

“Magic and Terrible”
Female Characters and Characterization in Charles Bukowski’s
Post Office, Factotum and Women

Lauri Leinonen
University of Tampere
School of Language, Translation and Literary Studies
English Philology
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Charles Bukowskin 1970-luvulla kirjoittamat kolme romaania *Postitoimisto* (*Post Office*, 1971), *Pystyssä kaiken aikaa* (*Factotum*, 1975) ja *Naisia* (*Women*, 1978) kertovat päähenkilönsä Henry Chinaskin elämästä noin noin neljän vuosikymmenyksen aikana. Kertojana toimivan Chinaskin lyhyiden parisuhteiden ja alati vaihtuvien työpaikkojen vuoksi nämä kolme kirjaa sisältävät laajan hahmogallerian. Pro gradu -tutkielmani tarkoitus on tarkastella näiden romaanien naishahmoja ja heidän karakterisaatiotaan.

Tutkielman teoriaosuudessa avaan tutkielmassa käyttämäni narratologiset käsitteet: kertojan, fokalisaation ja kertojan luotettavuuden. Tämän jälkeen pohdin kirjallisuudessa esiintyvän fiktiivisen hahmon teoreettista käsitettä avaamalla sitä eri teoreettisista näkökulmista. Käsittelen myös hahmomallien soveltamista ja karakterisaatiota. Lopuksi esittelen melko tuoreen yhä aktiivisen akateemisen keskustelun alaisena olevan tieteenalan, jonka näkökulmaa hyödynnän tutkielmassani: feministisen narratologian. Tämän lisäksi olen kiinnostunut vaikutuksista, joita 1970-luvun toisen aallon feminismillä saattoi olla kirjojen naiskuvaan.

Tutkielman analyysiosa jakautuu kahteen kappaleeseen, joista toinen jakautuu kolmeen alikappaleeseen. Ensimmäisessä käsittelen romaanien kertojahahmoa Henry Chinaskia ja etenkin hänen rooliaan epäluotettavana kertojana. Toisen kappaleen aloitan alustuksella likaisen realismin hahmomallista, jonka jälkeen kolmessa alikappaleessa käsittelen jo mainittuja kolmea romaania. Jokaisen romaanin kohdalla tutkin tapoja joilla naishahmot tarinassa esitellään, hahmomalleja joita hahmojen kohdalla voidaan soveltaa ja hahmojen funktiota tarinassa.

Analyysissäni selviää, että Bukowskin naishahmot ovat litteitä hahmoja *Naisia* -kirjan Lydiaa lukuun ottamatta. *Postitoimistoa* lukiessa lukija voi soveltaa lähes jokaiseen naishahmoon likaisen realismin hahmomallia. Hahmot ovat yksinkertaisia ja samankaltaisia. *Pystyssä kaiken aikaa* -kirjassa naishahmoissa voi jo aistia pienen muutoksen, sillä osa heistä ei tyydy olemaan äänettämiä objekteja. *Naisia* -kirjassa Bukowski luottaa yhä vähemmän likaisen realismin hahmomalliin ja kirjan naiskuva on huomattavasti muita monimuotoisempi.

Avainsanat: Bukowski, naishahmot, karakterisaatio, likainen realismi, epäluotettava kertoja

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1 Introduction

Charles Bukowski's debut novel was published over forty years ago. His active writing career lasted over thirty years, and within this time period this prolific artist wrote six novels and numerous collections of poetry and short stories. In addition he also wrote a travel book, a screenplay for the movie *Barfly* (1987) and books of letters. In my thesis I will focus on his early novels, *Post Office* (1971), *Factotum* (1975) and *Women* (1978).

To this day only little critical work has been written on Bukowski, because his work is considered "low culture" writing in some academic circles. David Charlson, the author of *Charles Bukowski – Autobiographer, Gender critic, Iconoclast* claims that the reason for Bukowski being a persona non grata in the academia is that his writing runs counter to what many American academics hold dear: Bukowski was vulgar in form and content and his subject matter focuses around the working-class life, making his work seem banal and boring to many serious readers (2005, 13). Bukowski wrote in a rough and simplistic style about themes such as gambling, drinking and low-paid jobs and his characters are often outsiders of the society. However, this genre of writing is nowadays known as dirty realism and Charles Bukowski is considered the godfather of the genre.

A key characteristic for Bukowski's novels is the semi-autobiographical narrator Hank Chinaski, who is the main character in five of Bukowski's six novels. The novels mainly focus on the life and adventures of the narrator. Chinaski offers a possibility for a biographic reading and some (often non-)academic work has been written on this subject, comparing Chinaski to Bukowski and figuring out connections between the character and the author and making statements of the author based on the character and vice versa. However, in my thesis I will reject this biographical reading and treat Chinaski as a fictional character in a fictional storyworld without bringing extra-textual evidence to my analysis.

The first novel, *Post Office*, is the story of Hank Chinaski's years in the postal service, first as a mailman (when he is approximately 35 years old) and later as a mail sorter (ending his career when he was approximately 50 years old). The second novel, *Factotum*, focuses on Chinaski's early adulthood doing temporary work around The United States of America (approximately from age 20 to 35). The third novel, *Women*, focuses on Chinaski's life after quitting the postal work and being a celebrated and famous poet and a writer. Most of the major female characters in these three novels are Chinaski's love interests, but some female co-workers et cetera appear as well.

The research question of my thesis is: How are the female characters constructed and characterized in *Post Office*, *Factotum* and *Women*? Because Chinaski is the first-person narrator of the novels, most of the characterization of the other characters is done via Chinaski. Therefore in order to understand the other characters, one must understand Chinaski as well, as Chinaski and the characterizations made via him cannot always be trusted because Chinaski is an unreliable narrator. Hence, a brief discussion of the narrator is necessary before focusing on the main theme of my thesis, the female characters and their characterization.

Some critical works have been written on sex and gender in Bukowski's work (for example David Charlson in *Charles Bukowski – Autobiographer, Gender critic, Iconoclast* and Russell Harrison in *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski*) but these works often mainly focus on the masculine side of the topic: Charlson focuses on violence and meaning of masculinity and the construction (and deconstruction) of masculinity in the Henry Chinaski of *Ham on Rye*, and Harrison focuses on analyzing Chinaski based on his actions towards the female characters. Only brief discussion of the female characters is offered by both of these critics: the question of how the female characters are constructed is mainly left unnoticed.

I chose to study the first three novels as they have all been written and published in the 1970s, during the time of second-wave feminism. In my theoretical framework I will discuss narratology, characterization and characters in general as well as from a feminist point of view, and

I am hoping that my analysis will provide fruitful results for understanding what kinds of effects the changes in society had in Bukowski's work. My theoretical framework will be provided by various academics and I will discuss the theoretical background of my thesis in the theory section. I will introduce the narratological concepts by discussing how Uri Margolin and Gérard Genette define the narrator, how Mieke Bal defines focalization and how Dan Shen and James Phelan define unreliable narration. Then I will focus on the theory of the character and discuss how Fotis Jannidis introduces us the concept of a character. This will be followed by a discussion on Edward M. Forster's theory of character types and Uri Margolin's theory of characterization. Finally I will discuss feminist narratology, sex and gender, introduced to us by Susan S. Lanser, Ruth E. Page and Sara Mills and Louise Mullany.

2 Theoretical frame

In this section I will lay out the theoretical framework of my thesis. I will discuss the key concepts and terms that are relevant to my study that help to analyze Bukowski's characters and finally help me answer my research question. I will present the narratological aspects of my study and discuss the narrator, focalization and the reliability of the narrator. It is followed by a discussion on character, character types and characterization. Finally, at the end of this section I will discuss feminist narratology. I will begin this section with a brief explanation why in my thesis I do not conduct a biographical reading – a reading that is quite common in studies and essays (both academic and non-academic) on Bukowski.

Scholars and critics of Bukowski rarely fail to mention that most of Bukowski's novels are semi-autobiographical and the protagonist-narrator Hank Chinaski is Bukowski's alter ego (Broekhuizen 2008, 19; Brosseau 2008, 380; Russell 2007, 39; Kirsch 2005; Korhonen 2006, 2 & 12). Even Bukowski himself has stated that most of his subject matter is based on real-world events and that ninety-three percent is taken directly from his own experiences and the remaining seven per cent is improved upon. (Sounes 1998, 7-9) Obviously one should be skeptical about these numbers as there is no way to confirm them. This mix of fact and fiction results in a blurring of the line between the real world and the storyworld. According to Kirsch (2005) this is "the secret of Bukowski's appeal: he combines the confessional poet's promise of intimacy with the larger-than-life aplomb of a pulp-fiction hero".

This mix of fact and fiction also opens a possibility for a biographic reading of Bukowski's work. Many biographers have traced the real-world people whom some of Bukowski's characters are based upon and the biographies even contain interviews of these people. Kennedy and Gioia (1995, 2182-2183) state that the basis of biographical criticism is the simple insight that literature is written by actual people and that understanding an author's life can help readers more thoroughly comprehend a work. Biographical information is seen as practical assistance in underscoring subtle

but important meanings. This biographical information should, however, only amplify the meaning of the text, not drown it out with irrelevant material.

Ellis discussed the problems of biographical criticism in his article already in 1951.

According to Ellis (1951, 971) it has never been doubted that a poet's public, private, historical or psychological experiences reappear distorted, refined, generalized and reordered in his or her poetry. What results is that

the reconstruction of the poet's experiences from diaries, letters, accounts of friends, and public records, may illuminate his poetry. But the converse of this proposition is also assumed to be true: if the biographical experience illuminates the poetry, the poetry must also illuminate the biographical experience. The poem, in other words, is an autobiographical document. (1951, 971)

In his essay he shows that the latter conclusion is false and that "biographical experiences can no more be reconstructed from a poem than the poem (if it were lost) could be reconstructed from the experiences." (1951, 971)

The biographical problem is extremely relevant while reading and interpreting Bukowski, as the line between fact and fiction is often blurred and Bukowski the author and Chinaski the narrator are easily mixed, resulting in statements such as "Bukowski often has a hostile way against women, but it could be argued that he is really hostile against all people and often throughout the novels he mentions how he is most comfortable in his own company and how he can not stand other people." (Korhonen 2006, 9) In a literary analysis one should not draw conclusions on Bukowski based on Chinaski's actions and vice versa. Biographical information can shed light on *why* Bukowski wrote Chinaski in the way he did and amplify interpretations made based on the textual evidence, but one should not include extra-textual evidence in such interpretations, such as "Bukowski was a gentle and caring lover, thus Chinaski is as well".

The point of discussing biographical criticism is to explain why in my thesis I have chosen to avoid biographical reading and base my analysis on textual evidence only. This eliminates the

risk of mixing fact and fiction and drawing conclusions on Chinaski based on extra-textual evidence. I do not, however, deny the fact that Bukowski's work is semi-autobiographical and Chinaski can be easily recognized as his alter ego.

2.1 Narratology

In this section I will discuss the narratological concepts that I apply in my study. I will discuss the narrator, focalization and the reliability of the narrator in their own subchapters. This creates the foundation for understanding the narrator Hank Chinaski, who is the main source of characterizing information in the novels.

2.1.1 Narrator

Uri Margolin (2014, section 1) defines *narrator* as the highest-level speech position within a text from which the narrative discourse, the story, as a whole originates. References to entities, actions and events that the discourse is about are made from this speech position. Margolin points out that “the narrator, which is a strictly textual category, should be clearly distinguished from the author”. The author is a real-life figure and the narrator only exists within a text, thus mixing these two concepts is mixing fact with fiction.

Margolin makes a distinction (2014, 3.5) between first-person, second-person and third-person narratives. If the narrator is a narrative agent, it is engaged in producing a first-person narrative. A narrative agent Margolin defines (1986, 205) as “a human or human-like individual, existing in some possible world, and capable of fulfilling the argument position in the propositional form”. If it is the narrator's addressees who act as narrative agents, a second-person narrative is being produced. A third-person narrative is produced if the entities referred to in the narrator's discourse

are not part of the current communicative situation. In first-person narratives the narrator also participates in the narrated events and in second- and third-person narratives the narrator does not.

G rard Genette sees (1980, 215) the narrative situation as a complex whole which analysis cannot differentiate “except by ripping apart a tight web of connections among the narrating act, its protagonists, its spatio-temporal determinations, its relationship to the other narrating situations involved in the same narrative, etc.” He discusses the narrating situation from the point of view of time of the narrating, narrative level and person.

Genette points out (1980, 215) that a story can be told without specifying the place where it happens or whether that place is more or less distant from the place where the story is being told. However, it is almost impossible not to locate the story in time as the story must be told in a present, past or future tense. For this reason the temporal aspect, in other words when the story is happening, is according to Genette more important than its spatial aspect, that is to say where the story is being told. From the point of view of temporal position, Genette differentiates (1980, 217) four types of narrating: subsequent, prior, simultaneous and interpolated. Subsequent narrating stands for the classical position of the past-tense narrative, prior stands for predictive narrative, simultaneous for narrative in the present contemporaneous with the action and interpolated for between the moments of action. Genette states (1980, 228) that the levels of narrative include an extradiegetic level, the diegetic level (or the intradiegetic level) and the metadiegetic level. He defines (1980, 228-229) this difference in level by saying that “any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed”. A narrative inside the first level of narration is at a diegetic or intradiegetic level. Narratives inside this level of narration are at a metadiegetic level. Finally, Genette distinguishes (1980, 244-245) between the heterodiegetic narrator and the homodiegetic narrator. In heterodiegetic narration the narrator is absent from the story he tells and in homodiegetic narration the narrator is present as a character in the story he tells.

2.1.2 Focalization

Focalization is a term coined by Gérard Genette in his 1972 article “Discours du récit”. In my theoretical framework I will, however, discuss Mieke Bal’s view of the concept, which Niederhoff defines as “influential revision of Genette's theory” and “another example of the reinterpretation of focalization in terms of point of view” (2013, section 1).

Mieke Bal discusses focalization in her book *Narratology – Introduction to the theory of narrative*. She states (1999, 79) that focalization plays an important role in assigning meaning to the fabula – the chronological order of story events (and *sjuzhet* being the employment of narrative – the plot order) – as the perspective from which the elements of the fabula are put forth is often of crucial importance for the meaning the reader will assign to the fabula. She offers an everyday example of focalization: a conflict situation is best judged by letting each party give its own version of the events. Focalization (or perspective as she here calls it) here is the placing of the point of view in a specific agent.

Bal states (1999, 142) that events are always presented from within a certain “vision”. A point of view is chosen whether presenting “real” historical facts or fictitious events. The relation between the vision and that which is “seen” or presented she names focalization. This concept has also been defined in the theory of narration as *point of view* and *narrative perspective*, but Bal uses (1999, 143) the term focalization for two reasons: tradition and practicality. Perspective is an ambiguous term as it has come to indicate in the tradition of narrative theory both the narrator and the vision. Also, perspective is a tough word to derive a noun from for indicating the subject of the action and she judges the verb “to perspectivize” as non-customary.

According to Bal (1999, 146), focalization belongs in the story in the layer between the linguistic text and the fabula. The subject and the object of focalization must be studied separately as the definition of focalization refers to a relationship between the two. She names the point from which the elements are viewed – the subject of focalization – as the focalizer (the term is nowadays

more commonly spelled as ‘focalizer’ but as I’m discussing Bal’s work I will use her terms as well. In my analysis I will use the term ‘focalizer’.). This point can lie with a character or outside it. If it coincides with the character, that character will have an advantage over the other characters, as the reader experiences the story through the character’s eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character-bound focalizer (or CF). However, she later states (1999, 148) that CF can vary and shift from one character to another even if the narrator remains constant. When the focalizer participates in the fabula as an actor, it can be referred to as internal focalization. When the focalizer is an anonymous agent outside the fabula, it is referred to as external non-character bound focalizer (or EF).

The focalized object is the object of the focalization. Bal states (1999, 150) that the image a focalizer presents of an object says something about the focalizer itself as well as of the object. The object can be perceptible (or p) or non-perceptible (or np) and some focalizers can be unable to describe non-perceptible concepts. Bal notes (1999, 153) that this distinction “is of importance for an insight into the power-structure between the characters”. In a conflict situation a character that can function both as CF-p and CF-np has an advantage over another character that can only function as CF-p. The CF-np can give the reader an insight into the character’s feelings and thoughts while the CF-p cannot communicate about its thoughts. Bal states (1999, 153) that the novel *La Chatte* (1933) written Colette is an example of this device: *La Chatte* is a story of a love triangle between a man, a woman and a cat and the novel effectively manipulates the reader to take the man’s side against his wife.

Niederhoff points out (2013, 3) that Bal’s revision of Genette’s theory involves deletions but it also contains additions. A notable addition is the “focalizer”, which is a concept that has spawned a considerable amount of controversy, including a debate about the question of whether narrators can be focalizers. According to Niederhoff (2013, 3) “Bal, Phelan and many others” argue that both

characters and narrators can be focalizers, while “Chatman and Prince argue that characters can focalize while narrators cannot” (2013, 3).

2.1.3 Reliability of the narrator

Sometimes the reader must be skeptical about the trustworthiness of the narrator. Some textual cue makes the reader question whether the narrator is presenting an objective view of events or whether the events are colored by the narrator. According to Dan Shen (2013, section 1) a narrator is unreliable or untrustworthy if he or she misreports, -interprets or -evaluates or underreports, -interprets or -evaluates.

The American literary critic Wayne C. Booth coined the term unreliable narrator in his 1961 book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. He discusses unreliability in relation to the concept of the implied author and to that of narrative distance. According to Booth (1983, 158-159, emphasis in the original) “a narrator [is] *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author’s norms), *unreliable* when he does not”. When the reader senses that there is a distance between the implied author and the narrator, in other words the narrator says one thing and the implied author seems to be saying another, the narrator must be unreliable. Shen states (2013, 2) that in this case “a secret communion occurs between the [implied author] and the reader behind the narrator’s back”.

Shen discusses (2013, 2) a refined and extended model for analyzing the different kinds of unreliability by James Phelan. In his book *Living to Tell about It* Phelan points out (2005, 50) that narrators “perform three main roles – reporting, interpreting and evaluating; sometimes they perform the roles simultaneously and sometimes sequentially”. Phelan classifies unreliability by concentrating on three axes: axes of facts, values/ethics and knowledge and perception. The axis of knowledge and perception has received less attention from Booth than the other two axes. (2013, 2)

In Phelan's categorization six types of unreliability are identified, which fall into two larger categories: (1) misreporting, misinterpreting and misevaluating and (2) underreporting, underinterpreting and underevaluating. Shen compares (2013, 2) that the difference between the "mis-" and "under-" categories is as the difference of being wrong and being insufficient. Phelan adds (1999, 96) that one type of unreliability often interacts with other types. This is the case for example when misreporting happens as a result of the narrator's insufficient knowledge and therefore it may concur with misinterpreting or misevaluating. It is also possible for the narrator to be reliable in one way and unreliable in another. This is the case when the narrator reports an event accurately but misinterprets and/or misevaluates it.

2.2 Character

In his article "Character" in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, Fotis Jannidis discusses the various aspects regarding the narratological concept of the character. He defines (2013, section 1) the concept as "a text- or media-based figure in a storyworld, usually human or human-like" and states that there is a difference between the concepts of a character and a person – the former referring to a text- or media based figure in a story world, the latter referring to individuals in the real world. (2013, 2)

Jannidis notes (2013, 2) that there is a long-standing debate regarding the status of the concept and asks whether characters are to be seen only as an effect created by recurrent elements in the discourse, or should they be treated as entities created by words but distinguishable from them and calling for knowledge about human beings? Jannidis states that the former school of thought is represented by people such as Barthes, Lotman, Wellek & Warren and Knights, but notes that "the reduction of characters to words was not convincing, for it posed many practical problems in literary criticism and also seemed to some critics unsatisfactory for theoretical reasons" (2013, 3.1). The latter school of thought is represented by people such as Hochman and Margolin, whose

work provided a breakthrough in this field by combining the elements of structuralism, reception theory and the theory of fictional worlds: Margolin claims that the “character is a general semiotic element, independent of any particular verbal expression and ontologically different from it” (1983, 7) meaning that characters are elements of the constructed narrative world. In a later essay he adds that characters can be factual, counterfactual, hypothetical, conditional or purely subjective, meaning that they can have various modes of existence in storyworlds (1995, 375). He also discusses questions such as what constitutes a character’s identity and how they come into existence.

According to Jannidis (2013, 3.1) “philosophers [...] have discussed the special ontological status of character under the label of incompleteness of characters. Unlike persons who exist in the real world and are complete, we can speak meaningfully only about those aspects of characters which have been described in the text or which are implied by it”. Jannidis notes (2013, 3.1) that there might be gaps in the descriptions of characters. These gaps often contain information, which cannot be directly inferred from the text itself.

Even though there are these two crucially different schools of thought, Jannidis states (2013, 3.1) that there is “currently a broad consensus that character can be best described as an entity forming part of the storyworld”, but “the ontological status of this world and its entities remains unclear”. In my theoretical framework I will follow the latter school of thought and treat characters as entities in a storyworld, and not focus on the ontological problems.

Jannidis states that for the narratological analysis of character there are three forms of knowledge that are particularly relevant:

- (a) the basic type, which provides a very fundamental structure for those entities which are seen as sentient beings; (b) character models or types such as the *femme fatale* or the *hard-boiled detective*; (c) encyclopedic knowledge of human beings underlying inferences which contribute to the process of characterization, i.e. a store of information ranging from everyday knowledge to genre-specific competence (2013, 2).

Jannidis notes that humans have long been able to distinguish between objects and sentient beings (2013, 3.2). A theory of mind is applied to the perception of the latter, which ascribes to them mental states such as wishes, beliefs and intentions. After an entity in a story world is identified as a character, this framework is applied to that entity, and the basic type then provides the basic outline of a character: the character has an invisible “inside” which is the source of all beliefs, wishes etc., and a visible “outside” which can be perceived. Knowledge about time- and culture-specific types contributes to the perception of characters on a more concrete level. Jannidis points out (2013, 2) that “some are ‘stock characters’ such as the rich miser, the *femme fatale* or the mad scientist, while others draw upon general *habitus* knowledge in a society like the formal and laborious accountant, the old-maid teacher or the 19th-century laborer”. He states that such figures serve as character models. They are usually associated with standardized “character constellations” such as wife and lover. In popular culture characterization frequently depends on character models, whereas in high culture character models are usually avoided. Jannidis discusses encyclopedic knowledge from both the real world and fictional worlds and states that in many instances of character description they both come into play. He gives two examples of this: “too much alcohol makes people drunk” and “vampires can be killed by a wooden stake driven into their heart”. He states that the reader is often forced to fill in missing parts of character information based on the appropriate knowledge.

2.2.1 Character types

Edward M. Forster categorizes characters into *flat* and *round* characters in his famous book *Aspects of The Novel* (1962, 75). The book is compiled of his lectures delivered at Trinity College. He defines flat characters:

Flat characters [...] are sometimes called types, and sometimes caricatures. In their purest form, they are constructed round a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round. The really flat

character can be expressed in one sentence such as ‘I never will desert Mr. Micawber.’ (1962, 75)

In his example Forster uses a character called Emma Micawber from a novel by Charles Dickens. Forster states that there are two advantages in flat characters: it is easy for the reader to recognize them and they are easily remembered afterwards by the reader (1962, 76-77). According to Forster, flat characters are at their best when they are comical, because tragic or serious flat characters are bound to be boring characters: he gives an example of a character whose only function in the story would be to enter the scene and cry out “I want revenge!” or “My heart bleeds for humanity!” (1962, 80). It is to be noted that Forster uses the expression “curve towards the round” here. He does not explicitly state it, but one can draw the conclusion here that there is a continuum between flat and round characters – in other words, some characters can be less flat than others. It is unclear, however, where to draw the line between the characters in the continuum: how many factors must a character contain in order to become a round character?

Forster introduces a test that can be used to decide whether a character is round or not. According to him, if a character is capable of surprising the reader in a convincing way, the character must be round. If the character is unable to surprise, it is flat. If it is able to surprise in an unconvincing way, it is a flat character pretending to be round (1962, 85).

Jannidis states that stereotypes are often regarded as the prototypical flat character (2013, 3.8). He points out, however, that Richard Dyer made a distinction in his essay “The Role of Stereotypes” (1993) between the social type and the stereotype. The former types are known because they belong to a society with which the reader is familiar, while stereotypes are ready-made images of the unknown.

Problematic in *Aspects of the Novel* is that Forster does not really define the round character. He lists some typical traits that the round characters share, for example, that only round characters are fit to function as tragic characters that are able to induce feelings other than humor and

appropriateness in the reader (1962, 81), but a basic definition is missing. One can only draw the conclusion that “if it is not flat, it is round”. Jannidis (2013, 3.8) points out this problematic aspect as well and says that there have been other propositions to categorize characters as well; for example Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan proposes three dimensions to categorize characters and Baruch Hochman proposes eight dimensions. Although slightly problematic, Forster’s theory is nevertheless still relevant and applicable and in my analysis I will apply his categorization into flat and round characters. This will provide me with an efficient method to analyze Bukowski’s female characters: my hypothesis is that all Bukowski’s female characters in *Post Office*, *Factotum* and *Women* are flat.

2.2.2 Characterization

Uri Margolin discusses characterization in his essay “Characterization in Narrative: Some Theoretical Prolegomena”. He defines characterization as the “constitutive activities of the reader which involve the ascription of mental properties (traits, features) to human or human-like narrative agents” and character-building as ascription of complexes of such properties (personality models or types) to human or human-like narrative agents (1983, 4).

According to Margolin, there are three different sources of characterizing information.

Margolin lists the sources as:

- (1) Explicit characterization statements made by a NA [=narrative agent] about itself or other NA(s). [...]
- (2) Statements about dynamic elements: the traditional triad of word, thought and deed, that is, the verbal, mental and physical acts of NAs. In fact, (1) is a subset of the verbal acts of NAs, and was listed separately for convenience sake only.
- (3) Statements about static elements: the NA's name, appearance and cultural and natural settings.
- (4) In *artistic* narrative only, there is a convention that forms of expression convey semantic information. Consequently, CSs [characterization statements] concerning artistic narratives could also be inferred from statements about formal compositional or tectonic patterns in the narrative discourse (disposition), including the grouping of NAs

and the analogies, parallels or contrasts, between them created by such groupings, and repetitions or gradations of static or dynamic motives associated with a NA. (1983, 8)

In this list we have four different sources, but as Margolin notes himself, the first group is a subset of the verbal acts of narrative agents, which belongs to the second group. Margolin defines all the sources in great detail, but for the purposes of my thesis I will only discuss the sources briefly.

In discussion of the first source Margolin points out that the correctness of characterization whenever A characterizes B must be verified by the reader independently and affirmed or denied (1983, 8). In case the reader cannot trust A's characterization about B, that will in a way characterize A. In discussion of the second source Margolin points out that gaining information from it is context dependent and must be extracted with the help of logical relations. For example: if x is afraid of all physical activity, x is timid. (1983, 8-9). In discussion of the third source Margolin states that "the canonic form of a characterization inference [...] is an implication, with a statement about physical properties, acts or settings of the narrative agent as premise and a statement about mental properties of this narrative agent as conclusion" (1983, 11). This means that for example the weather can express the feelings of a character.

Although Margolin's discussion of characterization is extensive, it does not cover the psychological or cognitive dynamics in the construction of a character in the reader's mind. Jannidis discusses it in his article and mentions "top-down" and "bottom-up" processes observed during empirical studies on reading comprehension, proposed by Ralf Schneider in 2001. Jannidis states that "a top-down process occurs in the application of a category to a character, integrating the information given by the text into this category, while a bottom-up process results from the text information integrating a character into a type or building up an individualized representation" (2013, 3.5). In a top-down process textual cues may trigger various types of categorization: "social types ('the teacher'), literary types (the hero in a Bildungsroman) and text-specific types (characters that do not change throughout the story)".

Margolin's model gives an insight into the principles behind characterization and the sources of information. Bal discusses characterization as well, but from a more concrete reader-oriented point-of-view. Bal states (1999, 119) that characters are more or less predictable, as the reader can inconspicuously process bits of information without giving it a thought, as is the case with historical, mythic and allegorical characters. Bal labels (1999, 121) characters such as these that act according to a pattern that we are familiar with from other sources as referential characters.

After the predictable elements, if a portrait is made of the character, meaning a description of the exterior character, it further limits the possibilities what the character can be. Bal argues (1999, 126) that "repetition, accumulation, relations to other characters and transformations are four different principles which work together to construct the image of a character". The first principle, repetition, is "an important principle of the construction of the image of a character" because characteristics emerge more and more clearly as they are repeated often in the course of the narrative. As the data piles up an image of the character is being made in the reader's mind. Relations to other characters also help to build this image and finally Bal notes that characters may change during the course of a narrative. (1999, 125)

2.3 Feminist narratology

Susan S. Lanser defines feminist narratology in her article "Gender and Narrative" in *The Living Handbook of Narratology* (2013, 1) as a field that "explore[s] the implications of sex, gender and/or sexuality for understanding the 'nature, form and functioning of narrative', and thus also for exploring the full range of elements that constitute narrative texts". According to Lanser, feminist narratology is also concerned with the methods in which "various narratological concepts, categories, methods and distinctions advance or obscure the exploration of gender and sexuality as signifying aspects of narrative." (2013, 1) Lanser quotes Robyn R. Warhol and gives a "simple"

definition of feminist narratology as “the study of narrative structures and strategies in the context of cultural constructions of gender”.

Lanser emphasizes that feminist narratology is a school of thought that has not yet fully found its final form and has been throughout its existence much under discussion and debate. In order to understand the field one must understand its origins as well. Ruth E. Page discusses the history of the field in her 2006 book *Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology*. She explains (2006, 2) how significant trends in narrative theory and feminism helped contribute to the emergence of feminist narratology and how they subsequently shaped its landscape. She argues (2006, 1) that feminist narratology has a relevant point of view as “narratives are human activities, and the assumptions and procedures involved in their telling and analysis are human constructions, which a feminist would argue must entail a consideration of gender”.

Feminist narratology was introduced in the middle of the 1980s. As the name suggests, it began from within the domain of narratology. Page argues (2006, 2) that in narratology there was a trend of structuralist thinking in the 1970s, a postclassical critique and evaluation in the 1980 and a postmodern diversification of both theoretical stance and interdisciplinary application from the 1990s onwards. Narrative theory has been the subject of interdisciplinary revision and has drawn upon theories from outside its original home in literary studies, including from gender theory. According to Page (2006, 4), Lanser’s 1986 article “Toward a Feminist Narratology” is credited as the principal impetus for integrating feminism with narratology. Lanser’s central argument was for a two-way, mutually beneficial dialectic between feminism and narratology. This proposal was rejected by some academics and welcomed by those who argued that narrative theory also embraced matters of meaning, context and evaluation. However, Page argues (2006, 9) that the feminism of 1980s feminist narratology is very much a product of its time. It is inspired with a second wave agenda of overturning inequality towards women. Concepts of gender altered radically by the end of the 1990s under the influence of poststructuralist theorizing laid out by Judith Butler. Lanser’s

early directive was that feminist narratology should analyze texts by women, mostly British or American writers. However, in order to examine points of similarity and difference within and between categories many feminist narratologists also include narratives by or about men.

Sex and gender are obviously key concepts in feminist narratology but over the years they have been under discussion and different definitions have been offered. According to Mills and Mullany (2011, 41), whereas in Second Wave feminism they were distinguished as biological versus socially constructed categories, Third Wave feminism sees gender as something that individuals do or actively perform and sex as constructed and always viewed through a gendered lens. Mills and Mullany state (2011, 42) that many Third Wave feminists adapt the work of Judith Butler, especially her notion of performativity. Within this type of analysis gender is viewed as a verb – something that one “does” – rather than something which one possesses. It is constructed through the repetition of gendered acts and it varies according to context. One does not “do” one’s gender alone – meaning gender identities are not created in isolation – but always with or for another.

Feminist narratology is applicable in my theoretical framework as I am interested in the effect that the female characters have on the narrative: what kind of characters they are, what kind of functions they have and how the characters are created in the narrative. In order to limit the length of my analysis I will not discuss gender performativity in my analysis – although that would certainly be a fruitful topic – as my main focus will be more on the narratological aspects.

In addition to the narratological aspects, I am also interested in the changes that happened in the society at the time the three novels were written and how these changes might be visible in the novels. According to Baxandall & Gordon

The women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s was the largest social movement in the history of the United States. Its impact has been felt in every home, school, and business, in every form of entertainment and sport, in all aspects of personal and public life. Like a river overflowing its banks and seeking a new course, it permanently altered the American landscape. (2002, 414)

The publication years 1971, 1975 and 1978 fall perfectly near the beginning and the end of the second-wave feminism. Baxandall & Gordon argue (2002, 414-417) that the second-wave US women's movement emerged near the end of the 1960s in two separate streams: the equal rights tendency and women's liberation. However, by the late 1960s the participants of radical campaigns for social justice referred to themselves collectively as "the movement", in singular. The growth of the movement can be seen in mentions of the women's movement in the national press: it increased tenfold in the ten months from May 1969 to March 1970.

According to Baxandall & Gordon (2002, 421) by the mid-1970s "feminist politics was occurring primarily in single-issue organizations focused on, for example, reproductive rights, employment discrimination, health, domestic violence [and] women's studies". However, the women's movement did not just focus exclusively on sexual issues, as Baxandall & Gordon argue (2002, 422) that "feminists in many parts of the country generated a great deal of activism focused on economic, bread-and-butter problems of employed women". Baxandall & Gordon state (2002, 426) that "a coherent mass women's movement began to weaken by the end of the 1970s". They see this development as inevitable, because mass social movements require such intensity of participation that they produce burnout. Also in a movement mostly driven by youth, aging pulls activists into working and family life. Second-wave feminism underestimated the backlash of its successes: it concentrated on what remained to be achieved and did not emphasize enough what had already been achieved which resulted in a new generation of women who emerged into adulthood and took for granted many of the gains made by the previous generation.

3 Analysis

In this section I will analyze the three novels in their respective chapters in order to answer my research question and to test my hypotheses. I will begin this section with a discussion on Henry Chinaski, the narrator, in order to understand what kind of a narrator he is and to provide an explanation for the choices I have done in my close reading, as he is an unreliable narrator. After that I will discuss the dirty realism character model and finally I will discuss the three novels.

3.1 The problematic narration of Henry Chinaski

The main focus of my study is Bukowski's female characters, but before a thorough analysis of them, a discussion on the narrator is necessary. In this chapter I will discuss the narrator Henry Chinaski and explain the problematic nature of his narration from the view point of my study. The reliability of his narration is a topic that not many academics have discussed.

Henry Chinaski, often nicknamed as "Hank" by other characters, is the first person narrator in most of Bukowski's novels. He is a narrative agent who also participates in the narrated events. *Ham on Rye* (1982) chronicles Chinaski's life from his birth until his mid-twenties, *Factotum* (1975) covers the years from his twenties until his mid-thirties, *Post Office* (1971) is the story of Chinaski's years in the postal service from his mid-thirties until his fifties, *Women* (1978) chronicles his adventures after quitting the postal service and becoming successful in the literary field and finally *Hollywood* (1989) tells the events of Chinaski's involvement in a Hollywood-production as a screenwriter. *Pulp* (1994) is unlike Bukowski's other novels as the narrator is not Chinaski, although Chinaski does appear briefly in the story.

The stories in *Post Office*, *Factotum* and *Women* are told in the past tense, which in Genette's terminology stands for subsequent narrating. Genette emphasizes the importance of the

temporal aspect over the spatial aspect – the “when” is more important than “where”. This phenomenon is observable in Bukowski’s work as the opening lines of the three novels reveal:

It began as a mistake.

It was Christmas season and I learned from the drunk up the hill, who did the trick every Christmas, that they would hire damned near anybody, and so I went and the next thing I knew I had this leather sack on my back and was hiking around at my leisure. What a job, I thought. Soft! (2002, 13)

I arrived in New Orleans in the rain at 5 o’clock in the morning. I sat around in the bus station for a while but the people depressed me so I took my suitcase and went out in the rain and began walking. (2009, 1)

I was 50 years old and hadn’t been to bed with a woman for four years. I had no women friends. I looked at them as I passed them on the streets or wherever I saw them, but I looked at them without yearning and with a sense of futility. (2007, 7)

All the stories are told without specifying the place where the narration happens. The past tense reveals that the narration happens after the events, but the temporal distance between the narration and the events is unclear.

The opening lines of the novels also reveal that as a narrator Henry Chinaski is an intra- and homodiegetic narrator. The highest level of narration is the narrator’s level. This level is unknown in place and time for the reader. This is the narrator’s present, a level in which he narrates past events and states that he “arrived in New Orleans”. Inside this first level of narration is the past-tense intradiegetic level. Chinaski is present as a character in the intradiegetic level thus he can be defined as a homodiegetic narrator.

As I already discussed in 2.1.2, there is an ongoing debate whether narrators can be focalizers. This question is relevant while discussing Bukowski’s work: can Chinaski the narrator and Chinaski the character in the narrative both function as focalizers? For the sake of coherence of this thesis and practicality I will not have a lengthy discussion of the debate; as I am using Bal’s revised theory of focalization, I will also concur with her view that both narrators and characters can be focalizers.

There are two focalizers in *Post Office*, *Factotum* and *Women*: Chinaski the narrator and Chinaski the character in the narration. Focalization is the relation between the focalizer and that which is “seen”, thus in discussion of focalization in *Post Office*, *Factotum* and *Women* this means that the discussion heavily emphasizes that which is “seen” as the other side of the relation remains somewhat constant. The point of focalization lies mainly with Chinaski the character, as the reader experiences the story through Chinaski’s eyes and through Chinaski’s narration gains knowledge of Chinaski’s feelings. The focalization is internal focalization as Chinaski participates in the fabula as an actor. In my reading I argue that the focalization lies partly with Chinaski the narrator as well. This is visible for example in parts where Chinaski the narrator comments the decisions what Chinaski the character makes: “It began as a mistake” (2002, 13) and “Little did I know how long that lunch would be” (2002, 66). It is also visible in a point in *Post Office* where the spatial aspect of the narration shifts from subsequent to simultaneous. Chinaski is attending Betty’s funeral and talks to Larry, Betty’s son. Larry promises to write Chinaski about the headstone and Chinaski comments that “I’m still waiting for that letter” (2002, 114).

The other side of the relation, the focalized object, is the vision that Chinaski provides as the focalizer. He is capable of providing perceptible and non-perceptible visions with certain limitations. These limitations can be found in the opening lines of *Post Office*. As Bal notes (1999, 153), “our criterion [to define ‘perceptible’] is that within the fabula there must be another character present that can also perceive the object”. The perceptible objects here include time and setting: it is Christmas season, the drunk lives up the hill, Chinaski hikes around with a leather sack on his back. Other characters than Chinaski can perceive these matters as well. The non-perceptible objects are, according to Bal (1999, 153), “the dreams, fantasies, thoughts, or feelings of a character”. In the opening lines we have “What a job, I thought. Soft!” that is an example of the non-perceptible objects that Chinaski is able to describe – his own thoughts. He can also describe his own dreams

(there is a chapter in italics in *Factotum* where Chinaski narrates his dream), fantasies and feelings but he is unable to describe the feelings of other characters.

At times the focalization is slightly ambiguous. Consider the following passage from *Post Office*:

Her father really hated me. He thought I was after his money. I didn't want his god damned money. And I didn't even want his god damned precious daughter.

The only time I ever saw him was when he walked into the bedroom one morning about 10:00. Joyce and I were in bed, resting up. Luckily we had just finished.

I peered at him from under the edge of the cover. Then I couldn't help myself. I smiled at him and gave him a big wink.

He ran out of the house growling and cursing.

If I could be removed, he'd certainly see to it. (1971, 58)

For a moment it seems like the narrator Chinaski has access to the thoughts of the father. However, the focalization is done through Chinaski the narrator, who thinks, long after the events have already happened, that the father must have always hated him. It is not the narrator telling how the father felt; it is the narrator reflecting how he thinks the father must have felt.

The narration and focalization in Bukowski's work heavily influence the reader's sympathies and attitudes toward the other characters. Chinaski is the only character who functions as a character-bound focalizer and is the only character whose inner thoughts and feelings are expressed. In conflict situations the reader never gets to know the feelings and thoughts of the other party in the conflict.

Finally I will discuss Chinaski's reliability as the narrator. A reliable narrator would give an objective view of events – the reader can trust his statements without having doubts whether the statements are colored or falsified in some way. This is certainly not the case in Chinaski's narration, as Chinaski is borderline alcoholic and his personality is slightly nihilistic – the reader cannot but wonder at times how accurate his depictions of some events and characters are as he often openly admits having been drunk while the events happened.

Booth defined reliability in relation to that of narrative distance: the narrative distance of a reliable narrator to the implied author is a short one. The narrator acts in accordance with the implied author's norms. On the contrary, an unreliable narrator does not: the narrative distance grows and the reader starts to suspect that the narrator cannot be trusted.

Harrison, in his discussion of depiction of women and the relationships between men and women in *Women*, notes how the narrative distance of the implied author and the narrator has increased from *Post Office* to *Factotum* to *Women*:

Here, and in other passages in *Women*, the reader's identification with the protagonist is threatened. In the earlier novels there was no doubt as to whose side the implied author was taking and where the reader's sympathy was being directed. A simplistic view of "right" and "wrong" in such affairs had begun to break down in *Factotum* [...]. Now Bukowski is consciously questioning Chinaski's behavior and the male role in such situations and trying to present events from the woman's perspective as well. (1994, 201)

Although he is not discussing Chinaski's reliability but Bukowski's ironic treatment of sex, his observation remains valid in my context as well: in *Women* there is clearly a narrative distance between the implied author and the narrator.

Although in *Post Office* there might not be such a clear narrative distance between the implied author and the narrator regarding sex and (sexual) relationships, there is clearly one visible in Chinaski's description of his supervisor Jonstone. In order to understand the narrative distance one should understand the relationship between Chinaski and Jonstone, hence a discussion on Jonstone is necessary.

Jonstone is first introduced as "a bullneck named Jonstone" (2002, 14) who "liked to wear dark-red shirts – that meant danger and blood" (2002, 14). Chinaski also describes how the others felt about Jonstone: "The subs themselves made Jonstone possible by obeying his impossible orders. I couldn't see how a man of such obvious cruelty could be allowed to have his position. The regulars didn't care, the union man was worthless" (2002, 15). Chinaski files a complaint of

Jonstone and visits the federal building only to be told that “MR. JONSTONE HAS BEEN WITH THE POST OFFICE FOR 30 YEARS. [...] MR. JONSTONE IS A FINE MAN!” (2002, 16). There is an obvious schism between Jonstone and Chinaski throughout the novel, as Chinaski seems to think that Jonstone is responsible for various troubles he faces while working for the postal service:

The Wently soup stood me in front of this case. [...] I’d never seen such a case. It was a rotten joke of some sort. [...] Whoever had conceived it was a madman.

We got it up and out and just as I was about to leave the soup walked over and said, “I can’t give you any help on this.”

“That’s all right,” I said

All right, hell. It wasn’t until later that I found out he was Jonstone’s best buddy. (2002, 23)

Then the dashboard light went out. I couldn’t read the clipboard. [...] I had two boxes of matches and before I made for each new pickup box, I would light a match, memorize the directions and drive on. For once, I had outwitted Adversity, that Jonstone up there in the sky, looking down, watching me. (2002, 27)

In the first passage Chinaski is implying that Jonstone has asked the supervisor of another station to give the toughest jobs to Chinaski. In the second passage it is dark and raining and the dashboard light of his truck goes out. Naturally, Chinaski thinks Jonstone is behind all that as well.

However, there are some subtle clues that Jonstone might not be all that bad a supervisor after all. When a mail carrier gets accused of child molestation, Jonstone’s reaction is quite reasonable for a supervisor:

I came in and heard The Stone on the phone, trying to explain to the mother that G.G. was a honorable man. [...]

When The Stone was finished and had hung up, I told him:

“You shouldn’t suck up to that woman. She’s got a dirty mind. Half the mothers in America, with their precious big pussies and their precious little daughters, half the mothers in America have dirty minds. Tell her to shove it. G.G. can’t get his pecker hard, you know that.”

The Stone shook his head. “No, the public’s dynamite! They’re dynamite!”

That’s all he could say. I had seen The Stone before – posturing and begging and explaining to every nut who phoned in about anything. (2002, 44)

As a supervisor who is responsible of the actions of the mail carriers Jonstone cannot act like Chinaski suggests. Jonstone understands the importance of his responsibility of being the public face of the post office – when a mail carrier is charged with serious accusations he must handle the issue carefully and with great delicacy.

Tom Moto is one of the first mail carriers Chinaski becomes friends with. As their roads part Chinaski does not see Tom Moto in a long time. Near the end of the story Chinaski bumps into Tom Moto and their conversation reveals something interesting:

“Hey, I was thinking of you! Jonstone is retiring this month. Some of us are holding a farewell party for him. You know, he always liked to fish. We’re going to take him out in a rowboat. Maybe you’d like to come along and throw him overboard, drown him. We’ve got a nice deep lake.” (2002, 188)

Tom Moto is clearly implying that Jonstone is a supervisor worth having a farewell party for, meaning there might not be such animosity between Jonstone and the other employees. This is the first time the reader learns anything personal about Jonstone. Tom Moto is also making it clear that Chinaski is the only one who would perhaps like to throw Jonstone overboard – in other words Tom Moto and perhaps the other co-workers as well are aware that there is a schism between Jonstone and Chinaski. So close to the end of the novel, this is a clear hint for the reader as well: Chinaski might not have been fair and honest in his description of Jonstone, as his attitude towards the post office and work in general is negative:

The salient characteristic of Bukowski’s first two novels is their focus on work. [...] What is different about these novels [*Post Office* and *Factotum*] is their relentlessly negative depiction of all aspects of work and a fundamental questioning of its usefulness. (Harrison 1994, 123-125)

Although Harrison discusses a characteristic of Bukowski’s style, I believe it is fair to state that Chinaski’s attitude towards work is negative as well as Chinaski is the narrator in *Post Office* and *Factotum* and therefore this negative depiction is presented by him. Harrison states (1994, 140) that

“*Factotum*, in fact, is the clearest statement of what might be called the refusal-to-work ethic, as well as its justification” which sums up Chinaski’s attitude towards work.

This is where the narrative distance between the implied author and the narrator can be found in *Post Office*. Chinaski’s narration tries to guide the reader’s sympathies completely towards Chinaski himself, but the implied author seems to know that Chinaski has presented the reader only a one-sided version of the events to underline his point of the uselessness of work. Chinaski acts like a martyr, a victim of the cruelty of his superiors, although he is not being completely honest depicting the events. His unreliable narration forces the reader to question characterizations such as his depiction of the union representative Parker Anderson:

I asked to have my union representative paged to my area.

After a long delay, here he came – Parker Anderson. Parker used to sleep in an old used car and freshen up and shave and shit at gas stations that didn’t lock their restrooms. Parker had tried to be a hustler but had failed. And had come to the central post office, joined the union, and went to the union meetings where he became sarge-at-arms. He was soon a union representative, and then he was elected vice president.

“What’s the matter, Hank? I know you don’t need *me* to handle these soups!” (2002, 185)

Chinaski’s problem is that construction workers are removing every other water fountain from the post office building and he asks Parker to find out why. After a couple of days Parker explains that he found out that the original blueprints did not have as many water fountains that there had been installed, hence they were removing the extra fountains. Chinaski’s comment to the explanation is “If he had made up the story, it was damn near worth \$312 [twelve years worth of union dues]. I’d seen a lot worse printed in *Playboy*.” (2002, 186). Knowing Chinaski’s skeptic attitude to the post office and work in general, the reader faces a problem with Parker’s background story: can this depiction be trusted? Was it so easy to advance in one’s career in the post office, coming from a background like that? How much of it is just Chinaski’s imagination? These kinds of questions the reader must actively ask oneself while reading.

The narrative tactic of Chinaski making himself a martyr and a victim of events can be found in *Women* as well, in Chinaski's depiction of his relationships. In one scene Chinaski and her girlfriend Jan run out of money and get evicted from their apartment. Jan moves in with another man, after promising Chinaski that she'd be waiting when his luck changes. According to Harrison,

the function of this scene is to show Jan deserting Chinaski in his hour of need, clearly a false and self-serving construction of events, aimed at justifying Chinaski's view of women. There is yet another attempt to create sympathy for the 'victimized' Chinaski when, concealed, he is described as 'watch[ing]' them kiss. (1994, 196)

In other words, in his narration Chinaski does not necessary lie about the events, he just presents them in a way that serves his narrative purpose of guiding the reader's sympathies. However, in dialogue with other characters, Chinaski has a constant habit of lying. This happens throughout the three novels. For example, in *Post Office*:

Another woman stood on her porch. [...]
 "Where is the regular man today?"
 "He's dying of cancer."
 "Dying of cancer? Harold is dying of cancer?"
 "That's right," I said. (2002, 40)

In this passage Chinaski lies because of his grim sense of humor. He is working as a substitute mail carrier and gets constantly asked the same questions by the people he meets during his ordinary working day: "A door opened and an old woman asked the question heard a hundred times a day: "Where's the *regular* man, today?" (2002, 24). These questions that he feels as pointless irritate him because he does not know the regular carriers and have no idea why they are absent from work and therefore he decides to be mean and lie to the woman. Another example is from *Factotum*:

A couple of days later I found an ad in the paper for a shipping clerk in an art supply store. The store was very close to where we lived but I overslept and it wasn't until 3 p.m. that I got down there. [...] Finally the manager called me over.
 "I want to tell you something. I already accepted another job this morning," I told him. (2009, 133)

In this passage Chinaski applies for a job and lies in the job interview about having been in another job interview earlier that morning although he had overslept. A third example comes from *Women*:

A door opened and a man came running out of a ground floor apartment. He was the manager.

“Hey! There is no swimming allowed this time of night! The pool lights are off!”

I paddled toward him, reached the pool edge and looked up at him. “Look, motherfucker, I drink two barrels of beer a day and I’m a professional wrestler. I’m a *kindly* soul by nature. But I intend to swim and I want those lights turned ON! NOW! I’m only asking you one time!”

I paddled off. (2007, 179)

In this passage Chinaski is drunk and blustering to a hotel manager. He is out in a swimming pool after the closing time with two of his friends and wishes to continue swimming.

All three passages are fine examples of how Chinaski lies: in his narration he seldom openly admits lying. The reader must read the line “‘That’s right,’ I said” and then independently make the decision that Chinaski is not being honest, that Chinaski is frustrated of the people asking him the same questions over and over again and must be misreporting. In the second passage Chinaski underreports what he did that morning: the reader cannot be completely sure whether Chinaski is lying or not in the job interview and has to independently make the decision again based on what he knows of Chinaski as a character, as there is a gap in the narration (he overslept and got there at three o’clock but it is not directly stated that he went straight there). In the third passage the reader automatically knows that Chinaski is lying as he is not a professional wrestler and although he does consume a lot of alcohol in a day, two barrels is an exaggeration.

In these excerpts where Chinaski is continuously lying he is guilty of misreporting and underreporting. He claims things as facts which clearly are not and depicts events in a way that guides the reader’s sympathies towards him. Thus I would argue that Chinaski is an unreliable narrator. However, as Shen points out (2013, 2), a narrator can be reliable in one way and unreliable in the other. This means that the reader should not automatically reject everything that Chinaski tells as lies – the reader should just be aware while reading that his narration might at times be

unreliable. Chinaski's unreliable narration is an important factor as it will have an effect on my analysis of the female characters. In my analysis I will not, however, focus on Chinaski's unreliability but the female characters themselves. Nevertheless Chinaski's unreliability is an underlying factor that has an effect on the choices I have made in my analysis.

3.2 Characterization of female characters

Before analyzing the characters in detail, I will briefly discuss Bukowski's characters in general. In order to understand what kind of characters we are dealing with, one should also understand the field in which these characters act – the genre – and how the characterization process functions in practice.

Michael Hemmingson discusses Raymond Carver and Charles Bukowski in his 2008 book *Dirty Realism Duo: Charles Bukowski and Raymond Carver on the Aesthetics of the Ugly*. In his book he discusses the two authors and their work but certain awareness and a level of source-criticism is necessary while discussing his work: some sources are missing and the style deviates from the academic style at times (for example there is a chapter written completely in the form of a poem).

Hemmingson states (2008, 11) that “certain critics” (no sources listed) categorize Raymond Carver as the founding member of the dirty realism literary movement. The genre was born in the early 1980s and it branched out from minimalism, in which fiction is stripped down to the least amount of words and it concentrates on the object of narration. The typical character is described as “run-of-the-mill, every-day people – the lower and the middle class workers, the unemployed, the alcoholic and the beaten down-by-life” (2008, 11). The term *dirty realism* was coined by Bill Buford in his editorial to *Granta #8* in 1983, an issue titled “Dirty Realism. New Writings from America”. In the editorial Buford defines the genre as

unadorned, unfurnished, low-rent tragedies about people who watch daytime television, read cheap romances or listen to country and western music. They are waitresses in roadside cafes, cashiers in supermarkets, construction workers, secretaries and unemployed cowboys. They play bingo, eat cheeseburgers, hunt deer, and stay in cheap motels. They drink a lot and are often in trouble for stealing a car, breaking a window, pickpocketing a wallet. (1983, 4)

Post Office, *Factotum* and *Women* were written already in the 1970s, but the description fits Bukowski's style. However, Hemmingson states (2008, 15) that there is one difference: Bukowski is able to find humor although his subject matter is the drunk, the unemployed and the hopeless – the lower middle class Americans. These characters have accepted their fates and conditions: “The Carver character hopes for better days, waits for them; Bukowski's characters know there won't be better days ahead and so they live it the best they can in the moment.” (2008, 15)

This description of a typical character also serves as the dirty realism character model. Although it does help if the reader is familiar with the genre beforehand, genre knowledge is not mandatory. As the subject matter is the everyday people and the stories tend to be unfurnished low-rent tragedies, the reader will quickly become familiar with the typical dirty realism character. After a couple of similar characterizations the reader starts to automatically have certain expectations for the characters: he applies the dirty realism character model – the ready-made outline for a character that is most likely lower or middle class, into alcohol and whose life is described through their boring easy-to-relate-to routines – and starts filling the outline with given information. Often there are textual clues that signal the reader that it is safe to apply the character model, such as descriptions of their social status and habits.

The *sjuzhet* and *fabula* go fairly hand-in-hand in all three novels: Chinaski's narration is chronological so the events are presented in an order that they happened. This means that the stories have a clear starting point and an ending point and all the events happen in between. Chinaski has several relationships with women but none of these relationships last a long time. In *Post Office* and more clearly in *Factotum* he changes jobs every now and then and thus his friendships with his

colleagues only last a brief amount of time. In *Women* he is a successful writer and thus gets to travel a lot giving readings to audiences. All this results in a huge cast of characters that only have a minor function in the story: they are introduced, they play their part, they exit the stage and never return. Exceptions to this rule are Chinaski's close-by neighbors in *Women*: Bobby and Valerie – a young couple that often hangs around in Chinaski's apartment, drinks alcohol and keeps company to Chinaski.

As I discussed earlier, characterization information can be derived from three different sources: the verbal, mental and physical acts of narrative agents, statements about static elements and statements about formal compositional or tectonic patterns in the narrative discourse. From the point of view of my study I would emphasize the importance of the first category. The correctness of characterization when a narrative agent characterizes another must always be verified by the reader. I have already proved that Chinaski is an unreliable narrator, thus the reader must pay special attention whenever Chinaski characterizes another character, as Chinaski might not always be truthful or sufficient in his narration.

Jannidis introduced us with the idea of character models: when a character enters the stage the reader already has a set of ready-made outlines for the character such as stock characters (femme fatale, rich miser, the mad scientist) and characters that drawn upon general habitus knowledge in a society (the old-maid teacher, the 19th century laborer). In popular culture these character models are often relied upon whereas in high culture they are often avoided. Hence in Bukowski's work one would expect to see reliance upon character models: the reader selects an outline for the character and starts filling it with the given information, finally creating an image of the character in one's mind.

My hypothesis is that in Bukowski's work character models play an important role and that characterizations of the female characters highly depend upon character models. In my analysis I will study his female characters in order to find out whether there is an underlying pattern how

Bukowski constructs his female characters. Additionally, this will help me discover what kind of character model the reader applies whenever a new female character is introduced.

3.2.1 *Post Office*

In this subchapter I will discuss the female characters in *Post Office*. I will first discuss the major characters; Betty, Joyce, a co-worker called Vi, a con woman called Mary Lou and a hippie writer called Fay – all the women with which Chinaski has relationships during the story – and then I will discuss the minor characters, who are by rule unnamed.

Chinaski's first relationship in the story is with Betty. She is an unemployed alcoholic. Later in the story Chinaski resigns from the post office and at the same time Betty finds a job. Betty does not stand the situation that she is employed and Chinaski is not and decides to leave Chinaski.

The first mention of Betty is “[t]he way my shackjob Betty and I drank there was hardly money for clothes” (2002, 14) and the second is “I had been up to 2 a.m. drinking and screwing with Betty” (2002, 16). Chinaski is unfaithful to Betty, since although he has Betty waiting for him at home, he often has intercourse with women who live on his mail delivery route. During a tough day at work Chinaski dreams of Betty: “I kept thinking of a hot bath, Betty's fine legs, and – something to keep me going – a picture of myself in an easychair, drink in hand, the dog walking up, me patting his head” (2002, 28). Later in the same subchapter he continues: “All I wanted was to get in that chair with that glass of scotch in my hand and watch Betty's ass wobble around the room” (2002, 29) and “Betty, baby, I'm coming!” (2002, 29). Finally he “made it back to Betty's ass” (2002, 31). Ultimately Chinaski decides to resign his job: “And so there it was. I drove home to Betty and we uncapped the bottle” (2002, 50). In the beginning of the second chapter Betty finds work:

Then Betty got a job as a typist, and when one of those shack-jobs gets a job, you notice the difference right away. We kept drinking each night and she left before I did in the morning, all hungover. Now she'd know what it was like. (2002, 53)

Betty gets jealous because Chinaski is receiving attention from the neighbors and is afraid that they might think that Betty is supporting him (while in fact Chinaski spends his days on a horse race track earning money). Betty decides to leave Chinaski. Chinaski does not see Betty again until the third chapter:

Betty had lost her job. The dog had been run over and killed. She got a job as a waitress, then lost that when they tore down the café to erect an office building. Now she lived in a small room in a loser's hotel. She changed the sheets there and cleaned the bathrooms. She was on wine. She suggested that we might get together again. I suggested that we might wait awhile. I was just getting over a bad one.

She went back to her room and put on her best dress, high heels, tried to fix up. But there was a terrible sadness about her. (2002, 93)

Later in the story Chinaski drops by Betty's apartment and finds her "sitting in her room, drunk, at 8:45 in the morning" (2002, 109). Chinaski reflects the situation:

She had two children who never came to see her, never wrote her. She was a scrubwoman in a cheap hotel. When I had first met her her clothes had been expensive, trim ankles fitting into expensive shoes. She had been firm-fleshed, almost beautiful. Wild-eyed. Laughing. Coming from a rich husband, divorced from him, and he was to die in a car wreck, drunk, burning to death in Connecticut. "You'll never tame her," they told me.

There she was. But I'd had some help. (2002, 109)

A week later Betty ends up in hospital and dies because of her alcoholism. When Betty is mentioned the first time, the reader recognizes her as a character in the story world. The first bits of information inscribed to her are that she is Chinaski's lover and that she has a drinking problem. She is described as having fine legs and Chinaski comforts himself while on job that soon he would be back in bed next to Betty. Although Betty is frequently mentioned in the first chapter of the story, she does not have a voice in it. She gains voice in the beginning of the second chapter, simultaneously after being employed:

Then, one night, Betty, my love, let me have it, over the first drink:
 “Hank, I can’t stand it!”
 “You can’t stand what, baby?” [...]
 “Me working and you laying around. All the neighbors think I am supporting you.”
 “Hell, I worked and *you* laid around.”
 “That’s different. You’re a man, I’m a woman.”
 “Oh, I didn’t know that. I thought you bitches were always screaming for equal rights?”
 “I know what’s going on with little butterball in back, walking around in front of you with her tits hanging out...” [...]
 “Now what the hell?”
 “I’ve got friends around here. They see what’s going on!” (2002, 53-54)

The moment Betty is given a voice she uses it to break up with Chinaski. Chinaski is presenting this issue from the point of view that Betty wants to end the relationship because the traditional gender roles have reversed in their relationship (Betty becoming the supporter). However, Betty, although she does support the traditional sense of gender roles, seems to have alternative grounds for breaking up, as she blames Chinaski for infidelity, an accusation that the reader can confirm as true.

As a character, Betty is a typical dirty realism character: alcoholic and first unemployed, later doing low salary jobs such as being a waitress and a cleaning lady. Her characterization is mostly done by Chinaski textually ascribing information to her. Most of this information the reader can trust. Her appearance is not directly stated, so the reader must build up a mental image of her from the scratch: the only thing the reader gets to know is that early in the story she was “firm-fleshed” and “almost beautiful” (2002, 109) and later she has lost these qualities. Betty is a flat character, because she does not surprise the reader. She is a tragic character, although Forster stated that flat characters should not be tragic, since they are bound to be boring.

After Betty, Chinaski has a relationship with a girl called Joyce. She is introduced in the second chapter:

The next thing I knew, I had a young girl from Texas on my lap. I won’t go into details of how I met her. Anyway, there it was. She was 23. I was 36.
 She had long blonde hair and was good solid meat. I didn’t know, at the time, that she also had plenty of money. She didn’t drink but I did. [...] She was a looker, and

everytime I got back to my seat there would be some jerkoff sliding closer and closer to her. There were dozens of them. (2002, 55)

Soon after they meet they decide to get married and visit Texas, Joyce's home. They stay in an apartment owned by Joyce's parents:

Joyce had a little house in town and we laid around and screwed and ate. She fed me well, fattened me up and weakened me at the same time. She couldn't get enough. Joyce, my wife, was a nymph. (2002, 56)

According to Chinaski, Joyce's parents do not like him because they believe Chinaski is only after their money. Her grandparents, however, approve of Chinaski. After the trip to Texas Chinaski and Joyce decide to rent a house and try to make it on their own:

So gramps wrote Joyce a big check and there we were. We rented a little house up on a hill, and then Joyce got this stupid moralistic thing.

"We both ought to get jobs," Joyce said, "to prove to them that you are not after their money. To prove to them that we are self-sufficient." (2002, 62)

Chinaski gets a job as an art store clerk, but quits his job and finds a new job as a mail clerk.

Meanwhile Joyce works as a secretary in a police station. After some time their relationship ends.

Joyce decides to file for a divorce, because she has fallen in love with someone from her work place.

As a character Joyce is a typical dirty realism character and shares some characteristics with Betty: first unemployed (although living with the aid of her rich parents) and later trying to support herself with a low-income job. What is exceptional in Joyce is that she does not consume any alcohol. Her appearance is directly stated by the narrator: she has "long blonde hair" and is "solid meat". Her characterization is mostly done by Chinaski textually ascribing information to her. Whereas the reader does not get to know much about Betty as a person, the reader gets plenty of information about Joyce, for example: "Joyce cut my hair. She did a terrible job" (2002, 60) and "I'll say one thing for that bitch. She could cook. She could cook better than any woman I had ever known" (2002, 61). Joyce is a flat character, because she does not surprise the reader. As a

character she can be expressed in one sentence: “I will try to live in a way that will make my family proud”.

After Joyce, Chinaski has a short relationship with a co-worker called Vi. He meets her accidentally at a horse race track:

I went to the bar for a drink and I saw this high yellow walk by in an old raincoat. She was really dressed *down* but since I felt that way, I called her name just loud enough for her to hear as she walked by. [...] I knew her from the central post office. She worked another station, the one near the water fountain, but she seemed more friendly than most. (2002, 115).

They spend the day betting successfully on horses and after that they head to Chinaski’s apartment. Vi thinks it is “really a rat hole” (2002, 118) and they decide to head to Vi’s apartment. Chinaski comments that “she did have a nice place” (2002, 119). Chinaski pours two drinks while Vi changes her clothing: “Vi came back. She was all dressed. Earrings, high heels, short skirt. She looked all right. Stocky. But good ass and thighs, breasts. A hard tough ride” (2002, 119). Chinaski pictures a life together with Vi in his head: he would spend his days at the racetrack and Vi would wait for her at home. A bit later Vi shows a photo of her daughter to Chinaski. The daughter is in Detroit with Vi’s mother, but is moving to Vi in the Fall to go to school. The father of the daughter is an African-American man named Roy. Vi comments on Roy that “I divorced Roy. The son of a bitch was no good. All he did was drink and play the horses” (2002, 120). Later they go to bed, but Chinaski has performance issues: “In bed I had something in front of me but I couldn’t do anything with it. I whaled and I whaled and I whaled. Vi was very patient. I kept striving and banging but I’d had too much to drink.” (2002, 121). The next day they wake up and Chinaski decides to head for the racetrack. They never meet in the story again.

Vi does not surprise the reader and therefore she is a flat character. She is a middle-class worker – a typical dirty realism character. Her characterization is mostly done by Chinaski textually ascribing information to her, but some information can be gained from textual cues as well (such as

that she does not like to hang around in untidy apartments). There is some textual information about her appearance, but mainly the reader must build a mental image of her from scratch. She states how she did not like her ex-husband's habit of drinking and gambling which in turn gets the reader to question why she decides to spend time with Chinaski in the first place: Chinaski is drinking in a bar in a horse track as they meet. This is where Vi's potential to become a round character lies but is never realized: she has opinions but is incapable of living according to them.

The next woman that Chinaski has a short relationship with is a woman called Mary Lou.

Chinaski meets her at the race track:

One day I was at the bar between races and I saw this woman. God or somebody keeps creating women and tossing them out on the streets, and this one's ass is too big and that one's tits are too small [...] But now and then, a woman walks up, full blossom, a woman just bursting out of her dress... a sex creature, a curse, the end of it all. I looked up and there she was, down at the end of the bar. She was about drunk and the bartender wouldn't serve her and she began to bitch and they called one of the track cops and the track cop had her by the arm, leading her off, and they were talking. (2002, 138)

Chinaski spends the night with her in seashore hotel. The next day they go to a motel where Mary Lou is staying. There is a "little dark guy in there with a wart on the side of his nose" called Hector, who "[looks] dangerous". (2002, 141) After a brief discussion with Hector (about how Chinaski is stealing his woman), Chinaski looks at a mirror to see how hungover he is and happens to see Hector attacking him from behind with a stiletto in his hand. Chinaski hits Hector with a beer bottle and Hector falls in the ground. After that Chinaski slaps Mary Lou and accuses her of a confidence trick:

"Cunt! You set this up, didn't you? You'd let this monkey kill me for the lousy four or five hundred bucks in my wallet!"

"No, no!" she said. She was crying. They both were crying.

I slapped her again.

"Is that how you make it, cunt? Killing men for a couple hundred?"

"No, no, I LOVE you, Hank, I LOVE you!" (2002, 142)

After the incident Chinaski never sees Mary Lou or Hector again.

Mary Lou is a controversial character. She can be read as a con woman or not, and the choice depends on whether the reader decides to trust Chinaski as a reliable narrator here. After all, most of the characterization of Mary Lou is done by Chinaski directly ascribing attributes to her: either the reader believes Chinaski, that Mary Lou is in fact a con woman and that Chinaski fell into her trap the moment the track cop was escorting her out of the bar, or the reader can decide not to believe Chinaski, reading Mary Lou's character as an ordinary woman who just happened to have a very jealous ex-boyfriend who attacks Chinaski. Anyhow, she represents the classic character model of a femme fatale, because in both interpretations Chinaski is first seduced by her and later gets into trouble with Hector. Her characterization is done by following a top-down process: first applying the character model of the femme fatale and then filling the category with given information. Mary Lou does not surprise the reader as the surprising reaction in the situation is Chinaski's, not Mary Lou's. Therefore she is a flat character. However, there is some depth to her as she is an ambiguous character and therefore the reader can sense what Forster calls the beginning of the curve towards the round character.

After Mary Lou Chinaski has a long relationship with a woman called Fay:

It's not a new story how women descend upon a man. You think you have space to breathe, then you look up and there's another one. A few days after returning to work, there was another one. Fay. Fay had grey hair and always dressed in black. She said she was protesting the war. But if Fay wanted to protest the war, that was all right for me. She was a writer of some sort and went to a couple of writers' workshops. She had ideas about Saving the World. If she could Save it for me, that would be all right too. She had been living off alimony checks from a former husband – they had had three children – and her mother also sent money now and then. Fay had not had more than one or two jobs in her life. (2002, 143)

Chinaski states that Fay is attending writers' workshops, but does not mention that Fay would be actively writing something. The only writing-related issue they discuss is Fay's friend in the workshop, Robby, who "was a guy nearing 40 who had lived with his mother all his life. All he wrote, I was told, were terribly funny stories about the Catholic Church" (2002, 145). Robby had

lost his job as a delivery truck driver and was in search for a new job. Chinaski suggests that Robby should try to get a job at the post office, but Fay states that Robby is “too sensitive to work at the post office” (2002, 145).

After some time, Fay gets pregnant. Her exact age is not mentioned, but Chinaski comments that “for an old gal, she was all right” (2002, 152). Fay names the child Marina Louise Chinaski.

Later in the story Fay decides to move out:

Then two nights in a row when I came home in the mornings, the early mornings, Fay was sitting up reading the classified sections.

“All these rooms are so damned expensive,” she said.

“Sure,” I said.

The next night I asked her as she read the paper:

“Are you moving out?”

“Yes.”

“All right. I’ll help you find a place tomorrow. I’ll drive you around.”

I agreed to pay her a sum each month. She said, “All right.”

Fay got the girl. I got the cat. (2002, 160)

The break-up happens with no previous textual cues that would point the reader to expect it.

Chinaski comments that he helped Fay move in and went over to see Marina three or four times a week. About Fay he says:

Fay was still wearing black to protest the war. She attended local peace demonstrations, love-ins, went to poetry readings, workshops, communist party meetings, and sat in a hippie coffee house. She took the child with her. If she wasn’t out she was sitting in a chair smoking cigarette after cigarette and reading. She wore protest buttons on her black blouse. (2002, 160)

After some time Fay decides to move again, this time to a hippie commune in New Mexico. She takes the child with her.

Fay is a typical dirty realism character: she is unemployed because she lives off alimony checks and spends her days smoking cigarettes and participating in peace demonstrations and writers’ workshops. As a character, she is a comment on certain type of writers. Fay uses her time concentrating in other issues than the actual writing process. Her characterization happens through

direct textual ascription of properties (such as “Fay liked to save empty jars and jar lids” [1971, 144]) and through inferences that can be drawn from textual cues (one can conclude that she is part of the hippie movement because she protests war and goes to peace demonstrations). She is a flat character because she does not surprise the reader in a convincing way.

In addition to these five female characters, *Post Office* has a variety of minor female characters. Early in the story Chinaski is delivering a registered letter and a woman grabs the letter without signing the receipt. Chinaski describes her: “She had on one of those see-through negligees and no brasserie. Just dark blue panties. Her hair was uncombed and stuck out as if it were trying to run away from her. [...] She had on a touch of lipstick, and she was *built* all the way...” (2002, 36). Chinaski has sex with the woman while the woman screams that she is being raped. This scene is controversial because of Chinaski’s unreliable narration: either Chinaski really raped her or Chinaski is misreporting. When Chinaski resigns from the post office he talks to a “thin old woman. Her hair was grey and she had very thin neck that suddenly bent in the middle. It pushed her head forward and she looked up over the top of her glasses at me” (2002, 50). When Chinaski is on a wrong floor and accidentally enters another apartment he sees “a woman on the couch. She looked all right. Young. Good legs. Blonde” (2002, 103). In Betty’s funeral Chinaski meets a woman (whose name is exceptionally given): “the subnormal sister of the owner of the hotel. Her name was Marcia. Marcia never said anything. She just sat around with this inane smile on her lips. Her skin was white as enamel. She had a mop of dead yellow hair and a hat that would not fit.” (2002, 112). When Fay is having a baby Chinaski describes the nurse: “I motioned the nurse to put the child down, then waved goodbye to both of them. She was a nice nurse. Good legs, good hips. Fair breasts” (2002, 155).

All these characters – the five women Chinaski has a relationship with and the minor female characters – and their characterization process share certain similarities. A pattern can be recognized as in his narration Chinaski rarely describes their appearance in detail: the only bits of

information the reader is given are normally hair color, type of clothing worn and Chinaski's evaluation of the physical qualities of the women. All the characters fit into the definition of a typical dirty realism character: ordinary every-day lower or middle class people, some unemployed, some alcoholic. The reader does not have to be familiar with the character model beforehand, as Betty, the first major female character, introduces the model for the reader. After an array of similar characters is thrown to the stage to fulfill their function in the narrative, the reader becomes familiar with the model and starts to apply the model to every new female character – it becomes safe for the reader to expect similar characters and characterizations. Most of the minor female characters in *Post Office* are plot devices – their function is to fulfill a role in order to advance the plot. Hence they appear briefly, fulfill their purpose and disappear. The major female characters, Chinaski's love interests, could be considered plot devices as well, as their primary function in the story is to be with Chinaski and they are depicted not having a life of their own outside the orbit of Chinaski.

Finally, I will discuss the topic often brought up when discussing Bukowski's work: the objectification of women. It is a fruitful topic especially for critics, and often observations made of the text lead into conclusions about the author:

Bukowski's antics with women, his thoughts about them, are one vast and sniggering cliché. He has nothing to tell us about them because, I'm convinced, he knows nothing about them [...] and is determined at this point not to learn. They are a dirty joke to him, a dirty joke on him. (Fulton 1973, 31)

This kind of opinion can be justified with evidence from the text, but the conclusion is pure speculation and a classic example of mixing Chinaski the character and Bukowski the author. However, the observation is valid. The focusing on the object of narration and the stripping of fiction to the least amount of words is a genre convention and a stylistic characteristic of Chinaski's narration, which in turn leads into objectification of women. Consider the characterization of the nurse that I previously discussed. She is introduced as “a very handsome nurse, dark, Spanish or Portuguese” (2002, 154) and later described as “a nice nurse” with “good legs, good hips. Fair

breasts” (2002, 155). The characterization makes her almost inhuman: she is reduced from a human being into a profession. No name is given and no mental qualities are mentioned, only physical. For Chinaski she is nothing more than an object with a profession and an appearance. The only conversation that they have according to Chinaski’s narration is the nurse telling Chinaski that “[y]ou... must go... now” (2002, 154). As a character the nurse is part of sexist and stereotypical pop-culture imagery, a masculine fantasy of a sexually attractive nurse. In Chinaski’s narration objectifying plain characterizations like this become a pattern for characterizing minor characters.

3.2.2 *Factotum*

Factotum is the story of Chinaski’s early adulthood: his time spent drifting around the United States from “one dead-end job to another, from one woman to another and from one bottle to the next” (2009, back cover). Whereas in *Post Office* Chinaski has several short relationships with women, in *Factotum* he only has one relationship that can be considered a steady one. *Factotum* introduces a varied cast of female characters that is different from the cast of *Post Office*: the characters now have other functions in the story, other than just being Chinaski’s love interests. For example, the cast includes a number of female co-workers as Chinaski often finds himself in a new job (whereas in *Post Office* there is only Vi), a female hustler trio and Chinaski’s mother.

Factotum begins with a similar technique as *Post Office*: a reader unknown to the genre is introduced to the basic subject matter and the character model with the very first character:

The rain stopped and the sun came out. I was in the black district. I walked along slowly.

“Hey, poor white trash!”

I put my suitcase down. A high yellow was sitting on the porch steps swinging her legs. She did look good.

“Hello, poor white trash!”

I didn’t say anything. I just stood there looking at her.

“How’d you like a piece of ass, poor white trash?”

She laughed at me. She had her legs crossed high and she kicked her feet; she had nice legs, high heels and she kicked her legs and laughed. I picked up my suitcase and began to approach her up the walk. As I did I noticed a side curtain on a window to my left move just a bit. I saw a black man's face. He looked like Jersey Joe Wolcott. I backed down the pathway to the sidewalk. Her laughter followed me down the street. (2009, 1)

Her proposition can hardly be taken seriously as it is followed by laughter: she is only mocking Chinaski. The characterization process is similar to the one in *Post Office*. The character is unnamed and Chinaski gives a superficial description of her appearance.

The first plot-wise major female character is Chinaski's mother. Chinaski visits home and his mother is delighted to see him: "My mother screamed when she opened the door. 'Son! Is that you, son?' 'I need some sleep.' 'Your bedroom is always waiting.'" (2009, 11) Unlike with other female characters, Chinaski does not describe the appearance of his mother. Her name remains unknown to the reader as well. All the characterization information must be derived from her actions rather than from Chinaski's direct descriptions: the mother is in charge of preparing dinner and has recently found a job. When Chinaski comes home late at night – escorted by the local police – he starts a fight with his father. The mother screams "*You Hit Your Father! You Hit Your Father! You Hit Your Father!*" (2009, 15) and interrupts their fight by ripping open one side of Chinaski's face with her fingernails. The situation calms down as fast as it escalated and Chinaski goes to his room. A few days later he moves out as he cannot afford the rent his father is charging from him. As a character the mother functions merely as a plot device – the same can be said of the father as well. Although Chinaski's "bedroom is always waiting", he is not welcome in his own childhood home, thus he must continue his drifting. The mother is a flat character as the reader can hardly be surprised of the mother's reaction when Chinaski attacks his father.

After moving out Chinaski encounters Martha, a fellow-lodger in a rooming house. She is described as "a fat woman in her mid-forties" (2009, 20), wearing "a loose green smock" (2009, 21), with legs that are "very white, fat, flabby, with bulging purple veins" (2009, 21). Martha tells

Chinaski that she is a prostitute whose main source of income is the owner of a department store who gives her money. Martha starts dancing for Chinaski, when suddenly

her eyes narrowed. I was sitting on the edge of the bed. She leapt on me before I could move. Her open mouth was pressed on mine. It tasted of spit and onions and stale wine and (I imagined) the sperm of four hundred men. She pushed her tongue into my mouth. It was thick with saliva, I gagged and pushed her off. She fell on her knees, tore open my zipper, and in a second my soft pecker was in her mouth. She sucked and bobbed. Martha had a small yellow ribbon in her short grey hair. There were warts and big brown moles on her neck and cheeks. [...]

Sucking sounds filled the room as my radio played Mahler. I felt as if I were being eaten by a pitiless animal. My pecker rose, covered with spittle and blood. The sight of it threw her into a frenzy. I felt as if I was being eaten alive.

If I come, I thought desperately, I'll never forgive myself. (2009, 22)

This kind of initiative taking is something completely new for a Bukowski's female character. The previous female characters have mainly been submissive to Chinaski's control, but here Chinaski is clearly losing the control. According to Harrison,

The last sentence is one of the funniest in all of Bukowski's writings. Rarely has the mind-body split been presented so comically. The tactic Bukowski uses is [...] Chinaski's reluctance to lose control – in a comic way.

Here the male has completely lost control; while the scene is comic, it is the comic transformation of the male's ultimate nightmare: he – or at least his penis – has fallen prey to a sexually devouring woman. The depiction of a wounded and terrified Chinaski radically contravenes our traditional expectations. [...]

Chinaski, in a tactic not unknown in Bukowski, gives the woman money afterwards, although she hasn't mentioned payment and, indeed, seems content with the pleasure she has derived from the act itself. Commodifying the act is the male's last-gasp attempt to maintain control and escape his victimization (inherent in his being treated as an object) by reversing the roles. This passage represents something quite unusual in the presentation of a male protagonist in American fiction. Though it does not depict the woman positively, indeed not even as fully human, neither is it the language of simple chauvinism, and its significance lies as much in what it reveals about men and the masculine role as in its degradation of women. (1994, 187-188)

The comic aspect makes this scene one of the most powerful events in *Women*. For a moment the reader cannot find anything positive to identify with in the narrative: Martha is described almost as an inhuman predator and Chinaski is desperately clinging to the last remains of his masculinity. The

characterization process of Martha follows the already-established pattern: the reader can easily recognize her as a typical dirty realism character and can apply the dirty realism character model. Chinaski describes her hair colour, appearance and even gives a little background information of her. It is controversial whether Martha can surprise the reader in a convincing way: the reader is not surprised that a prostitute has sex with Chinaski, but in the context of Bukowski's writing it is surprising that a female character is given this much control in a situation. Martha could also be what Forster described a flat character pretending to be round as she surprises the reader in an unconvincing way. Martha is the first character to break the pattern of female characters being the objects and Chinaski being the subject. In this scene, Martha is the force that drives the story forwards and therefore I would argue that in Martha the reader begins to see the curve towards the round character. However, her appearance in the novel is a brief one, and therefore the evolution of this character is disrupted. As a character she has potential that is never fully utilized and thus she remains a flat character.

After arriving in St. Louis Chinaski rents a room and meets two girls:

One was a bit on the fat side but scrubbed, shining, in a flowery pink dress. She had a kind face. The other wore a wide tight belt that accentuated her very good figure. Her hair was long, dark, and she had a cute nose; she wore high heels, had perfect legs, and wore a white low cut blouse. Her eyes were dark brown, very dark, and they kept looking at me, amused, very amused.

"I'm Gertrude," she said, "and this is Hilda." [...]

Gertrude moved nearer my bed. Hilda remained where she was, pink and scrubbed and blushing. Gertrude pivoted back and forth on her very high heels. (2009, 35)

Chinaski keeps seeing Gertrude in the hallway but Hilda is mentioned only once after this. Chinaski has a clear interest in Gertrude and later describes her as

perfect, pure maddening sex, and she knew it, and she played on it, dripped it, and allowed you to suffer for it. It made her happy. I didn't feel too bad either. [...] Like most men in that situation I realized that I wouldn't get anything out of her – intimate talks, exciting roller-coaster rides, long Sunday afternoon walks – until after I had made some odd promises. (2009, 39)

Chinaski takes her out on a date. During the date Gertrude looks at a soldier and comments that he looks handsome with all his medals on. This does not make Chinaski happy as he immediately wants to, and does, exit the bar. Later he checks out of the rooming house, thinking that after the war is over Gertrude and Hilda will not have a problem finding men. As characters Gertrude and Hilda are fine examples of Chinaski's power as the narrator: Hilda, uninteresting to Chinaski, remains relatively unknown to the reader. She has no voice, either because she spoke nothing to Chinaski or because of Chinaski's underreporting. Gertrude, on the other hand, has a voice and her characterization process involves more than just Chinaski superficially commenting her appearance. As no background story or context for these characters are given, the reader cannot safely apply the dirty realism character model: it is unclear whether they are employed or not and no indication of social problems is given. They are both flat characters as they do not surprise the reader.

Later in the story Chinaski meets a trio of women – Laura, Grace and Jerry – who live with an eccentric alcoholic millionaire, Wilbur Oxnard. Oxnard is writing an opera and Chinaski is accepted into the fold to write the libretto. Chinaski first meets Laura at a bar:

I walked along until I came to an inviting bar and went in. It was crowded. There was only one seat left at the bar. I sat in it. I ordered a scotch and water. To my right sat a rather dark blonde, gone a bit to fat, neck and cheeks now flabby, obviously a drunk; but there was a certain lingering beauty to her features, and her body still looked firm and young and well-shaped. In fact, her legs were long and lovely. When the lady finished her drink I asked her if she wanted another. She said yes. I bought her one. [...]

I paid for three or four more rounds. We didn't speak.

Then I told the lady, "That drink was it. I'm broke."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes."

"Do you have a place to stay?"

"An apartment, two or three days left on the rent."

"And you don't have any money? Or anything to drink?"

"No."

"Come with me." (2009, 47)

Laura is introduced with a familiar pattern: the description "obviously a drunk" invites the reader to apply the dirty realism character model. Chinaski's description begins negatively with words such

as fat and flabby, but then suddenly turn towards the positive: firm, young and well-shaped. The reader gets the impression that Chinaski does not like what he sees at first, but then, after a closer inspection, gives her his acceptance. This, in turn, has an effect how the reader familiarizes oneself with the character. Grace's and Jerry's appearance is not clearly described, other than that they "were in their mid-thirties, attractive and very sexy, and they knew it" (2009, 51). Grace is Oxnard's main girl but Jerry has tricked him to sign a paper that forces Oxnard to pay her fifty bucks a month for the rest of her life. Alcohol finally kills Oxnard so the trio and Chinaski find themselves at a bar reflecting the situation:

"Shit," said Grace. "I'm fucked."

"You're fucked," said Jerry, "I still got my fifty a month."

"And your round, fat ass," said Grace.

"And my round, fat ass," said Jerry.

Laura and I knew we were fucked. There was no need to say it.

We all sat there at the bar attempting to think of a next move. (2009, 61-62)

In this point it is clear that all three (and Chinaski) were just taking advantage of Oxnard and his money. After Oxnard's passing all four go in separate ways and never meet again. In the hustling game there are no gender limits: all four are presented as equal players, and ultimately Jerry becomes the winner. Laura, Grace and Jerry are all flat characters as they do not surprise the reader: they are introduced as conwomen and they continue running the con as long as they can. After the enabler of this game dies, the game is over and the characters have fulfilled their function in the story and are never met again.

After the Oxnard-episode, the reader is introduced with another female character, Jan, who is Chinaski's long-time love interest in the story:

We had met at an open air lunch counter – I was spending my last fifty cents on a greasy hamburger – and we struck up a conversation. She bought me a beer, gave me her phone number, and three days later I moved in to her apartment. [...]

Jan looked a lot like Laura – only she was leaner and prettier, with shoulder length blonde hair and blue eyes. She was strange; she was always hot in the morning with her hangovers. I was not so hot in the mornings with mine. I was a night man. But at night

she was always screaming and throwing things at me: telephones, telephone books [...] She was an unusual woman. (2009, 66-67)

Chinaski meets Jan as he had met Laura: he is broke and the woman takes the initiative and takes care of Chinaski. Jan is an unemployed alcoholic who spends her days drinking and hanging around with Chinaski. Later she finds job as a chambermaid. She does not seem to have a life of her own outside Chinaski's orbit. They live a simple life as they have "nothing to do but drink wine and make love" (2009, 73) She is a typical dirty realism character and the reader can safely apply the dirty realism character model. She represents the theme of unfaithfulness of women:

Most of the evening fell into a pattern. She'd argue, grab her purse and be gone out the door. [...] I knew she was out there, and I knew there would be somebody else. [...]

This particular evening I sat there and something just broke in me, I could feel it breaking, something churned and rose in me and I got up and [...] walked along past the bars and I knew she was in one of them. I made a guess, walked in, and there was Jan sitting at the far end of the bar. She had a green and white silk scarf spread across her lap. She was sitting between a thin man with a large wart on his nose, and another man who was a little humped mound of a thing wearing bifocals and dressed in an old black suit.

Jan saw me coming. She lifted her head and even in the gloom of the bar she seemed to pale. I walked up behind her, standing near her stool. "I tried to make a woman out of you but you'll never be anything but a god damned whore!" I back-handed her and knocked her off her stool. She fell flat on the floor and screamed. I picked up her drink and finished it. Then I slowly walked toward the exit. When I got there I turned. "Now, if there's anybody here... who doesn't *like* what I just did... just say so."

There was no response. I guess they liked what I just did. I walked back out on Alvarado street. (2009, 82-83)

Here we can see a clear narrative distance in Chinaski and the implied author. Chinaski and Jan have a long relationship and Chinaski commits numerous acts of infidelity but constantly blames Jan of being unfaithful. Chinaski acts hypocritical and comments

She acted very angry, but it was just a cover for her own guilt. I couldn't understand why I didn't get rid of her. She was compulsively unfaithful – she'd go off with anyone she met in a bar, and the lower and the dirtier he was the better she liked it. She was continually using our arguments to justify herself. I kept telling myself that all the women in the world weren't whores, just mine. (2009, 108)

Here the implied author knows that Chinaski could as well be describing himself with these words: Chinaski himself is compulsively unfaithful too and goes off with anyone he meets in a bar. Jan becomes a victim of negative characterization as her character is used as a plot device to make a point about unfaithfulness in general. The reader does not get any “hard” evidence of Jan’s unfaithfulness – all one has is Chinaski’s word for it, which cannot always be trusted. Chinaski and Jan finally end their relationship when they both run out of money:

The day before I had helped Jan move in with a fat real estate operator who lived on Kingsley Drive. [...] We’d been evicted from our apartment. I had \$2.08. Jan promised me she’d be waiting when my luck changed but I hardly believed that. (2009, 156)

Jan is a flat character as she does not surprise the reader in a convincing way. Her characterization process follows the familiar pattern of Chinaski superficially describing her appearance and providing no background story.

Finally I will discuss a number of Chinaski’s co-workers. The post office is described as a fairly masculine place in *Post Office*: most of Chinaski’s co-workers are men. Vi works at the post office as well but at a different station so Chinaski does not really see her at work. Later in the story Chinaski is studying to pass a scheme where he needs to stick mail correctly and a girl is studying next to him. But this does not mean that *Post Office* would be stating that women do not work – there are female nurses, Betty finds job as a waitress and Joyce finds job at the county police department. In *Factotum*, Chinaski works at various places with female co-workers and in general women at work places equal relationship troubles for him. Chinaski meets Carmen at a company where he is working as a shipping clerk:

She was the manager’s secretary. Her name was Carmen – but despite the Spanish name she was a blonde and she wore tight knitted dresses, high spiked heels, nylons, garter belt, her mouth was thick with lipstick, but, oh, she could shimmy, she could shake, she wobbled while bringing the orders up to the desk, she wobbled back to the office, all the boys watching every move, every twitch of her buttocks; wobbling, wiggling, wagging. [...] But, finally, with Carmen pressing me, I led her into one of the boxcars we were unloading at the rear of the warehouse and I took her standing up in

the back of one of those boxcars. It was good, it was warm; I thought of blue sky and wide clean beaches, yet it was sad – there was definitely a lack of human feeling that I couldn't understand or deal with. (2009, 64)

Carmen's character type draws upon general habitus knowledge in a society: the attractive secretary. She is described as the object of desire of all men in the work place. As Carmen is introduced the reader can safely apply this character model. Chinaski describes her appearance using a familiar pattern: hair colour, clothing and an evaluation of how she is physically built. Carmen is a flat character as she does not surprise the reader. The narrative distance between the implied author and the narrator is visible in Chinaski's comment of the lack of human feeling: the implied author is suggesting that Carmen is such a shallow character that even Chinaski does not see her as fully human. Later Chinaski lies at a job interview and finds a job as a shipping clerk at an art supply store. There he meets two female co-workers, Mary Lou and "a Japanese girl":

Mary Lou was one of the girls in the front office. [...] One of her jobs was to bring a copy of the orders back to me after she had typed them. [...] The first time she came back with some orders she wore a tight black skirt, high heels, a white blouse, and a gold and black scarf around her neck. She had a cute turned-up nose, a marvelous behind and fine breasts. She was tall. Class. (2009, 135-136)

The next thing that happened was that they hired a Japanese girl. I had always had a very strange idea, for a long time, that after all the trouble and pain was over, that a Japanese girl would come along one day and we would live happily ever after. [...]

So I was very taken with the new girl. [...] So the first day she came back with the orders I said, "Hey, let's touch. I want to kiss you."

"What?" [...]

I kept after her like a horny redneck drunk on beer in a Greyhound bus passing through Texas. She was intrigued – she understood my craziness. I was enchanting her without realizing it. (2009, 144-145)

As characters they represent the theme introduced by Carmen: women in work places distract men and lead into problems. They are not described in terms of their skillfulness or dedication to their work, rather by the sexual tension their presence leads into. The reader can apply a similar character

model as with Carmen. Mary Lou and the Japanese girl are both flat characters and their characterization is done mainly by Chinaski directly ascribing properties to them.

In summary, the female characters in *Factotum* are more diverse than in *Post Office*. Although the characterization still mainly depends on character models, not all female characters are typical dirty realism characters. Bukowski is letting the female characters speak for themselves as Chinaski is not in control of every situation. All the female characters in *Factotum* are typical flat characters as they do not surprise the reader, except for Martha, where the reader can sense the beginning of the curve towards the round.

3.2.3 Women

The story of *Women* continues where *Post Office* left the reader: Chinaski has just resigned from the post office and is beginning his career as a successful writer. He has one problem though: the female sex is a mystery for him, hence he is unable to write convincing female characters. In order to fix this problem he starts doing research by having relationships with women so that he would learn as much as he can from them to become a better writer:

I had to taste women in order to really know them, to get inside of them. I could invent men in my mind because I was one, but women, for me, were almost impossible to fictionalize without first knowing them. So I explored them as best I could and I found human beings inside. (2007, 227)

Some metafictional commentary is offered here: Bukowski's female characters in *Post Office* and *Factotum* are, as I have discussed in the previous subchapters, flat, somewhat similar and built depending on character models and now here we have Bukowski writing how Chinaski wants to learn how to write better female characters.

Harrison has taken notice of this evolution of female characters as well: "just in the seven years between *Post Office* (1971) and *Women* (1978) there was an increased subtlety of characterization, a more nuanced treatment of psychological dynamics and less reliance on

stereotypes” (1994, 183). He states that *Women* marks a change in Bukowski’s style as the depiction of women and sexual relationships slowly shifted from “crude descriptions of events and flat characterizations of women to fuller descriptions, more rounded characterizations and female characters who, it was suggested, had lives outside the orbit of Henry Chinaski” (1994, 184). While this is true for some female characters in *Women*, it is a simplified generalization: there are still plenty of flat characterizations and crude descriptions of events.

Women differs from *Post Office* and *Factotum* in a way that it includes an extensive cast of female characters. Therefore some categorization is needed in order to keep my analysis within readable limits as a discussion of over twenty characters would be far too large-scale. A couple of characters deserve their own discussion, the rest I will group together in reasonable categories.

The first female character that I will discuss is Lydia. Harrison describes Chinaski’s relationship to her as (1994, 198) “Bukowski’s most successful attempt at presenting such a relationship in depth and [...] at creating a ‘round’ character other than the protagonist”. She is Chinaski’s love interest for a long time in the beginning of the story and she is introduced to the reader on the first pages:

I’m not sure when I first saw Lydia Vance. It was about 6 years ago and I had just quit a twelve year job as a postal clerk and was trying to be a writer [...]

I think I met Lydia Vance at my first poetry reading. [...]

Then during a lull Lydia Vance walked up. I was sitting at a table drinking beer. She put both hands on the edge of the table, bent over and looked at me. She had long brown hair, quite long, a prominent nose, and one eye didn’t quite match the other. But she projected vitality – you knew that she was there. I could feel vibrations running between us. [...] Lydia Vance had on a suede cowgirl jacket with a fringe around the neck. Her breasts were good. I told her, “I’d like to rip that fringe off your jacket – we could begin there!” Lydia walked off. It hadn’t worked. I never knew what to say to the ladies. But she had a behind. (2007, 7-8)

Later she visits Chinaski’s home, gives him a couple of pages of poetry she has written and leaves, saying she’s paying a baby sitter. Then a few days later Chinaski wakes up by a knocking on the front door: it is Lydia who is saying that she is a sculptress and that she wants to sculpt Chinaski’s

head. Chinaski starts visiting Lydia's home and Lydia starts working on the clay. She questions Chinaski:

“Why do you write about women the way you do?”
 “Like what?”
 “You know.”
 “No, I don't”
 “Well, I think it's a damned shame that a man who writes as well as you do just doesn't know anything about women.” (2007, 11)

When the sculpture is finished Chinaski describes it: “Lydia hadn't spared me. The scars were there, the alcoholic nose, the monkey mouth, the eyes narrowed to slits, and there was the dumb, pleased grin of a happy man, ridiculous, feeling his luck and wondering why. She was 30 and I was over 50. I didn't care” (2007, 13). A comparison is being made: Lydia questions Chinaski's ability to describe the opposite sex accurately in his art, and in her own art she appears to be able to realistically capture Chinaski's being. Lydia's introduction does not indicate any ready-made character model, but later serves as the basis for other characters. The key is how Chinaski and Lydia (and later a number of other women) meet: in a poetry reading. Chinaski's profession has become an enabler of relationships, a conversation starter and a means for meeting new people. Some of the women seem to be interested in Chinaski only because he is a writer, which would make them some kind of groupies. Lydia's appearance is described in a familiar pattern: hair color, clothing and Chinaski's evaluation of the character's physical appearance.

Lydia's back story is soon offered to the reader (2007, 18): her father had died, leaving some money to all four sisters, which enabled Lydia to divorce her husband. Lydia has had a mental breakdown and has spent some time in a madhouse. This bit of information will prove valuable to the reader later in the story, as Lydia's character becomes more and more neurotic, chaotic and unpredictable. Chinaski states that the problem is his drinking: “Lydia and I were always fighting. She was a flirt and it irritated me. [...] She loved sex and my drinking got in the way of our lovemaking. [...] We split up at least once a week – ‘Forever’ – but always managed to make up,

somehow” (2007, 33). Lydia constantly accuses Chinaski of infidelity (although not always in vain) and loses her temper in situations like:

I got out of the car with Valerie and Lydia looked at us. “Who’s that?” asked Valerie. “The woman I love,” I told her.
 “Who’s the bitch?” screamed Lydia. [...]
 “I came here to give this letter to you and it looks like I came at the right time. Who was she?” [said Lydia]
 “Bobby’s wife. We’re just friends.”
 “You were going to fuck her, weren’t you?”
 “Now look, I told her I love *you*.” [...]
 Suddenly she shoved me. I was standing in front of the coffee table which was in front of the couch. I fell backward over the coffee table and into the space between the table and the couch. I heard the door slam. And as I got up I heard the engine of Lydia’s car start. Then she drove off. (2007, 34-35)

This unpredictability is the basis of the roundness of Lydia’s character. Although the reader knows that she is a bit unstable and perhaps knows to wait for something unpredictable, her character still manages to surprise the reader numerous times. On one page she is dreaming of having a baby with Chinaski and on the next page she is attacking him “in a spitting rage, snarling, her lips pulled back [...] like a leopardess”, ripping off a sleeve from Chinaski’s coat and finally when Chinaski tries to escape the situation she follows him and starts to beat on the hood of the car: “*I’ll kill this car!*” she screamed. *‘I’ll kill this car!’*” (2007, 39). Despite having these fierce fights, they continue their stormy relationship. Later in the story they have a telephone conversation about Chinaski’s drinking habits:

Lydia phoned me in the morning. “Whenever you get drunk,” she said, “I’m going out dancing. I went to the Red Umbrella last night and I asked men to dance with me. A woman has a right to do that.” [...]
 “If you don’t want my pussy,” she said, “I’ll give it to somebody else.”
 “That’s your privilege.” (2007, 44-45)

This is another feature in Lydia where the reader senses roundness in her character: unlike many other Bukowski’s female characters, she is actually able to speak up for herself and she appears to have her own life outside Chinaski’s orbit. For a female character she serves a surprisingly large

purpose for the narrative: her function is not just limited in entering the stage, fulfilling her purpose and exiting the stage. She plays a major part in the story as she and Chinaski have an on/off relationship and they break up and get back together several times in the story. A couple of times Chinaski even wonders where Lydia is and what she might be doing, even if they have not been together for a long time. During their off phases Chinaski often has relationships with other women, but abandons them when a possibility to get back together with Lydia appears.

Besides Lydia the only other characters that have a longer role in the story are Bobby and Valerie, a peculiar pair who live close to Chinaski. They are a couple who often spend time in Chinaski's apartment, but otherwise their part is a minor one. I will discuss them both as they have a common function in the narrative, but I will mainly focus on Valerie. It is worth notice that Valerie is introduced through Bobby:

I had a young friend, Bobby, a rather bland kid who worked in a porno bookstore and was a photographer on the side. He lived a couple of blocks away. Bobby was having trouble with himself and with his wife, Valerie. He phoned one evening and said he was bringing Valerie over to stay the night with me. It sounded fine. Valerie was 22, absolutely lovely, with long blond hair, mad blue eyes and a beautiful body. Like Lydia, she had also spent some time in a madhouse. [...] I remembered Bobby telling me that when he first introduced Valerie to his parents they had commented on her dress – that they liked it very much – and she had said, “Yeah, well how about the rest of me?” She had pulled her dress up over her hips. And didn't have any panties on. (2007, 34)

Valerie's appearance is described using a familiar pattern: hair colour and Chinaski's evaluation of her physical appearance is mentioned. A character model cannot be safely applied as she does not appear to be a typical dirty realism character, although a direct comparison to Lydia and her medical history is being made. If the reader thinks that this character is like Lydia and assumes that Valerie will be chaotic, neurotic and unpredictable as well, the text will prove the reader wrong later, as Valerie's character is built using another approach. Later in the story one of Chinaski's love interests, Mindy, is banished by Lydia and Mindy seeks refuge at Bobby and Valerie's place. Bobby

tells Chinaski that Valerie tried to cheer her up by taking her out shopping. Chinaski breaks up with Mindy and as he exits, wonders:

I walked back to my place thinking, I wonder if Bobby fucked Mindy? Bobby and Valerie were into lots of strange new things. I didn't care for their lack of common feeling. It was the *way* they did everything without any show of emotion. The same way another person might yawn or boil a potato. (2007, 81)

This suggests that Valerie and Bobby are in an open relationship, as previously Chinaski has stated that Bobby “was crazy to pass her around” (2007, 34). Chinaski’s comment reveals that in his thinking it is not problematic if one does not stay loyal to the other; it becomes problematic when one is disloyal without emotion. This could be Chinaski’s way of justifying his own disloyalty.

One day Chinaski trips in his bedroom and gets a cut in his leg. Bobby knocks on the door, enters and comments that Chinaski should do something about his leg. Immediately after that there is another knock on the door and Valerie enters and screams. Chinaski casually pours drinks to everyone and the phone rings. Lydia is calling, Chinaski answers and Valerie takes the phone:”It’s true, his ankle is cut open. There’s blood everywhere and he won’t do anything about it. You better come over...” (2007, 88). This rational behavior starts the positive characterization of Valerie: “Valerie was all right when you got her alone, she was intelligent and very energetic and damned honest” (2007, 105), “she worked two nights a week as a barmaid” (2007, 119) and later she phones Chinaski when she sees that Chinaski’s car is parked with the door open (2007, 160).

Bobby and Valerie are later going on a vacation and renting a room by the seashore in Manhattan Beach and decide to invite Chinaski and his current love interest Cecelia with them. After going to a restaurant Chinaski comments how Bobby and Valerie “stole the salt and pepper shakers, two steak knives and the tip I had left for the waiter” (2007, 176). In the rental room, when Cecelia goes out, Valerie tells Chinaski how Cecile had told her that “Hank’s poems are so full of passion, but as a person he’s not that way at all!” (2007, 176). After this conversation the reader learns more about Bobby and Valerie’s relationship: “When my wife is out fucking somebody else

I put on my pyjamas, pull the covers up and go to sleep,' said Bobby. 'He's cool,' said Valerie."

(2007, 176)

The character arc of Bobby and Valerie come to an end when Chinaski is hanging around at their place one drunken evening. Valerie starts a fashion show, putting on different kinds of clothes and walking across the room:

Valerie came prancing out in 8-inch high heels. She could hardly walk. She poked about the room, staggering on her stilts. Her ass poked out and her tiny nipples were hard and stiff, they jutted out under her see-through blouse. She had on a thin gold anklet. She whirled and faced us, made some gentle sexual movements.

"Christ," said Bobby, "Oh... Christ!"

"Holy Jesus Christ Mother of God!" I said. [...]

Each time Valerie came out she looked better, crazier, wilder. [...]

We drank and smoked and Valerie kept coming back with more. One hell of a show.

(2007, 254-255)

Later Bobby and Valerie disappear into the bedroom. Chinaski follows them and finds them naked, having oral sex. Bobby goes into the bathroom and Chinaski starts having sex with Valerie. Bobby returns and asks Chinaski to leave: "'I want you to go back to your place.' [...]' Hey, Cool Papa,' I said to Bobby, 'what's wrong?' 'I just want you out of here.'" (2007, 256) Bobby seems upset of Chinaski's actions although Bobby is in an open relationship with Valerie. Previously he stated that he is fine with Valerie going out and having sex with others, but apparently when it happens in his own home it crosses a line of acceptability. This appears to be the narrative function of the characters of Bobby and Valerie: a commentary on open relationships and sex without emotion. Valerie is a flat character as she does not surprise the reader. She fits the dirty realism character model as she is working part-time and into alcohol in her free time.

The final female character to have her own discussion is Joanna Dover. When Chinaski is seeing a woman named Laura (whom he calls Katherine after Katherine Hepburn) he learns that Laura's ex-husband was seduced by a "tall, stately semi-millionairess" who is "educated and crazy"

(2007, 93): Joanna Dover. A few days later Chinaski meets her and is seduced by her. The reader can safely apply the character model of a femme fatale. Joanna quickly takes the initiative:

We got to talking about painting and I brought out some of mine. She looked at them and decided that she'd like to buy two of them. "How much?" she asked.

"Well, \$40 for the small one and \$60 for the large one."

Joanna wrote me out a check for \$100. Then she said, "I want you to live with me."

"What? This is pretty sudden."

"It would pay off. I have some money. Just don't ask me how much." (2007, 94)

However, Chinaski rejects the offer. He continues his relationship with Laura for a while, but eventually they break up. After the break-up Chinaski decides to contact Joanna Dover and agrees to fly over to Texas to see her. In Texas Joanna lays out the ground rules of their relationship. She tells Chinaski that she has paints for him so he can paint if he wants. Chinaski says "Be kind to me, Joanna, sucking and fucking aren't everything." and Joanna replies "That's why I got the paints. For when you're resting." (2007, 126). They have dinner and after that have a conversation:

Back at Joanna Dover's place we had a delicious bottle of red wine. We sat in the dark watching the few cars pass in the street below. We were quiet. Then Joanna spoke.

"Hank?"

"Yes?"

"Was it some woman who drove you here?"

"Yes." [...]

"Let's fuck" [said Joanna Dover]

"I've drunk too much."

"Let's go to bed."

"I want to drink some more."

"You won't be able to..."

"I know. I hope you'll let me stay four or five days."

"It will depend on your performance," she said.

"That's fair enough." (2007, 127-128)

Finally, their time together comes to an end: "I stayed five days and nights. Then I couldn't get it up any more. Joanna drove me to the airport. She had bought me a new piece of luggage and some new clothing." (2007, 130) As a character Joanna is flat as she does not surprise the reader but the reader can sense the beginning of the curve towards the round character, as she is not an ordinary female

character. She reminds the reader of Martha from *Factotum*: like Martha, Joanna Dover takes control from Chinaski and breaks the pattern of female characters being the objects and Chinaski being the subject. Joanna agrees to support Chinaski as long as he keeps her sexually satisfied. This in turn reverses the traditional gender roles where men are normally seen as providers and women as dependent on men: here Joanna is the provider and Chinaski is dependent of her. When Chinaski can no longer perform, Joanna abandons him. Joanna Dover does not fit in the mold of a typical dirty realism character as she appears to have a steady subsistence, she is highly educated and her life is not depicted as run-of-the-mill. Therefore the reader cannot apply the ready-made outline of a dirty realism character and must build an individual representation of a character.

Next I will discuss a group of three female characters: Dee Dee, Laura and Cecelia. What these three women have in common and what separates them from the rest of Chinaski's love interests (besides Lydia, Valerie and Joanna Dover) is the way Chinaski meets them. Chinaski knows Dee Dee because she used to "drop by my place with her boyfriend when he and I both had columns in a Los Angeles underground newspaper" (2007, 43). He meets Laura at a poetry reading after party but it is to be noted that it is Chinaski taking the initiative and going to talk to her. He meets Cecelia when he flies to Illinois to give a poetry reading and to meet a fellow poet William Keesing, whose soon-to-be ex-wife Cecelia is.

Chinaski first meets Dee Dee by accident: he is walking to his car and Dee Dee is "sitting in her Mercedes" (2007, 43) and shouts out to Chinaski. He learns that Dee Dee is running a famous music company and single. Chinaski gets her phone number, later phones her and goes to meet her:

Dee Dee had a place in Hollywood Hills. [...] Dee Dee was about 40, had black, cropped hair, was Jewish, hip, freaky. She was New York City oriented, knew all the names: the right publishers, the best poets, the most talented cartoonists, the right revolutionaries, anybody, everybody. [...] There was a good deal left of her body. She was small but buxom and many a young girl would have loved to have her figure. (2007, 49)

They continue seeing each other for some time, but finally their relationship comes to an end when Lydia phones Chinaski and Chinaski says that Dee Dee is “a good woman, but if you come back I’ll give her up” (2007, 61).

Chinaski meets Laura at a poetry reading after party in Houston. He describes her as “absolutely the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. She looked like a young Katherine Hepburn. She was about 22, and she just radiated beauty. [...] Her hair was reddish-brown and so very long. She was small but well proportioned. Her face was the most beautiful thing about her.” (2007, 89-90) They continue their relationship for some time and Chinaski starts dreaming about a marriage. Laura’s response to Chinaski’s dreams is that “if you talk that way I’m taking the first plane out. [...] It’s just *sex*, Hank, it’s *just sex!*” (2007, 100) After “4 or 5 more days” (2007, 107) Laura flies back to Houston and they never meet again in the story.

Chinaski meets Cecelia in Illinois. He is giving a poetry reading and staying with a fellow poet called William Keesing. Cecelia is William’s wife but they are in the middle of a divorce process: they do not spend that much time together anymore and William sleeps on the couch. After Chinaski returns to Los Angeles he gets a call from Cecelia, who is saying that soon after Chinaski left William got sick. She took him to a hospital but after a couple of hours he was dead. Cecelia decides to fly to Los Angeles to see Chinaski. On the airport Chinaski comments that she “looked good, albeit a bit plump. She was sturdy, built low, she looked Midwestern, scrubbed. Men looked at her, she had a way of moving her behind; it looked forceful, a bit ominous *and sexy*” (2007, 172). The distinctive feature of her character is her way of stating how she loves things: “I just *love* airports and airport passengers, don’t you?” (2007, 172), “I just love the ocean!” (2007, 175), “I *love* sunrises!” (2007, 180) Cecelia differs from the other characters in a way that she does not enjoy drinking and she does not have sex with Chinaski, although Chinaski continuously keeps asking.

Dee Dee, Laura and Cecelia are all flat characters as they do not surprise the reader. They all vaguely fit the dirty realism character model, although Dee Dee appears not to be lower or middle class as she is an executive in a music company, but otherwise Dee Dee's life with Chinaski is described as everyday and ordinary. However, they are not constantly in trouble for breaking the law or unemployed. They fit the character model only by their social class and through the depiction of their ordinary life. Their introduction follows the familiar pattern of Chinaski giving a rough description of their appearance: only surface information and no information on their persona, background, dreams or hopes. As characters Laura and Cecelia seem to comment on the theme of emotion also seen in Valerie and Bobby. For Laura there is no love in their relationship, just sex, and for Cecilia there is not the kind of love that Chinaski would want, the physical kind, only Cecilia's love for life.

Finally, I will discuss a large group of characters. This category includes a number of female characters (for example, Nicole, Mindy, Tammie, Arlene, Mercedes, Liza, Hilda, Gertrude, Sara, Cassie, Debra, Iris, Tanya, Valencia, and the list continues) that appear somewhat briefly in the story. When Chinaski meets Laura in a poetry after party he comments how she "didn't appear to be a groupie" (2007, 90). This is the only mention of groupies even existing in the whole story, even though all the characters in this final category are basically groupies. They are women who start corresponding with Chinaski after he becomes famous, women whom he meets at poetry readings and after parties and even women who just happen to knock on Chinaski's door as they have found his address in the phone book. In this category I will mainly focus on what kind of function they serve in the narrative.

Chinaski's relationship with Laura is placed in the first third of the book. After this, according to Harrison

a good part of *Women* concerns itself with Chinaski's string of relatively casual affairs, with no one relationship depicted as having any great significance [...] although the narrator is almost always shown as at least somewhat involved emotionally. While the

depiction of intense emotional involvements is foregone, we do have a picture of sex and the American male in the 1970s, the full flowering of the “second phase” of Women’s Liberation. (1994, 206-207)

The relationships follow a distinctive pattern: the female characters seek for Chinaski’s attention, gain it and begin a relationship with Chinaski and soon the relationship ends as fast as it began. As characters the groupies do not have a significant effect on the story: they are introduced, used and abandoned. It is worth notice that these characters form the majority of female characters we meet in *Women*. They are all flat characters as they do not surprise the reader. They function as plot devices whose purpose in the story is to entertain Chinaski and to be the object of his desire.

Gradually their presence forces Chinaski to reflect his own views of women and relationships:

“I’m not a thinker. Every woman is different. Basically they seem to be a combination of the best and the worst – both magic and terrible. I’m glad that they exist, however.” (2007, 188)

“What kind of shit was I? I could certainly play some nasty, unreal games. What was my motive? Was I trying to get even for something? Could I keep on telling myself that it was merely a matter of research, a simple study of the female? [...] I was worse than any whore; a whore took your money and nothing more. I tinkered with lives and souls as if they were my playthings. (2007, 236)

The ending of the novel hints that Chinaski finally finds some closure to his problems: a woman named Rochelle calls her and asks if it is okay to come and visit him. The reader perhaps automatically assumes that next Chinaski will invite her over and they will form some kind of a relationship but surprisingly Chinaski breaks his behavioral pattern and hangs up, goes into the kitchen and eats vitamin tablets with half a glass of Perrier water. He opens the door and goes out on his porch, sees a tomcat and opens a can of tuna for it.

In summary, the female characters in *Women* follow the trend set forth by *Factotum*: some of the characters are diverse and their characterizations rely less on the dirty realism character model. However, *Women* does include a variety of typical dirty realism characters as well: everyday people, the lower and the middle class workers, the alcoholic and the beaten down-by-life. Most of

the female characters in *Women* are heavily objectified but most of them have the ability to speak for themselves. Except for Lydia, all the female characters are flat characters as they do not surprise the reader.

4 Conclusion

In this thesis I have discussed Charles Bukowski's female characters and the narrator Henry Chinaski in *Post Office*, *Factotum* and *Women*. My primary goal was to find out how the female characters are constructed and characterized in the novels and in my discussion I tested two hypotheses: whether the characterizations of female characters depend on character models and whether all Bukowski's female characters in the three novels are flat. Additionally I was interested whether the changes in the society – the ones caused by second wave feminism particularly – are visible in the three novels.

As I discussed in the theory section, a character model is a ready-made outline for a character that the reader applies when a new character is introduced. Characters can be built either depending on ready-made character models or they can be built as individual representations – entities that do not depend on ready-made models. In the beginning of my analysis I discussed the dirty realism genre and argued that there is a dirty realism character model – a model that the reader applies, if cued by the text, whenever a new character is introduced. These characters have clear boundaries as the reader will have a certain set of expectations for them: they are most likely middle or lower middle class, possibly unemployed and their life is depicted as ordinary. As well as a tool for creating a character, a character model is also a tool for the reader to understand a character: it makes the understanding easier by giving the character a ready-made outline.

In my theory section I laid out that in popular culture characters are often built and characterized using character models whereas in high culture these models are often avoided. In my analysis I found out that between *Post Office* and *Women* Bukowski clearly evolves as a writer as there is less and less reliance on character models. The characterizations of the female characters in *Post Office* mainly depend upon character models: they are typical dirty realism characters and mostly function as plot devices. This trend is still visible in *Factotum* as majority of the female characters are typical dirty realism characters. However, some variation can be observed as the

female characters are no longer voiceless objects by default: Bukowski is letting the female characters speak up for themselves. In *Women* there is less and less reliance on the dirty realism character model: most of the female characters are not introduced in a way that would automatically cue the reader to apply the model and many characters are built as individual representations that do not rely on a ready-made outline.

All the female characters in *Post Office* are flat. They are characters who are mostly constructed around a single idea or quality and their narrative purpose is mainly to function as plot devices and to move the plot forward. They are unable to surprise the reader in a convincing way as they are only able to follow the behavioral pattern they are constructed upon. The female characters in *Factotum* share these qualities, except for Martha – a character in which the reader can sense the beginning of the curve towards the round. My analysis supports Harrison's argument of Lydia being Bukowski's most successful attempt at creating a round character, although Harrison is discussing Bukowski's whole bibliography and my scope of analysis is limited to the first three novels. Lydia is successful in surprising the reader in a convincing way numerous times in *Women*.

The characterization processes of the female characters follow a stylistic pattern: after Chinaski introduces a new female character, he often describes their hair color and clothing and evaluates the physical qualities of their appearance in the terms of how attractive he finds them. The characterizations mainly happen through Chinaski directly ascribing information to the characters that the reader must independently verify or reject as Chinaski cannot always be trusted as a narrator and the reader deducting information from the actions of the characters.

The women's movement was the largest social movement in the history of the United States. Its impact on the society was universal in all aspects of personal and public life. The effects that the second wave feminism had on the society are visible in the development of Bukowski's female characters. Women in *Post Office* are mainly unemployed or working on low-paid jobs. They exist through Chinaski in a way that they do not seem to have a life outside Chinaski's orbit. *Post Office*

offers a one-dimensional and simplified view of women as dependent on men. Some development is visible in *Factotum*, but mainly it offers a similar view of women. Although the female characters are seen all around the working life, their presence in the work place seem to equal sexual tension and less concentration on work, hence it depicts a negative image of women in work places. The development becomes positive in *Women*: it offers a more open-minded and varied view of women with its extensive cast of female characters. They occupy other professions than just simple low-paid jobs and are finally able to speak up for themselves. Some of them are even financially so independent that they reverse the traditional role of men as the provider and become the providers for Chinaski. In this sense *Post Office*, *Factotum* and *Women* reflect the changes that second wave feminism had on the society. However, the language in the three novels is and remains somewhat objectifying and sexist as it focuses on the object of narration. The narratological hindrance of Chinaski being unable to narrate other than his own thoughts naturally plays a major role in this.

To conclude, I would say that this thesis has answered some questions and raised some others. An example of a fruitful topic for future discussion that I was unable to include due to the limits in length would be gender performativity in Bukowski's work. Gender identities are never created in isolation, which means that gender is always performed with or for another: does this mean that in Bukowski's work it is always performed with Chinaski as he is the first person narrator and the only focalizer in the story? Another possibility would be to extend the character model discussion into Bukowski's other novels: do the characterizations of female characters depend on character models in *Ham on Rye* and *Hollywood* or does the trend of less character model reliance visible in *Women* continue to develop? Bukowski was also a prolific writer of poems and short stories so for academics interested in Bukowski there is plenty of field to plow.

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