THE EVOLUTION OF A FEMINIST DISCOURSE IN TEEN-BASED SERIES INVOLVING THE CHARLES BUKOWSKI PERSONA: A STUDY OF INTERMEDIAL REFERENCES IN *BEVERLY HILLS 90210*, *13 REASONS WHY*, AND *MAID*

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Résumé

Cet article explore l'utilisation des textes et de l'image de Charles Bukowski dans les séries pour adolescents, depuis les années 1990, aux États-Unis. Charles Bukowski, un poète californien du milieu du XX^{e} siècle, est entré dans la culture populaire par la création d'un mythe autour de sa personne. Poète alcoolique, coureur de jupons et marginal de la littérature, ses textes sont considérés par beaucoup comme antiféministes, et à la limite de la pornographie. Cependant, depuis les années 1990, une tendance se dessine dans les séries pour adolescents aux États-Unis. Cet auteur est cité, référencé ou mentionné par les protagonistes féminines. Son statut d'« outsider » de la littérature américaine, de marginal, et ses écrits crus, directs et honnêtes le lient aux personnages féminins des séries étudiées. À travers une variété de références intermédiales liées à un auteur pourtant considéré comme misogyne – une citation, une couverture de livre, le nom de l'auteur –, nous observons l'évolution du discours féminin et féministe dans les séries pour adolescentes, de 1990 à aujourd'hui, de domination masculine à prise de pouvoir féminine.

Mots-clés

Série pour adolescents – Charles Bukowski – Discours féministe – Adaptation – Intermédialité – Postféminisme.

Abstract

This article explores the use of Charles Bukowski's texts and his image in teen-based series since the 1990s in the United States. Charles Bukowski, a Californian poet from the mid-twentieth century, has entered popular culture through the making of a persona. Known as a drunk poet, a womanizer, and an outsider of literature, his texts are considered by many as anti-feminist, anti-women overall, and on the threshold of pornography. However, since the 1990s a trend has occurred in teen-based series in the United States. Bukowski is quoted, referenced, or mentioned by female protagonists in these shows.

From a variety of intermedial references – a quote, a book cover, the name of the author uttered by the three protagonists studied – this article aims to demonstrate that Bukowski's texts and images are used in teen-based series alongside a growing feminist discourse. His direct, blunt, and honest style about the difficulties of life on the margins and his literary outsider status are both used by the female protagonists in their teenage or early adulthood years and show the evolution of a feminist discourse in such series, from domination to empowerment.

Keywords

Teen-based series – Charles Bukowski – Feminist discourse – Adaptation – Intermedia –Postfeminism.

Introduction

In 1994, Charles Bukowski, a Californian poet, known for his image as an alcoholic poet and womanizer for his many books of poetry, short stories, and novels, died in his San Pedro home. A year later, the writer was mentioned in a highly successful teen-based series, *Beverly Hills 90210*. Both Bukowski's and *Beverly Hills 90210*'s stories were set in Los Angeles, but the poet's life and texts, very often interwoven, were far from the fancy teenagers of Beverly Hills' adventures. *Beverly Hills 90210* is set in a fancy neighborhood whilst Bukowski's stories were usually set in Los Angeles' Skid Row. He used themes like horse betting, women, working endless part-time jobs, bar fights, and the interactions with the low-lives he encountered. Bukowski belonged to the margins both in his life and the literary world.

On the other hand, *Beverly Hills 90210* set the tone for the following programs in the 1990s. In Sarah Magee's words, it "had a significant impact on television's teen-based programs and their audiences by taking on controversial subjects in a forthright manner that made teens think of uncomfortable, even frightening issues affecting them" (p. 877). In 2017, an original series from the streaming platform Netflix was released, *13 Reasons Why*, which discusses some of the issues teenagers, in particular young women, face: teenage pregnancy, violence, and the difficulty to build intimate relationships. These problems were finally epitomized in another mini-series from the same streaming platform five years later, *Maid* (2021), which follows Alex, a young mother in her coming-of-age story. This corpus was selected to show the evolution of feminism through such TV series. *Beverly Hills 90210* has been selected as the hit show, the one that started a highly successful trend, with a romanticized vision of teenage years. *13 Reasons Why* was released right before the #Metoo movement and takes on a more dramatic vision of teenage life, particularly for young girls, as if announcing the tide turning. *Maid* depicts a more feminist view of young adulthood, in a post #Metoo era.

Feminism has always had many roots. From Simone de Beauvoir questioning the status quo between men and women in *The Second Sex* (1949) in France and Betty Friedan the "happy modern housewife" tale in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) in the United States, launching second wave feminism, it has continued to evolve into multiple movements, particularly in the United States. The *New Feminist Literary Studies* edited by Cooke in 2020 highlights this evolution toward feminism in relation with more marginalized, repressed minorities such as LGBTQI+, migrants, sex workers.

In this article I aim to expose the evolution in teen-based series of a feminist discourse opposed to – young – male oppression, even while the protagonists studied are part of the heteronormative, white majority. By feminist discourse, I consider the "experiences of being female, feminist, and feminine in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries." (Moseley, Read, p. 240). I also consider, like Lancioni, that "personal choice is the central concept" (p. 135-136) of feminism or postfeminism. Indeed, all three series debuted after 1990 in the era of "postfeminism" which Koinuven likens to "prime time feminism" (p. 1). Most scholars agree that postfeminism is "a discourse of gender and sexuality poised on individualism, choice, and empowerment, highlighting femininity as an embodied property and self-surveillance as a key female virtue [...]" (Koivunen, p. 1). Adriaens and Van Bauwel define it as "not about an activist of political struggle, [but] about an individual one." (p. 179).

The appearance of Bukowski in such series and in relation to a feminist discourse may appear counterproductive as the writer was at best ambivalent when writing about women. Bukowski discussed his views on women in his private correspondence, talking about "the miracle of the female" (2008, p. 30) as one of his main influences, alongside Celine and Dostoevsky, and states that "the female is a clever creature. She knows how to regulate her affairs" (p. 30). He shows admiration for the way women behave toward men. He did not consider himself anti-feminist, but as early as 1970, he expressed his concern about censorship to abide by feminism correctness (2018, p. 1538). Some of his texts can rightfully and undoubtedly be considered so. One example in the short story "Women" written in the 1960s, Bukowski writes about a drunken night leading to intimate relationships with first an inebriated woman, barely aware of his acts, before another he degradingly describes as "a little female pig, farting and grunting and sniffling, wiggling" (2008 p. 59). In the series discussed in this article though, Bukowski is not used to decrying women or feminist values, but on the contrary, to providing the female protagonists with added strength.

This article aims to analyze how the image or text of Bukowski is employed by female characters to further their agenda in these teen-based series. I argue that young women use the figure of Bukowski partly because of his outsider figure, but also to overcome paternalistic patterns. The article aims to demonstrate how the use of intermedial references of Charles Bukowski is intertwined with the evolution of feminist discourse in theses series: from the 1990s until now, from shy mentions of feminism advancement in *Beverly Hills 90210* to struggle in *13 Reasons Why* and self-sufficiency in *Maid*. Andrea uses a Bukowski book to share her reader's experience with a friend in need in *Beverly Hills 90210*, Hannah uses the quote from Bukowski's epitaph "Don't try" to compare her life

to his death in *13 Reasons Why*, and finally Alex uses his hard-working, working-class and melancholic poet persona to escape her troubled relationship in *Maid*.

I refer to the use of Bukowski's image and texts in teen-based series as "intermedial references", defined by Irina O. Rajewsky as follows: "Intermedial references are thus to be understood as meaning-constitutional strategies that contribute to the media product's overall signification: the media product uses its own media-specific means, […] to refer to a specific, individual work produced" (p. 52). Any intermedial reference of a literary text could be considered a "paratext", ensuring "the presence of the text to the world, his 'reception', and consumption", in the terms of Gérard Genette in his introduction to *Seuils* (1987). Bukowski's insertion into the serial world could also be defined as a "cross-mediation", i.e. the input of a story into a different medium (Prié, p. 1).

To discuss the impact of Bukowski's intermedial references in the series, it seems important to have a look at how Charles Bukowski was presented on screen more broadly before considering feminist discourse in teen-based series and how these two elements converge in the series studied, with a "content analysis" (Fiske & Hartley, p. 121) of the latter to demonstrate what Bukowski's intermediality in these shows means from a feminist discourse perspective.

1. Charles Bukowski on screen

Bukowski is a writer that many people refer to in other media, such as cinema, musicals, etc. He also has a fan club online with a dedicated forum that referenced all the TV series where he and his work are mentioned in a thread of 152 messages, evidence of the interest of readers for both the medium and his books (*Bukowskiforum*, 2014). The study of his intermedial references is interesting as he is a highly visible author. His many photographs have been turned into art by a variety of artists such as Robert Crumb for his book illustrations, street artists in California, or comic writers in France or Italy. Bukowski has become an "image", a "myth" through the lens of his many photographers. In his texts, he was photographing what he was seeing from outside his window, but in life, and interviews, the promotional world made him into an image, one to be looked at. Of course, there was no "scopophilic instinct" (Mulvey, p. 815) by readers of Bukowski's image, the way female characters can be represented in films or series.

In *Maid* and *Beverly Hills 90210*, both female characters have an encounter with a male protagonist that can be likened to a classic *Bukowskian* figure. Bukowski has become an anti-hero and representative of the alcoholic poet in other American series like *Californication* or *BoJack Horseman*. But his image was always ambivalent, his writing was also melancholic with touches of humor, and

he was a highly knowledgeable author. The male protagonists in series where Bukowski is mentioned usually take on Bukowski's trait as a drunkard. The female characters are presented with the intellectual side of Bukowski, the writer or reader. For instance, in the same aforementioned series, Andrea Zuckerman and Alex, the female protagonists, are both readers of Bukowski. They're also writers; the first writes in a newspaper, and the other is a writer. Hannah can also be considered one in *13 Reasons Why*, as she wrote and recorded her journal. They are all creative protagonists. On the other hand, Dylan in *Beverly Hills 90210* is a lost student, a rebel, smart but unable to fit in socially. He is the typical rebel boy. In *Maid*, the boyfriend reading *Love is a Dog from Hell* is working at a bar, he does fit in a society of outsiders, drunk almost every night while his girlfriend is at home in a trailer taking care of their child. He is not creative but mentally abusive to Alex, the poet in their relationship.

The male characters who can be assimilated to Bukowski are the rebels, the anti-heroes. Women, and his intimate relationship to women, have always played a big part in Bukowski's writing. In these series they are adopting his persona in an attempt to foreshadow what will happen to them, using feminist discourse.

2. Feminism in teen-based programs

In the 1990s, American television series were booming, and *Beverly Hills 90210* became an instant hit, the teenager series *per excellence*, "a touchstone in popular culture for many dimensions of teen life" (Magee, p. 883), viewed by millions. And as Vincent Colonna predicted in his book, with initiatives such as Netflix, series have become a "major format of fiction writing" (2015, p. 33).

American series have had a long history of supporting civil rights movements. The producers and scriptwriters never forgot who the series were intended for, nor who their public was. Historically a *minor* medium, for youngsters and women, "portraying domestic and family life, and allowing for the durable instalment of feminine characters" (Laugier, 2020, p. 252). Heroines were valued from the beginning of the series (Morin, 2018, p. 112). Many researchers such as Fiske, Hartley – or Morin in France – have noted that a lot of series were ahead of their time and representative of what society was aiming for in terms of cultural and societal values, and encouraged stories of "feminine emancipation" or liberation, even at a time when women's roles were confined to their household (Morin, 2018, p. 243). As early as 1978, Fiske and Hartley, in their seminal work *Reading Television* noticed that

> racial minorities were treated more favourably in the symbolic world of television than in society [which] may indicate that the

> liberal desire to integrate them socially is that the liberal desire to integrate them socially is ahead of the social fact, and that television is playing an active role in this ongoing social change. (p. 25)

We could wonder whether fifty years later, Netflix productions are showing women more and more favorably to indicate the same liberal desire, not only to integrate them socially but to bring awareness to the hardships they still encounter in real life. On the other hand, back in the late 1970s, Fiske and Hartley also noted that white women were "in the symbolic world of television, more socially disadvantaged than members or racial minorities" (p. 26), particularly in the labor marketplace. In *Maid*, the young white female protagonist still works as a maid (which used to represent 6.5% of jobs on television for white women, after housewife, and nurse in the 1970s).

A lot of research has been conducted on feminism and the feminist discourse in series involving adult characters; for instance of studies of *I Love Lucy* up to *Ally Mc Beal* (Dow, 2002) and *The Good Wife* (Morin, 2017). But the feminist discourse has also taken root in the tradition of the teenage series genre, decisive in the 1990s and gaining new grounds with Netflix series nowadays. Indeed, with the arrival of *Beverly Hills 90210* (1990-2000), young girls and teenagers identified with new characters created by Aaron Spelling and Darren Star. The phenomenal success of the show led to the iconicity of its main characters. Even though feminism was not obvious in this series feminist issues, such as teen pregnancy or the question of abortion, were introduced. Many other series resulted from this initial success, copying the idea of high school students' adventures at a transitional stage in their lives, learning how to become adults in a world familiar to their viewers.

Beverly Hills 90210 started the teenage-based series genre and thirty years later, Netflix revived it with a variety of shows. *13 Reasons Why* (2017-) goes even further in demonstrating why, for many students, "high school is hell" (Magee, 2014, p. 877). The "male gaze" coined by Laura Mulvey as early as 1973 to show that women on screen were "simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (1998, p. 809) is not absent from the high school ground, even though like Andrea Zuckerman in *Beverly Hills 90210*, Hannah in *13 Reasons Why* is not wearing any distinctive "feminine" outfit. Hannah aims to blend in at her new school. She is neither trying to be overtly sexy nor to bring attention to her physique. These characters differ from most teen shows which involved "the glamorous makeover of the central female character, a mechanism through which appropriate feminine identities are constructed and reinforced"

(Moseley, p. 406). But the male gaze has gone beyond the physical and into the imaginary of the male students in this new, much darker approach to high school life. In another genre, and departing from the high school setting, *Maid*'s main protagonist, Alex, is also lacking physical "obvious" feminine traits the male gaze would be drawn to. In neither of these series does the appearance of the three characters seem of paramount importance to them.

Beverly Hills 90210 takes place in high school, before moving on to the college years. The series has a very distinct diegesis, where characters evolve in a "dynamic environment" (Colonna, 2010). *13 Reasons Why* also takes place in a California suburb high school community. However, after 9/11 and the Columbine event, followed by many more mass shootings in high schools, the setting, which was already purely superficial in *Beverly Hills 90210*, has lost its innocence in *13 Reasons Why*. The latter opens with the suicide of a teenage girl, telling her story through cassette tapes. While during the first season of *Beverly Hills 90210* one of the main protagonists (Brenda Walsh) had a pregnancy scare, the issue of high school sex and secrecy is replaced by blunt and multiple rapes as well as constant sexual harassment in *13 Reasons Why*. In *Maid*, the pregnancy scare is no longer a scare. Alex gives birth after being pressured by her boyfriend to keep the baby and must drop out of college for years to raise their child, before escaping from the household she tried to build with him.

What's happening to young female characters in TV series seems at first sight to be worsening, many girls are going through sexual abuse in *13 Reasons Why* for instance. But their representation is evolving positively with female empowerment, women speaking up, and leaving abusive men. This risk-taking from script writers, showing more violence but also more freedom to the female protagonists, and as a result to spectators, may be due to the evolution of society and of the reception of series, which used to be "typically received in the family home" (Fiske, p. 152). From the 2000s and the rise of streaming platforms, series have now taken other shapes and forms: *Beverly Hills 90210*'s seasons were 24 episodes long, while the seasons of Netflix series tend to be around 10 to 13 episodes long. Furthermore, the series can now be viewed outside of the "family home" and in a more private manner, without the need to share a screen. This could explain why nowadays series are more daring in their representation of teenagers' lives. As Fiske and Hartley put it, "[…] the television discourse presents us daily with a constantly up-dated version of social relations and cultural perceptions" (p. 18). Series have had the effect of evolving faster than the societies around which they are built. Netflix is now used to taking care of its viewers, not the other way around (Laugier, 2021), which also implies taking care of the characters in its series. This may explain why the female characters written after 2017 are more and more assertive.

The three series in which Bukowski is portrayed are not purely feminist – with the exception perhaps of *Maid* – even though they involve strong female characters, and feminist discourse or issues related to women. So, why is Bukowski mentioned at all in these series, and at pivotal, climactic moments for either the overall series or a specific episode? It looks as if the female characters identify with the poet or use the masculine to overcome their previous submissive positions, using the persona of Bukowski to their advantage.

3. From supporting character on TV to lead on streaming

3.1 Beverly Hills 90210

In *Beverly Hills 90210*, Charles Bukowski is mentioned several times, but one occurrence is particularly interesting. The sixteenth episode of the fifth season entitled "Sentenced to Life" shows Dylan McKay, played by the actor Luke Perry, having a look at a copy of *The Last Night of the Earth Poems* (Bukowski, 1992). The book takes over the whole screen at the very beginning of the episode. Andrea Zuckerman played by Gabrielle Carter is the one who offered Dylan the book. The two characters are at Dylan's house, drinking coffee, and conversing about literature. Andrea resembles the "postfeminist women from the 1990s series" (Morin, 2018, p.98). She is described by Magee as "the intelligent, shy, outsider who wanted to fit in yet keep her own individuality", while Dylan McKay is depicted as "the sexy bad boy with a good heart" (p.880). In this episode, Dylan faces drunken driving charges and is expected to go into rehab. Andrea has problems of her own, of the romantic nature, with a character named Peter. However, Andrea and Dylan's encounter in the first few minutes of the episode is what drew our attention.

Dylan McKay starts by asking her friend "Ok Zuckerman how did you know I was into Bukowski uh?" While he browses the book, Andrea replies "Oh come on, the greatest poet of our time? Please…". Her tone sounds slightly condescending or ironic, and rightfully so. Indeed, the reference to Bukowski as "the greatest American poet alive today" supposedly coined either by Jean Genet or Jean-Paul Sartre, was a publicity stunt, "another myth" according to Bukowski's biographer (Sounes, p. 142). The camera zooms from the book to Dylan's face, reading a poem entitled "Bluebird". Dylan finishes reading the line "… never knowing he's in there", looks at Andrea, and she back at him. He then closes the volume of poetry wondering whether Bukowski's friends would have ever tried to put him into rehab, connecting his situation to that of the author. While he asks the question and uses the possessive pronoun "him", Dylan displays the book; Bukowski has become his work. Andrea goes on to say that maybe Bukowski's friends and family should have put him into rehab, to which Dylan ponders whether the

author would have been able to write such things without drinking. At last, he quotes another author, William Blake, from memory: "the road to excess leads right to the gates of the Palace of Wisdom". By then, Bukowski's book is in plain sight, unused on the table until Andrea picks it up while Dylan goes up to answer the door. He comes back to tell Andrea "I'm being charged, 'driving under the influence'". The scene ends and the series' opening credits, with its famous music, begin.

The intermedial reference occurs at a pivotal moment, as season 5 is transitional, one of the main protagonists has left the show and many new faces make their appearance. Bukowski and his book are discussed in a scene portraying Dylan and Andrea, two regular characters from the first season, offering a sense of continuity and comfort to the series' fans who have shared references and appreciate seeing the two characters together. In this scene, intermediality is used to liken the male character's situation to the author's.

Andrea is knowledgeable, and in the series, she is considered one of the smartest students. Her mentioning of Charles Bukowski highlights her interest in poetry. She is the reader of Bukowski, who invites a fellow friend to read a poem, reinforcing the idea that Bukowski's poetry needs to be spoken out loud, rather than simply read quietly to oneself. The conversation that follows is about "rehab", and when Andrea mentions Bukowski's friends should have put him into a rehabilitation center, she is referring to the author's affection for liquor. Even though Dylan McKay sees himself as a *Bukowskian* character, Andrea is the one suggesting the connection, advising him to read Bukowski. After that Dylan quotes Blake, showing he is also book savvy, and in doing so excuses his behavior, likening it to that of tortured artists. In the staging, she is sitting and listening quietly, the camera movement follows that of Dylan, who at some point stands up, empowering Andrea. Andrea acts in this scene more as a teacher, a provider of knowledge, but she has yet to assert her authority as such.

The view of *The Last Night of the Earth Poems*' book cover is a conventional way to intermediate a written work on screen. Dylan reading "Bluebird", one of Bukowski's most famous poems, to Andrea demonstrates that the female character is put aside, allowing the male figure to take over. She acts as a literary intermediary, and Dylan holds paternalistic power. She tries to fit in as Magee noted (p. 880), by letting the man share the knowledge she has provided him with. The character of Andrea is the most representative of postfeminist values in *Beverly Hills 90210*, a hard-working young woman successful in her studies, trying to find a work-life balance. Yet, she still attempts to belong in a society built for men by helping them. This episode was released in 1995. Twenty-two years later, Bukowski's referencing has evolved, and young women are no longer

prescribing his book as medicine for tortured men, but now use Bukowski as a way to foresee their fates, such as Hannah in *13 Reasons why*.

3.2. 13 Reasons Why

Beverly Hills 90210 and *13 Reasons Why* offer the same setting - a high school in a fancy Californian town. The Netflix series is set in Crestmont, CA, an upper-class neighborhood with upper-class students. A new student arrives, in a similar fashion to the start of *Beverly Hills 90210* in its first season, from a middle-class upbringing. Apart from the references to Bukowski in both shows, the setting, and familiar high school stereotypes, the similarities stop there. The perception and the lives of teenagers in the 1990s and the main protagonists in the late 2010s are dramatically different. We could consider that the "carefree days of childhood to the responsibilities of adulthood" depicted in *Beverly Hills 90210* (Simonetti, p. 38) evolve in the 21st century in a dramatic and traumatic manner. Bukowski is not an element linking the female character to the male character in a "caring" way, but his reference is used as a dire warning: beware of the teenage boys.

In *13 Reasons Why*, released in 2017 right before the #MeToo movement unfolded a new wave of feminism, Hannah, the main protagonist, is dead. She tells her story through cassette tapes that every student shares in their school. Each tape is aimed at one student who has hurt her. The intermedial reference to Bukowski occurs again in a pivotal episode, the sixth episode of a 13-episode mini-series. The episode focuses on Hannah's relationship with Marcus, and her Valentine's Day gone wrong. The reference to Bukowski takes place in the last minute of the episode, when Hannah, in bed, ponders about the tombstone of the author, and his motto "Don't try". Death was one of Bukowski's favorite themes, whether in his novel, his volumes of poetry or short stories, or his essays. He uses death-related vocabulary ("death", "die", "dying") regularly: forty-two occurrences in *Women* (1978), at least forty in *The Captain is Out to Lunch and the Sailors Have Taken over the Ship* (1995), and over eighty in his poetry volume *The Pleasure of the Damned: Poems from 1951-1993* (2007). He also used to talk about suicide in many short stories and poems. One poem is even entitled "Suicide" in *The Roominghouse Madrigals* (p. 128). According to Alexandre Thiltges, suicide was one of the "central themes in the work of Bukowski" (p. 2310). Suicide is also the main theme in Hannah's story.

Hannah's monologue is set in a cemetery, in her bedroom, but also in her friend Clay's bedroom. We first see tombstones in darkness, at night, the camera tilts up to down while Hannah, in voice-over, utters the words "fun fact", which brings a dark humor tone to her monologue:

> Fun fact. I did some research on tombstones the other day. Or more specifically, on epitaphs on tombstones. The best one I could find was by this writer called Henry Charles Bukowski, Jr. On his tombstone, he has engraved the picture of a boxer and beneath the boxer, two simple words: 'Don't try.' I wonder what will be on mine (2017).

The reference to Bukowski can be understood as "relay-text" described by Roland Barthes as important in films, but also in series. Indeed, as Barthes explained for films "dialogue functions not simply as elucidation but really does advance the action by setting out, in the sequence of messages, meanings that are not to be found in the image itself" (1977, p. 41). Nothing says Bukowski in the excerpt except for the spoken text. The monologue helps further the understanding of the viewer.

The events keep darkening as the episodes unfold. Even though in the sixth episode Marcus tried to abuse Hannah in the coffee shop, trying to touch her inappropriately without her consent, then calling her crazy after her refusal and making fun of her. This is unfortunately not the most dramatic event that will lead to her downfall, but one of the many encounters gone wrong in her short life. It seems as if Hannah is victim of the postfeminist shift of representation from women as sex objects to "active, desiring sexual object", explained by Rosalind Gill (p. 151). As a result, Hannah is expected by her male counterparts to be "forever 'up to it'." (Gill, p. 151) The other option is for her to be considered a "prude". Bukowski's motto, "Don't try", can then be viewed as furthering feminist discourse, inviting Hannah to avoid both the male gaze and relationships with teenage boys. It is also a reminder that Hannah is a tortured artist, and Bukowski's creativity is displaced to Hannah, who creates physical memories through her cassette recording.

However, the first character to appear on screen during the short monologue looking at the tombstones while her voice is covering the image is one of her few friends, looking at the cemetery while sitting in his car. There is a short pause when she says "specifically on epitaphs on tombstones" and the boy takes one of the many cassette tapes he has on his side, and put it in his radio player. A piece of music entitled "In a blackout" starts playing. After a few seconds, Hannah carries on speaking, while the camera is now on Clay in his bedroom lying in bed, on his side, wide awake, looking beaten down and disheveled. The sentence "The best one I could find" is voiced over while the camera comes closer to Clay's bed, moving slowly from an American plan toward a close-up, but before the camera comes closer to his face, the image changes and shows Hannah, in flashback, mirroring his position in her bedroom, looking sad and upset, the light

a bit clearer than in Clay's bedroom, as if she still had some hope left about her future. However, the light is striped by the blinds, making her look imprisoned. Clay's image, set in the present time, is darker, as if after Hannah's death, hope is gone.

The scene is very tragic and also polysemic. Bukowski's tombstone functions both as a reminder that life ends with death, but his words "don't try" also resonate with her life. As if the author, through this motto, was warning her that trying was not the solution. The "boxer" that is represented on Bukowski's tombstone is uttered while the camera is on Clay's face, as if he was the one who would have to fight for her now. Clay's attitude could also be interpreted as reliving Hannah's despair or working as Hannah's savior, but in this twisted version of the romantic tale, the hero is too late.

Hannah's utterance of Bukowski's motto "Don't try", which he used constantly in interviews and other letters to his friends, could be an omen for Bukowski's readership. Indeed, even though this intermedial reference helps close the scene in a dramatic fashion, there is some doubt that spectators went and searched for Bukowski after viewing the episode, or took any interest in his words, except the ones she voiced. Online, even though one can easily find the quote used by Hannah on some social networks such as Quora or Reddit (Think_Bit_2925, 2023), the posts are rarely answered or commented on, which, at least superficially, means little visible reception for the author.

13 Reasons Why depicts sexual violence, which is not unusual in teenage-based series from the mid-1990s onward according to Susan Berridge who explained that acts of sexual violence "tend to be inextricably bound to teenage characters' romantic sexual relationships, operating to advance, frustrate or highlight the perils of choosing the wrong romantic partner (sexual violence follows the end of a relationship)" (2021, p. 470). In the last series analyzed, *Maid*, the violence is not sexual, but psychological, and doesn't follow the end of the relationship, but has been an ongoing part of the main protagonist's life from the day she met her partner.

4. Embodying Bukowski

Laugier explained in a recent essay that post #MeToo, the series have become more feminist (2021, p. 6). *Maid* can be considered as part of this feminist series movement. The story arc focuses on a female protagonist, Alex, who manages, thanks mostly to a strong-willed attitude but also to other women and a sense of sisterhood, to escape her blatantly dreadful relationship and build her life back. The series presents Bukowski's persona as dual, expressing the postfeminist

contradictory constructions of gender. On the one hand, he is represented through the male protagonist, the alcoholic partner. On the other hand, Alex becomes an author, a poet, like Bukowski.

Alex may be representative of a 2.0 version of the independent woman described in the 1970s as a "single white career woman or mother" by Rabinovitz (p. 3). But, as opposed to the 1970s perspective which encouraged that "central female characters must be returned ultimately to the conventional narrative structures of family melodrama or heterosexual romance, critics have demonstrated that a woman's position can only be inscribed narratively in relationship to male prerogatives." (p. 3) On the contrary, Alex is trying to find her path. While before the 1990s "home" was where women were re-positioned (Probyn, p. 148), Alex uses her creative persona to flee the latter and reinvent herself.

The first episode of *Maid* shows the failure of the nuclear family as promoted in the 1950s in middle-class white American suburban life (Morin, 2018, p. 109) and still present in today's ideal in some societies. The middle class is no more. The couple is not the goal but the problem. Sixty years later, the nuclear family has become the center of issues descending from patriarchal concepts. The "uncaring" system (Laugier, 2021, p. 8) is vivid in *Maid* where Alex, a young woman, escapes an abusive relationship and becomes a maid to survive and give a better chance at life to her daughter. Alex's escape from her "home" is what leads her to pursue her own sensibility of postfeminism, i.e. a form of individualistic self-reinvention, freely chosen, (Gill, p. 164), with the support of other women.

The scene unfolding in front of the viewers at the start of the second episode reminds us of Bukowski, for several reasons. Alex is standing on a stage in a bar-restaurant, where we understand she is working, as she is wearing an apron, and a t-shirt with the bar-restaurant logo. This scene takes place in the afternoon, and while she is reading a short text from her notebook, that looks and sounds like a poem, her eyes cross those of a young man, reading while listening to her voice, and going back and forth between his book and the girl on stage. Bukowski, while not fond of public reading, was familiar with the exercise, and was famous for his outbursts and drinking on stage while reading poetry (Debritto, 2016, p. 166). He said in an interview "I don't think anybody should ever read poetry before an audience unless it is a matter of survival" (2003, p. 104).

Her reading starts with "I punched my way out", it is a description of a violent domestic abuse scene involving her mother. This "punching" her way out is also reminiscent of Bukowski's writing, who used the same image in his correspondence: "[…] you tell Barbara that I'm still punching this machine" (2004, p. 44). His writing was his way of surviving, and it seems to be Alex's. By

reading her poetry to a restricted audience, Alex shows that she is, like Bukowski, only interested in sharing her work, and her writing. This reminds us of Pierre Bourdieu's lines about poetry as, "by virtue of its restricted audience (often only a few hundred readers), the consequent low profits, the disinterested activity par excellence" (p. 51). Alex and Charles Bukowski share this "disinterest", this need to write for the sake of writing, but also the need to write for the sake of survival. Friedan stated that "it is the jump from amateur to professional that is often hardest for a woman on her way out of the trap." (Friedan, p.367), and it is thanks to her becoming a writer, that she succeeds in her escape. The scene, a flashback, is also a cautionary tale and details how Alex met the man the viewers saw her leave in the previous episode. The chance encounter with the future lovers unfolds. Her way out of it will be through her writing.

The camera closes up on her profile and back on the text she is reading, before zooming in on her love interest reading: we see the book he is holding, and recognize the famous book cover of *Love is a Dog From Hell*, created by Barbara Martin in 1977, for Black Sparrow Press. The book cover appears succinctly, before a second viewing. With it comes the exchange of looks, before the young woman says "Maybe I've been a ghost all of these years", then stops before exclaiming in a sort of ironic laughter "and that would make sense, as looks like no one of you guys seem to hear me at all", referring to the other customers. This scene is very short, and the appearance of the famous Black Sparrow Press book spans less than a second, time for the man to turn the page, and show her the cover.

Following this public poetry reading, which invariably makes us think of Bukowski after seeing the book cover, she goes back to work and asks her co-worker and friend who the man reading is. She then asks her friend whether she can go and verify which book he is reading, to which the friend complies, unwillingly. She comes back and tells her "Love is a dog… Something", which is the second appearance of Bukowski's text in the scene, through her friend's voice. Alex replies "*Love is a Dog from Hell*, Bukowski", while nodding, convincingly, with a knowing look. The scene ends with the man smiling at her, her smiling back at him, then the image fades back to her current living situation: she is seen holding their child, after sleeping outside all night, to avoid going back to their home.

The scene describes Bukowski as part and parcel of love turned hell relationship, which inevitably repeats the *Love is a Dog from Hell* title. Bukowski seems to be tied to both characters taking part in this exchange. Even though the friend does say "Love is a dog… something", it is obvious that she is unaware of who Bukowski is and does not understand the shared reference between Alex and the man. Her reading poetry in public, using words such as "punching", comparing

herself to a ghost, as living dead, are common references to Bukowski's writing.

Alex becomes homeless for part of the series, while her boyfriend is an alcoholic. The two protagonists encompass Bukowski's persona in the scene and the overall series. Bukowski describes his relationship with women, his life as a writer on the margins, and his many different jobs to make ends meet. Alex starts writing a journal about her experience as a maid, the many small jobs that she does to make a living, the people she meets. There are obvious similarities between the maid's actions and persona, and Bukowski's persona and autofiction-type work. Like him, she is calm, solitary, likes writing about what she sees. But his flaws, his alcoholism, and his anger are displaced to the male character as if the scriptwriters had wanted to divide Bukowski in half, a good side, and an evil side. A love, and a hell.

Conclusion

Bukowski's intermediality functions as a bad omen in all three series. In the first mention of the writer in *Beverly Hills 90210*, the male protagonist takes the lead by reading "Bluebird". Andrea is here solely to open the door to new thoughts for the male character. In *13 Reasons Why*, the quote "Don't try" is used in many ways and makes the darkness of the character along with her fate, visible and audible. In *Maid*, the female lead impersonates Bukowski the melancholic poet, the hard-working persona. The feminist discourse is furthered by women using Bukowski's intermedial references to flee the patriarchal situations they have found themselves in. The three female protagonists never give up their individual choices in a postfeminist fashion. Bukowski's image is twofold, dual: one of the alcoholic, rebel anti-hero; and one of the melancholic poet, understanding of the cause of women because of his and their outsider status. Women, as outcasts – in opposition with the male gender, as the protagonists studied are still representatives of the tryptic heterosexual, white and young – free themselves from their attributed places in the world, the same way Bukowski refused to fit in. In these series, Bukowski is representative of the "cultural metamorphosis" that occurs with adaptations, rewritings, and the transfer of a text to another medium, which according to Massimo Fusillo are "a vital part of the text" (p. 76), and a vital part of the image of the author.

Notes:

[1] Another example of this audacity is the recent HBO series Euphoria (2019-).

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BIOGRAPHIE

Amélie Macaud est membre du laboratoire Climas de l'Université Bordeaux Montaigne, et enseigne l'anglais pour les non-spécialistes à l'Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne. Elle est titulaire d'un doctorat en littérature américaine depuis décembre 2021. Sa thèse portait sur la fabrication de l'œuvre de Charles Bukowski, son édition, son image et sa réception, notamment auprès de son lectorat en ligne. Elle a publié des articles sur les traductions de titres de Bukowski en français et sur la réception des photographies de l'auteur sur papier et en ligne. Elle s'intéresse à l'histoire du livre et à l'édition mais aussi à l'intermédiation des textes et des images de Bukowski et d'autres auteurs américains, qu'elle explore dans divers médias, notamment les séries télévisées.

BIOGRAPHY

Amélie Macaud is a member of the laboratory Climas at University Bordeaux Montaigne and teaches English at University Paris 1 Pantheon Sorbonne. She holds a Ph.D. in American literature since December 2021. Her thesis focused on the making of Charles Bukowski's work, publishing, image, and reception, particularly with his online readership. She has published articles on Bukowski's title translations into French and on the reception of the author's photographs in print and online. She is interested in book history and book publishing, but also the intermediation of Bukowski and other American authors' texts and images and explores the latter in a variety of media, including TV series.