

Geographical and Societal Foot Prints in Bukowski's Works with Reference to Los Angeles

Venkatesha P

Associate Professor, Govt. First Grade College, Davangere

Abstract:

The life and work of Charles Bukowski are heavily influenced by geographical and societal factors of the city Los Angeles. This article looks at how the city has changed throughout his life and works. To highlight the author's distinct perspective on the city and its various sites—that of a disenfranchised insider writing at street level—it places the author into the greater context of Los Angeles' literary depiction. Then it advises recreating the author's dual trajectory and that of his works in relation to the city. Bukowski's urban imaginaries are difficult to grasp because the descriptions do not accurately depict the locations. Although his writings have a coherent spatiality when considered as a whole. Initially quite narrow-minded, the image of the city gradually broadens in terms of geography and society. Despite its fragmentary and patchy nature, the picture of the city and its various social circles gradually gains richness and depth. Finally, the paper makes the case that the geographical imaginary Bukowski created as a result of his experiences in the gritty underbelly of the city shaped his interpretation of L.A.'s social reality as a whole, gave him the themes and language to express it, and gave him his own perspective to make sense of it all.

Keywords: Geographical, Los Angeles, Charles Bukowski, Trajectory, Imaginaries.

1. Introduction

Geographical elements such as climate, location, resources, and stability, as well as societal challenges like poverty, gender inequality, and social exclusion, can all have an impact on individual development. Geography can also have an impact on a person's ability to reach a fair standard of living, such as access to resources, mobility, history, hazards, and comfort. These difficulties may also reinforce one another, generating further barriers for particular groups. People's dress and eating habits, for example, can be influenced by their local climate and plants. Girls and women with impairments, as well as those living in rural regions, may face greater challenges than those in more affluent urban areas. As many great personalities and writers opened that cities can be recognized by their distinct cultural landscape, people, and environment. Certain urban communities are given the name "city" due to a legal or customary distinction that may differ between countries or regions. Many writers' life and their writings are impacted by such cities and shaped differently. As a result their creativity can not to be interpreted without social and geographical trajectory of such cities. This can be applied to the oeuvre of the American writer Charles Bukowski. Charles Bukowski is twentieth century German born and American settled writer hailed from lowlife society of America. He lived and got different experiences in various

cities of America based geographical and social factors and that are captured in his literary oeuvre. This paper makes an effort to unravel that capture from the point of view of landscape and society that too with reference to Los Angeles and American society.

2. The Geographical and Social Impact

As Charles Bukowski revealed that most cities are alike: you've got people, a business district, warehouses, police who hassle you and a bunch of bad poets walking around. Maybe the weather is different, and the people have slightly different accents; that's about it. But, like I said, LA has a spiritual and geographical difference, which, because I've been hanging around it, I've picked up on. I have an acquaintance with LA, you might say. (Bukowski, interviewed by Wennersten in 1974, in Calonne 2003: 90)

Los Angeles might be viewed as the ambiguous and renowned personification of the American Dream, serving as modernity's penultimate stop before traveling west. It's also a particularly interesting area for literary depiction. As David Fine correctly points out, immigrants and exiles drawn to Hollywood's attraction and motivated by the desire for a better life, money, and the ability to reinvent themselves contributed to the development of Los Angeles' literary legacy:

From its beginnings Los Angeles fiction has been a migrant fiction, constructed essentially – and until the past few decades almost exclusively – by men and women who left homes elsewhere, drawn to Los Angeles and Hollywood largely to work as screenwriters. Like immigrant fiction, Los Angeles fiction is double-edged: implicitly, at least, it is about both the place discovered and the place left behind, what is gained and lost in the process of extirpation and resettlement. (Fine 2000: vii-viii)

These writers were "outsiders" to Los Angeles, and their imaginations were confused by the city's strange sprawling urban form and horizontal vertigo, its violence, the "pastiche" nature of its landscapes, and the confusing network of motorways that irrigated an uncontrollable flow of traffic. Los Angeles is "a metropolis constructed of words", thus it might be harder to tell fact from fiction than anywhere else in the world. The city is a sort of semantic geographic puzzle that is nearly impossible to solve; the only way to do so is to compare it to the more famous, crowded, "vertical" urban landscapes of northeastern American cities like Chicago and New York, Boston: Landscape in the Los Angeles novel is always weighted with symbolic meaning. The fact that the writers, as outsiders, were playing the region contrapuntally against a home territory accounts to a large extent for the symbolic quality it acquired in fiction. Charles Bukowski like John Fante, came from elsewhere, "traveled" to these neighborhoods, setting his stories in the seedy bars, cafes, Charles Bukowski's career and writings are unique in many ways that paints brutal and unsparing portraits of the city.

The geographical and social impact of Los Angeles is at the heart of Bukowski's life and writing. The author and his alter-ego Henry Chinaski are only truly at home in this city, which is neither strange, charming, nor seductive. E. Fontana, in *Bukowski's novel Ham on Rye and Los Angeles*, described it as an insignificant, ordinary city, a place completely devoid of exoticism, an everyday realm of the working class and many unemployed, homeless, disinherited, and almost forgotten. Bukowski is one of the few Southern California writers who, despite his success in later years, remained deeply connected to Los Angeles and Southern California, and in a sense, "loyal." Bukowski always felt out of place in the older cities of the Northeast:

Apart from Charles Bukowski, who had fame imposed upon him at the last after a film (Barfly [Schroeder, 1986]) was made of his work, any moderately successful Los Angeles writer who hasn't wanted to

subserve the film industry has found it virtually impossible to resist the gravitational tug of the East. (Murphet 2001: 3)

The Los Angeles landscape, a complex intertwining of the ocean, mountains, valleys and deserts of Southern California, and, more importantly, the constant threat of devastating earthquakes, have indulged in the geographical imagination of many California writers. This was not the case with Bukowski. The city does not have the room for the metaphorical vibrancy and symbolic richness found in many of his writings. Bukowski is a man of the street who writes about the city at street level, a "Skid Row Laureate". He is said to belong to the first generation of writers who portrayed Los Angeles as a familiar place from the inside to the outside, as an "authentic" insider, so to speak. This may be true, but Bukowski also approaches the city from the perspective of a socially and spatially marginalized human being, an "outsider" in a familiar place. He has the privileged perspective of an insider, but he sees and writes about the world he inhabits from the relative distance of his own marginality. For a long time, there were only a few places where he felt at home: bars, side streets, racetracks, grey guesthouses and boarding houses, and a host of soulless, alienating workplaces. Together, these places form a social geography where alcoholics, vagrants, drunks, prostitutes, exhausted coworkers, obnoxious business owners, streetwise innkeepers, smiling waitresses, macho bartenders, petty thugs and gamblers try to cope with their own "ordinary madness." Extremely prolific in many genres like poetry, short stories, novel, letters, etc. Bukowski's writing is known for its simplicity, straightforward, absence of stylistic ornamentation and sentimentality, punchy dialogues and tongue-in-cheek humour. His fascination for life at the bottom, or on the margins of the city stems not only from personal experience, but mostly from the conviction that those are the places where human authenticity can really be found:

Familiar and mundane as these places may be, they remain somewhat puzzling to critics attempting to reconstruct the geography of Bukowski's imagined Los Angeles. His narratives in his novels and short stories mostly take place in general locations, which are not very specific in their descriptions; they are usually named without going into detail. Bukowski does not provide lengthy descriptions of the places from which to extrapolate an interpretation of the city's geography, as literary geographers often do. The places seem taken for granted; they are just "there." Yet these places form an uncompromising prism through which to perceive the city and American society. Bukowski's work offers little material for a literal interpretation of the urban landscape or a sense of place in Los Angeles, but it is certainly not without its own highly consistent spatiality.

Bukowski's writings are extremely prolific in a variety of genres, including poetry, short stories, novels, and letters. They are known for their simplicity, directness, lack of stylistic ornament or sentimentality, punchy dialogue, and ironic humor. His fascination with urban underbelly and suburban life comes not only from personal experience, but above all from the belief that it is here that human authenticity can truly be found. Geographical and social developments go hand in hand in Bukowski's personal life and work. Bukowski's writings closely trace his trajectory from Skid Row, in the shadow of the city's central business district, to the suburban seaport of San Pedro, to a significant extended stay in East Hollywood, where he lived and wrote for almost twenty years. This is reflected in the Bukowski/Chinaski journey. Like Los Angeles itself, it is difficult to separate fact from fiction in Bukowski's life and writing. The initial depiction of the city is very myopic, if not claustrophobic, and gradually becomes more sociologically and geographically complex. The image of the city and its contrasting social world is incomplete and patchy, but gradually gains structure and depth. This depiction of the streets of Los Angeles is at times marginal and provocative, and often eccentric, but, as Harrison argues, it represents a highly

informed critique of the American Dream and one of its greatest urban symbols.

3. Bukowski's Works

It is obviously impossible to interpret Bukowski's body of work and its complex relationship to the city. Not only do different genres require different reading habits, but they do not see the city in the same light or imitate it to the same degree. However, in *Pulp* Bukowski leaves his usual alter ego, Henry Chinaski, and appoints a private investigator who still resembles himself. All his novels are set in Los Angeles, except for the many city trips to New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Atlanta, and New Orleans in *Factotum*. His first novel, *The Post Office*, recounts long, painful days at the Los Angeles Post Office. His second novel *Factotum* follows Chinaski in the aforementioned cities and on Skid Row in Los Angeles as he wanders, drinks, works, and refuses to work in a long list of meaningless jobs. His another novel *Women* depicts Bukowski's slow rise to fame and his tumultuous love life from 1970, when he left his post for good to dedicate his life to writing "full-time", until 1978, when the novel was scheduled for publication. His fifth and Bildungsroman novel *Ham in the Rye* tells the story of the narrator's first two decades of life, from childhood memories to his first trip to downtown Los Angeles in the late 1930s. *Hollywood* tells the epic story of the film *Barfly*, from his signing of a contract with Barbet Schroeder in 1979 to the premiere of the screenplay in 1987. The film encapsulates Chinaski's down-and-out days in Los Angeles in the 1950s and 1960s. Although not autobiographical, Bukowski's recurring Los Angeles location is indirectly connected to his filming in *Pulp*, a parody of crime novels, in which an aging private investigator, Nick Belane, is hired by Lady Death to search for Celine, who has been spotted in Los Angeles.

Most of Bukowski's short stories bear no resemblance to his life. But many of them have a good relationship with the Los Angeles landscape. Many describe the city or its location clearly. According to Open City magazine, Los Angeles is an award winning city that doesn't seem to need listing. The spatiality of the short story lends itself more easily to defining the role of space as a social mediator than to a more general reading of the city as a whole. But occasionally the short stories give us a sense of what a particular place or community means to Bukowski or his characters. It goes without saying that the image of Los Angeles in his poems is more difficult to uncover. The number of his poems, the variety of evidence they find, and the complex nature of the city reflected in the poem attempt to reconstruct his perspective on the space where death remains incomplete.

4. Conclusion

However, it is also true that it is possible to talk about the representation of the field and the relationship gradually gaining depth of field, that is, the development in the process becomes more social and beautiful as it moves away from the body. In order to understand how his depiction of the city developed, we need to read his works in the period they were published. Although many of them are short and simple, this article reconstructs this process by showing how the geography and social relations of Los Angeles were depicted in his early and late works. However, it can be argued that the points of departure and arrival still speak of the transformation of Los Angeles in Bukowski's works and show that the time that can be given to the region and the relations between areas is very distant when it comes to the city. According to that his literary oeuvre is shaped.

Works Cited

1. Brosseau, M. 'In, Of, Out, With, and Through: New Perspectives in Literary Geography.' In Tally, R. T. (ed) *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*.
2. -----Street-Level Writing: Los Angeles in the Works of Charles Bukowski in *Literary Geography* London, New York: Routledge, 6(1) 2020 pp.77-95.
3. Bukowski, C. *Post Office*. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1971.
4. -----. *Factotum*. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1975.
5. -----. *Women*. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1978.
6. -----. *Ham on Rye*. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1982.
7. -----. *Tales of Ordinary Madness*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1983.
8. -----.*The Most Beautiful Woman in Town and Other Stories*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1983.
9. -----. *The Movie: Barfly*. An Original Screenplay by Charles Bukowski for a Film by Barbet Schroeder. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1987.
10. -----. *Hollywood*. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989.
11. -----. *Pulp*. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1994.
12. Calonne, D. S. ed. *Charles Bukowski: Sunlight Here I Am. Interviews and Encounters: 1963-1993*. Northville: Sun Dog Press, 2003.
13. Cherkovski, N. *Bukowski: A life*. South Royalto, VT: Steerforth Press, 1997.
14. Cooper, S. 'John Fante's eternal city.' In Fine, D. ed. *Los Angeles in Fiction*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, pp. 83-99. 1995.
15. Fine, D. *Imagining Los Angeles. A City in Fiction*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000.
16. Fontana, E. 'Bukowski's Ham on Rye and the Los Angeles novel.' *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 5(3) 1985, pp. 4-8.
17. Goldstein, L. *Poetry Los Angeles: Reading the Essential Poems of the City*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014.
18. Harrison, R. *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski*. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press. 1994.
19. Hones, S. 'Literary Geography: Setting and Narrative Space'. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 12(7), pp. 685-699. 2011.
20. Skinner, R. E. *Street of Fear: The Los Angeles Novels of Chester Himes*. In Fine, D. (ed) *Los Angeles in Fiction*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, pp. 227-238. 1995.