In chapter twenty-six Chinaski describes the daily routine of his parents:

My mother went to her low-paying job each morning and my father, who didn't have a job, left each morning too. Although most of the neighbors were unemployed he didn't want them to think that he was jobless. So he got into his car each morning at the same

time and drove off as if he were going to work then in the evening he would return at exactly the same time. (132)

This quote sheds light on Henry's family background and the challenges his parents confront in keeping up appearances in their neighborhood. The family's financial situation is described in the opening sentence, where it is said that the father is unemployed and that the mother has a low-paying job. The second half of the quote illustrates the father's insecurity over his neighbors' perception of him as unemployed. He tries so hard to keep up the appearance that he has a job, getting into his car and leaving at the same time every morning, and coming home at the same time every evening. This implies that his father's feeling of self-worth is correlated with his perceived social position and that he is prepared to compromise his honesty and integrity in order to uphold this image. In summary, Bukowski here emphasizes the pressure to live up to social norms and expectations as well as the difficulties faced by working-class families in America during the 20th century. It also addresses issues of pride and humiliation, as well as the extent individuals will go to protect their dignity in the face of misfortune.

In chapter fifty-six Chinaski declares that “Los Angeles was a good place, there were many poor people, it would be easy to get lost among them” (325). This phrase appears to sum up Henry's sentiments on the city of Los Angeles. Because there were so many poor people there during the Great Depression, he believes it to be a place where it would be simple to blend in with the poor population. Henry, who has battled to fit in throughout his life due to a terrible childhood, finds solace in the possibility of disappearing in a place like Los Angeles. However, Bukowski's work frequently carries an undercurrent of sarcasm and irony, so it's vital to keep in mind that this phrase might not be meant to be taken totally seriously. Bukowski depicts another reality of people during the Great Depression era in the same chapter. Chinaski rents a new apartment and while he was sleeping he heard someone

sneaking into his apartment. He has just moved into a new place, and he is already facing the threat of intrusion from a stranger. He states “People did that. They rented a place, stopped paying rent and kept the key, sneaking back to sleep there if it was vacant or robbing the place if the occupant was out” (326). This emphasizes how desperate individuals were during the Great Depression, as some of them turned to immoral and illegal ways of surviving. The act of renting a property and then sneaking back in or stealing it indicates the amount of poverty and desperation that many individuals endured at the period.

B. Social Struggles

Bukowski also depicts social struggles since the main themes of the novel hover around isolation, loneliness, loss of hope and optimism, desperation and despair...etc. which are all centered to the Great Depression era. In chapter six he states; “I didn’t have any friends at school, didn’t want any. I felt better being alone” (26). He asserts in chapter nineteen; “I didn’t like anybody at that school. I think they knew that. I think that’s why they disliked me. I didn’t like the way they walked or looked or talked, but I didn’t like my father or mother either. I still had the feeling of being surrounded by white empty space” (91). At first, the quotation paints an image of a young boy who despises the world around him, who feels free when alone, and enjoys isolating himself and being alone. Nobody liked him, and he didn't like anybody, including his own parents. However, the phrase “white empty space” gives the reader a deeper impression that he is not actually enjoying his state much. It is like the whole quote is a shattering scream or cry of a young lonely boy. It implies that Chinaski is disconnected from his surroundings and struggling to find meaning or purpose.

In chapter twenty-one, Chinaski’s gym teacher asks the students to pull their shoulders back and stand straight but no one responds to his order; Bukowski describes:

Nobody would change position. We were the way we were, and we didn't want to be anything else. We all came from Depression families and most of us were ill-fed, yet we had grown up to be huge and strong. Most of us, I think, got little love from our families, and we didn't ask for love or kindness from anybody. We were a joke but people were careful not to laugh in front of us. It was as if we had grown up too soon and we were bored with being children. We had no respect for our elders. We were like tigers with the mange. (105)

This passage perfectly expresses the spirit of despair and defiance shared by Bukowski and his peers. The first statement, "Nobody would change position," alludes to a sense of contentment with one's status in life. The sentence "We were the way we were, and we didn't want to be anything else" conveys a sense of fatalism that their circumstances were beyond of their control. Overall, the quote depicts a bunch of young individuals, or basically the whole generation at that time, who were defiant of the world around them and have become hardened by their terrible childhood. They exhibit zero respect for those in positions of power and are self-reliant to the point of isolation.

In chapter forty-four Bukowski provides a window into his thoughts and his disappointment with the typical American dream of prosperity, a large family, and a secure career. He declares:

I could see the road ahead of me. I was poor and I was going to stay poor. I didn't particularly want money. I didn't know what I wanted. Yes, I did. I wanted some place to hide out, some place where one didn't have to do anything. The thought of being something didn't only appeal to me, it's sickened me. The thought of being a lawyer or a councilman or an engineer, anything like that, seemed impossible to me. To get married, to have children, to get trapped in the family structure. to get some place to

work every day and to return. It was impossible. to do things, simple things, to be part of a family, picnics, Christmas, the 4th of July, Labor Day, Mother's Day... was a man born just to endure these things and then die? I would rather be a dishwasher, return alone to a tiny room and drink myself to sleep. (235)

In this passage, Bukowski's alter ego Chinaski is introduced as being "poor" and anticipating staying that way. However, he does not appear overly obsessed in accumulating riches or money. His desire for an escape from societal constraints and expectations is made clear by the second part of the quotation. He seeks a place where he can "hide out" and not have to do anything. He believes that obtaining a profession or starting a family will trap him in a suffocating structure; hence, he finds these ideas undesirable. Chinaski expresses a sense of nihilism and melancholy, asking if life is all about going through a series of routine rituals like family picnics and holidays before passing away. He favors the isolation and simplicity of working as a dishwasher and drinking himself to sleep.

C. Bukowski's Philosophy of War

In chapter fifty-two, World War II broke out in Europe. The war is portrayed by Bukowski as a distant conflict that was taking place far away from his daily life. While the war was going well for Hitler, the majority of the students at his school, according to him, were quiet about it. However, all of the professors were anti-German; except for one teacher and he was discreet about it. Chinaski was expected to support going to war to stop the spread of fascism. He reveals his personal unwillingness to fight in the war, claiming that "[he] had no desire to go to war to protect the life [he] had or what future [he] might have." This shows that he did not have anything worth fighting for, as he believed he had "no freedom" and "nothing." Chinaski also expresses his dissatisfaction with how the German people were depicted in the media, especially newsreels that were purposefully produced to make Hitler and Mussolini appear like "frenetic madmen" (290). He claims that this representation was

unfair and inaccurate, and he is furious that it was so widespread. Despite his German ancestry, Bukowski did not share the pro-German beliefs of his professors, who were virtually all “left-wing” and “anti-German”. Instead, he chose to adopt a contrary position to their point of view. He admits “I had never read *Mein Kampf*” and had no special devotion to Hitler, whom he saw as just “another dictator” who “instead of lecturing me at the dinner table,” referring to his dad, “he’d probably blow my brains out or my balls off if I want to war to stop him” (291). This quote reflects Bukowski's philosophy of war as something that is imposed on individuals rather than chosen by them; “Everybody was talking about the war in Europe. I wasn't interested in world history, only my own. What crap. Your parents controlled your growing up period, they pissed all over you. Then when you got ready to go out on your own, the others wanted to stick you into a uniform so you could get your ass shot off” (325). In this quote Bukowski shows his frustration with how parents and society control and manipulate young people. He argues that parents have excessive control over their kids throughout the formative years, which might have an impact on their growth.

Additionally, Chinaski suggests that the expectations society places on children and young adults continue well into adulthood. He believes that the military draft is simply one more way society is attempting to control them. The fact that Chinaski says he was not interested in world history and only cared about his own life implies that he perceives the war as something that is forced upon him rather than as something in which he has any personal involvement. Moreover, he suggests that the idea of being forced into a war is a pointless waste of human life and an unfair way for society to impose its will on people. Even when one of his friends goes to fight in war against Hitler his dark cynicism remains as he says “The war. Here I was a virgin. Could you imagine getting your ass blown off for the sake of history before you even know what a woman was? Or owned a car? What would I be protecting? Somebody else. Somebody else who didn’t give a shit about me. Dying in a war

never stopped wars from happening” (325). Chinaski questions the idea of sacrificing one's life in a war. He would rather experience some life's simpler pleasures like owning a car and being in a relationship with a woman. He indicates that dying for a cause, no matter how noble, like defending one's nation, is meaningless and pointless because conflicts will continue to occur regardless of who wins or loses.

In the last chapter of the novel, Bukowski recalls the moment the news of the Pearl Harbor attack first aired over the radio; he sets the scene at a bar with people listening to a famous song, implying that life is going on normally until the abrupt interruption:

There was a small radio in the bar. There was a popular song playing. Then in the middle of the song there Was An interruption. The announcer said, ‘a bulletin has just come and the Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor. I repeat: the Japanese have just bombed Pearl Harbor. All military personnel are requested to return immediately to their basis!’. (344)

After the announcement, Henry and Becker finish their drinks. Henry walks Becker to the bus depot where he has to get a ticket first. A sailor asks Henry if he's going to sign up to help and go fight in the war, Henry refuses. He says “I walked out of there. Suddenly there was traffic on the street. People were driving badly, running stop lights, screaming at each other. I walked back over to Main Street. America was at war” (346). Chinaski explains his shock after learning that America is at war after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The suddenness and seriousness of the news appears to leave him disoriented and disconnected from the world around him. His observation that people are speeding and yelling at one other on the street implies that the news of the war has had an immediate impact on people's behavior and emotions. The chaos and disorder on the streets may be interpreted as a metaphor for the crisis that America would face when it entered the war.

Throughout the novel, Bukowski uses Chinaski to explore his own experiences. The book provides a glimpse into Chinaski's challenging experiences during his youth, which were instrumental in his evolution into an American literary underground writer. According to Bigna's research, the degree to which Bukowski effectively conveys the importance of these experiences in Chinaski's search for freedom ultimately determines the significance of the novel (89-90). Furthermore, in his introduction to the novel, Roddy Doyle states that "it was a Bukowski's book, after all. It was Hank explaining how he became hank, Bukowski explaining how he became Bukowski" (xi). That describes how every occurrence in the novel, from childhood to adulthood to manhood, formed Bukowski or Chinaski into who he is: an underground writer.

3.1.2 Bukowski's Self-Portrayal Vs. His Public Persona

In the analysis of both *Women* and *Ham on Rye*, it is important to compare Bukowski's self-portrayal or alter ego in the novel with his public persona. Bukowski was known for his gritty, hard-drinking, and anti-establishment persona, which he cultivated through his writing and public appearances. However, it is important to examine how much of this persona is a reflection of his true self and how much is a constructed image for public consumption.

Bukowski's public persona is that of a hard-drinking, womanizing, and often confrontational writer who lives life on his own terms. Bukowski presents a gruff, hard-boiled public persona to the public. In contrast, taking a closer look at his works reveals an introverted, great observer and frequently mentally tormented man. The portrayal of himself in his book *Ham on Rye* is far more frank and vulnerable. In *Ham on Rye*, Bukowski portrays himself as a young boy growing up in a dysfunctional family and struggling with acne, poverty, and social ostracism. He writes about the pain and isolation he felt growing up. He presents himself as a sensitive and introspective observer of his own life, often questioning his place in the world and struggling to find meaning and purpose. This portrayal is a far cry from

the tough and rebellious Bukowski that he presents to the public. Henry Chinaski is portrayed as a rebel, outcast, and nonconformist who challenges authority, tradition, and morality. He is shown as a victim of his surroundings, growing up in a chaotic and violent home, attending a terrible and restrictive school, and working in petty and unpleasant jobs. Chinaski is also shown as a survivor who utilizes his wit, humor, and intellect to cope with his difficulties and proclaim his uniqueness. Chinaski's personality combines tenderness and violence, sensitivity and cynicism, brilliance and ignorance. He is shown as a complicated and inconsistent character who battles with his identity, relationships, and desires. Chinaski allows Bukowski to go into his own mind, confront his own issues, and convey his own truths. Bukowski criticizes society and culture that marginalize and alienate people like him through Chinaski's voice. He exposes the American dream's hypocrisy, corruption, and superficiality, as well as the oppression, exploitation, and violence that pervade everyday life. Bukowski uses his alter ego Chinaski to rebel against established ideals and standards and to assert his own vision of life.

Finally, the comparison of Bukowski's self-portrayal in his novels with his public persona reveals a more complex and nuanced picture of himself. While he certainly cultivates a public image as a tough and rebellious outsider, his autobiographical fiction shows a more introspective and vulnerable side to his personality. This suggests that Bukowski's public persona is at least in part a constructed image, designed to appeal to a certain audience, while his true self is more complex and multifaceted.

3.2 The Impact of Charles Bukowski's Life on His *Ham on Rye*

Charles Bukowski's life had a major influence on his writings, particularly his novel *Ham on Rye*. Because the book is essentially autobiographical, it leans extensively on Bukowski's personal experiences. This helps the reader understand Bukowski's vision in life, where he came from, what he had been through, and eventually accept his writings.

3.2.1 The Language of Charles Bukowski in *Ham on Rye*

If anything made Bukowski's books well-known, it has to be his language and writing style. He was often criticized for his unique and “ugly” writings, as described by Roddy Doyle (viii), which helped him gain fame. Bukowski was influenced by a variety of writers throughout his life. He mentioned numerous writers he read as a teenager in *Ham on Rye*, like Upton and Lewis Sinclair, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway; he also read Russian literature Ivan Turgenev, Maxim Gorky, not to mention he wrote a whole poem about Fyodor Dostoevsky. For instance, he declares “I read a book a day. I read all the D. H. Lawrence in the library. I read all the books by D. H. and they led to others. To D. H., the poetess. And Huxley, the youngest of the Huxley's, Lawrence's friend. It all came rushing to me. One book led to the next” (182-3). D.H. Lawrence was a huge influence on Charles Bukowski, especially during his formative years as a young reader. Lawrence's evocative depictions of nature, exploration of sexuality, and frank representation of human desires drew Bukowski in. Lawrence's literary style, which frequently blended poetic language with explicit description of sex and violence, had a significant effect on Bukowski's own writing. Bukowski's admiration for Lawrence was probably motivated by the fact that both writers were known for their rebellious attitudes and desires to break free from societal norms. In addition, Bukowski admired Earnest Hemingway's minimalist writing style and ability to convey the essence of a character or event in just a few words. Hemingway's description of emotions is precise, clear and direct; which is something we can often see in Bukowski's books as well.

Charles Bukowski's language in *Ham on Rye* is renowned for its crudeness and straightforwardness. Bukowski's writing is distinguished by its lack of pretension and directness, which is frequently seen as aggressive and controversial. This is reflected in the vocabulary employed in *Ham on Rye*, which is sometimes basic and vulgar, with an emphasis

on daily life experiences. Bukowski's style is marked by a strong sense of realism, with an emphasis on the banal elements of daily life. He frequently describes the environment around him in simple, direct terms, and his observations are frequently raw and unsophisticated. This style gives his writing a feeling of spontaneity and realism, as though the reader is present in the moment with the characters. An example of this is Chinaski saying "I sat back down and poured a glass of wine. I left my door open. The moonlight came on with the sounds of the city: juke boxes, automobiles, curses, dogs barking, radios..." he then adds, "We were all in it together. We were all in one big shit pot together. There was no escape. We were all going to be flushed away" (339). Just as the second part of this quote, Bukowski often uses repetition and some rhythmic patterns; he would repeat words and phrases, producing a poetic and euphoric effect that draws the reader in and completely immerses them in the story.

Finally, one of the most distinguishing features of Bukowski's vocabulary in *Ham on Rye* is the use of blasphemous words and profanity. Bukowski is well-known for his use of swear words, which he uses to express wrath, helplessness, and desperation. This language is frequently used to shock and disturb the reader, but it also serves to underline the brutal facts of life that Bukowski explores in his work.

3.2.2 Transgressive Fiction and Dirty Realism in the Novel

Ham on Rye is often regarded as an example of both transgressive fiction and dirty realism, two literary movements that describe the harsh reality of the postmodern era. The novel contains various elements of dirty realism. First, the depiction of daily life. Dirty realism focuses on portraying ordinary life and the problems of working-class people. In *Ham on Rye*, Bukowski realistically depicts his alter ego, Henry Chinaski, as he grows up in poverty and strives to find his place in the world. The novel narrates daily life problems that Henry encountered from childhood to adulthood. Second, the Realistic settings; Dirty realism is frequently shown in urban or suburban settings that are clearly realistic. Bukowski recalls

the harsh realities of Depression-era Los Angeles in *Ham on Rye*, presenting the city as a place of poverty, violence, and desperation. Third, there is one of dirty realism's key features; minimalism, an approach to writing that uses plain language with few details. According to some scholars, dirty realism is more closely related to American naturalism and minimalism. The reason Bukowski excelled at employing this type of narrative was that he had been influenced by naturalist and minimalist writers such as Ernest Hemingway, who, according to Prof. Tamas Dobozy, formed the basis for the development of dirty realism (38). Unlike other forms of realism, dirty realism emphasizes life's unpleasant events in a straightforward and unadorned manner. For instance, Bukowski casually describes Jimmy's parents saying "His mother was a bar maid and his father had committed suicide" (194). The writing is minimalist and straightforward. He gives surface description utilizing simple words to convey the unfiltered reality of the lives of his characters. The fourth feature of dirty realism is the focus on working-class people's lives, and the depiction of the negative aspects of western society during the postmodern era. As a result we find most dirty realist works are sad and angry because "Dirty realism focuses on the sadness and loss in the everyday lives of ordinary people" (Kita 386). It focuses on the lives of lower-class individuals and the difficulties they encounter on a daily basis. Bukowski's protagonist in *Ham on Rye* is a working-class outsider who is continuously seeking to find his place during the Great Depression. Rather than being heroes, its characters are ordinary people suffering from problems and challenges in daily life. Bukowski not only depicts the U.S society at that time, but also criticizes it. As he gives a glimpse into the American society during the 30's and 40's.

The novel *Ham on Rye* also contains various elements of transgressive fiction. First, transgressive fiction frequently defies social norms by including taboo topics such as sex, violence, and drug use. Bukowski pushes beyond the limits of acceptable content in his novel *Ham on Rye*, showing explicit sexual scenes that are really disturbing. Bukowski does not shy

away from exposing scenes of masturbation, sex and violence in *Ham on Rye*, and he uses vulgar phrases and graphic sexual subjects to question social norms. Second, anti-hero protagonists who are outcasts and rebels are common in transgressive writing. Bukowski's protagonist and alter ego in *Ham on Rye*, Henry Chinaski, is a working-class outsider who comes to terms with his own violent tendencies. Bukowski often writes about the category of people that no one talks about, and that people perceive as losers in modern society. For instance, in *Ham on Rye* all the characters are jobless, alcoholic, rebellious, ugly, abusive, selfish, drug dealers, womanizers...etc. Third, transgressive fiction frequently adopts an aggressive and offensive writing that might not be suitable for all the readers. Bukowski's writing in *Ham on Rye* is bold and visceral, employing vulgar language and vivid descriptions to portray the sense of cruelty and desperation that defines the lives of his ordinary characters. Lastly, similarly to dirty realism, transgressive fiction frequently criticizes society and its institutions. In *Ham on Rye*, Bukowski's depiction of Depression-era Los Angeles is a harsh criticism of American culture at the time.

Conclusion

Postmodernism, as a literary and cultural movement that emerged during the mid-twentieth century, criticized traditional norms and narrative structures. It was a period when established truths were being dismantled and a greater focus was placed on subjectivity, fragmentation, and self-reflection. Autobiographies emerged as a genre in American literature during this period due to the fundamental connection between postmodernism's intellectual foundations and its exploration of personal narratives. During the postmodern era, there was a widespread rejection of grand narratives, with an increased emphasis on individual experiences and perceptions. Therefore, autobiographies became an outlet for writers to express their own identities and question society's prominent narratives because of their personal and unique nature. Authors aimed to challenge traditional norms and explore the complexity of human existence by telling their personal stories.

Postmodernism called into question the concept of the unified self and emphasized multiplicity and fragmentation. Hence, writing autobiographies gave authors a platform to embrace these concepts by including numerous perspectives and examining the subjective nature of memory and identity. This approach is best illustrated in Bukowski's *Ham on Rye* (1982), in which he reveals fragmented souvenirs from his childhood and adolescence while exploring the many layers of his experiences and how they affected the development of his identity. Moreover, postmodern literature frequently demonstrated self-reflexivity, blurring the lines between fiction and reality. Autobiographical literature, like Bukowski's *Women* (1978), embraced this characteristic by deliberately accepting its own constructed nature. Bukowski engages in metafiction by fusing parts of his real life with fictional ones. For instance, Bukowski created an alternative persona, Henry Chinaski, in which he used as a literary alter ego to chronicle his personal life, which causes readers to doubt the narrator's objectivity and the nature of truth in the narrative.

In addition, postmodernism rejected traditional narratives' linear and cohesive structures in favor of non-linear and fragmented storytelling strategies. Autobiographies gave writers a place to question and challenge these traditional narratives. Bukowski's works, with their transgression, dirty realism and plain portrayal of his own life experiences, reject the romanticized image of a hero's journey, instead highlighting the hardships, illicit behaviors, and imperfections which define human lives.

Charles Bukowski was a prominent American writer known for his raw, dark, and often sarcastic humorous writing style. His novels *Ham on Rye* and *Women* are among his best-known works, both of which provide insight into the life of Bukowski's alter ego Henry Chinaski. *Ham on Rye* is a semi-autobiographical work about Chinaski's youth and adolescence. The story is set in Los Angeles during the Great Depression and follows Chinaski's battles with poverty, abuse, and loneliness. Despite the difficulties he experiences, Chinaski emerges from his childhood with a strong sense of independence and a determined drive to survive. On the other hand, *Women* is a collection of short stories that tells the story of Chinaski's interactions with women. The stories are sometimes graphic and disturbing, but they also provide insight into Chinaski's complicated and frequently contradictory perspectives on love, sex, and relationships.

Women and *Ham on Rye* are both major masterpieces of American literature, and they share a number of similarities. They provide a unique and informative glimpse at the lives of a working-class American people in the twentieth century. Both novels take place in Los Angeles and feature Chinaski as the main character. The tone and style of the novels are quite comparable. Both novels are particularly noteworthy for their straightforward and frequently amusing writing style. There are, however, some key distinctions between the two works. As mentioned before, the novel *Women* is fundamentally a bunch of short stories mostly about sexual relationships with different women. It focuses on Chinaski's connections with women,

whereas *Ham on Rye* is a more autobiographical, it focuses on his childhood and adolescence. *Women* (1978) was published four years before *Ham on Rye* (1982), and it discusses only a part of the life of the author when he was an adult. However, *Ham on Rye* chronicles the life of the author from when he was just a little child until he became a young adult. So, despite the fact that *Women* was published first, the events in *Ham on Rye* occurred far earlier than the events in *Women*. For instance, in *Women* Bukowski's alter ego, Henry Chinaski, declares that he did not like Ernest Hemingway's writing, but in *Ham on Rye* Chinaski admires the works of Hemingway which might confuse the readers. It's not unusual for people's opinions to shift in time, and it appears such was the case with Bukowski. Charles was only a young man when he wrote *Ham on Rye*, and he was definitely affected by Hemingway's work. He appreciated Hemingway's toughness and courage to face life's ugly realities. Bukowski, on the other hand, had grown more cynical and jaded by the time he wrote *Women*. He had experienced the nasty side of life, and Hemingway's romanticized notion of manhood no longer pleased him.

This thesis proposes a new method for analyzing Charles Bukowski's novels *Women* and *Ham on Rye*, changing the focus from a merely feminist perspective to a deeper look at the psychological issues within the works. Past studies have frequently overlooked or ignored the psychological factors, notably in *Women* as the focus was only on how Bukowski portrayed women. However, this study tries to close this gap by examining the psychological issues that the alter ego, Henry Chinaski, deals with, from parental abuse and neglect to his adaptation of hazardous defense mechanisms to cope with life problems like violence, sex and alcohol; as well as the implications that these issues have for understanding Bukowski's writing. These two novels were chosen precisely because, when taking into consideration the psychological factors that the protagonist Henry Chinaski faced in the novel *Ham on Rye*, one may understand his behavior, personality and writing in the novel *Women*.

By adopting a biographical approach, this study examines the two novels in relation to the author's life; it explores the connection between Bukowski's personal experiences and his literary works. It also highlights how the author's life influenced his unique writing style which falls in the category of dirty realism and transgressive fiction. Moreover, a psychological approach, also known as the psychoanalytical approach, is employed to analyze the author's unintended message. The analysis focuses on the biographical circumstances as well as the psychological issues of Charles Bukowski and how they are reflected in his alter ego, Henry Chinaski. The main goal is to analyze the unconscious elements within the novels based on the background of the author Bukowski.

Through the novels, Charles Bukowski's personal experiences, such as his blue-collar origins, battles with addiction, chaotic relationships, feelings of alienation, and writing as catharsis, profoundly inspired the themes, content, and style of his work. His uncensored writing struck a chord with many readers and is still admired for its honesty and authenticity. It is worth noting that Henry Chinaski represents the author Charles Bukowski in the novels, as all of the events in both novels are real-life occurrences in the author's life and are not fictitious. Bukowski chronicled his personal life through his alter ego. Although both novels are considered works of fiction and not direct autobiographies, the only fictitious content in the novels is the name of the protagonist Henry Chinaski; the rest of the events are mostly based on Charles Bukowski's experiences. Both novels draw from Bukowski's own life, incorporating autobiographical elements and exploring themes he personally experienced.

Charles Bukowski's use of blunt language, graphic imagery, and explicit content can be attributed first to his commitment to honesty and authenticity. He wanted to capture the unedited and simple truth of life, even if it meant delving into uncomfortable or controversial topics. Second, Bukowski had a rebellious attitude along with his skepticism of social customs and norms. His use of explicit and provocative language might be interpreted as an

intentional defiance of traditional literary etiquette. He intended to disrupt the norm and push the limits of what was acceptable in literature. Third, he wanted to portray the ugly truth of the human condition as it is. Lastly, Bukowski searched for uniqueness, because he considered his writing as a kind of aesthetic expression as well as a means to demonstrate his individuality. He distinguished himself from other writers by inventing his own particular style, which was distinguished by explicit and direct language. He pioneered the two literary movements dirty realism and transgressive fiction.

The vulgar behavior exhibited by characters like Henry Chinaski in Bukowski's works can be understood as an expression of frustration and anger. They use vulgarity to vent their emotions. Additionally, Bukowski believed that by portraying characters who are shamelessly vulgar, he could capture the essence of life and offer a more truthful portrayal of humanity; thus, he presented characters who are imperfect, flawed, complex individuals, and unapologetically human.

In the end, this thesis not only provides a thorough understanding of Bukowski's novels, but it also contributes to the broader field of literary analysis by emphasizing the importance of psychological perspectives in interpreting and appreciating literary works. This research gives vital insights into the delicate interplay between personal experiences and artistic expression by bridging the gap between the author's life, his alter ego, and their psychological complexities. Charles Bukowski's works in general, *Ham on Rye* and *Women* in particular, provide an adequate and rich ground for conducting research and studying as many issues as possible.

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