

**Charles Bukowski and Efraím Medina:  
Two Portrayals of Transgression in Postmodern Literature**

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To the man upstairs who gave me the sky  
And Luisa who gave me the wings

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## Abstract

This study explains the literary relationship between American writer Charles Bukowski and Colombian's Efraím Medina in terms of self-conscious fiction and postmodern aesthetics, by interpreting aspects such as language, themes, voice and characters of the novels: *Factotum* and *Érase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo* respectively. It discusses how Bukowski's literary influence takes place in Medina's style through a process of linguistic transculturation, and how their crude and simple narrative based on personal experiences is a way to establish an honest and direct communication with the reader and also a way to deal with their personal frustrations and unfulfilled desires.

El presente trabajo pretende explicar la relación entre el escritor norteamericano Charles Bukowski y el colombiano Efraím Medina en términos de autoconsciencia narrativa y estética posmoderna a través de la interpretación de aspectos como lenguaje, temas, voz narrativa y personajes en las novelas: *Factotum* y *Érase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo* respectivamente. Se discute además cómo tiene lugar la influencia de Bukowski en el estilo literario de Medina a través de un proceso lingüístico de transculturación y cómo la crudeza y sencillez narrativa de estos autores basada en sus experiencias personales es una forma de establecer una comunicación franca y directa con el lector y también una forma de lidiar con sus frustraciones personales y deseos no cumplidos.

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## **Introduction**

The great variety of individualistic expressions of postmodernism has given a set of possibilities of having different aesthetic experiences in literature. New artistic tendencies and the development of individualistic ideologies as a manifestation of non-conformity, have turned out in a big mixture of styles and alternative languages without a definite premise.

The element of transgression is frequently found in postmodern works, especially when it comes to human modern customs, values and beliefs, as a way to criticize them and protest against all those empty rituals of consumerist society.

Such intention are completely evident in the work of Charles Bukowski and Efraím Medina, whose irreverence and mordacity characterized their work by referring to taboo topics and breaking those so-called aesthetic literary patterns. These characteristics, along with their particular style, work in the novels as an alternative aesthetic which is completely alien to Colombian traditional literary subjects and techniques.

Just as Bukowski did in his time, Efraím Medina's work shocked some of his readers because of the use of rude words and obscene depictions of sexual intercourse but, beyond this elements, is the self-referential writing the narrative technique that explain the best how these authors construct their individual literary universe and establish an honest contact with the reader.

According to this, the existence of a literary relationship between these writers can be explained just in the meeting point of two main narrative components; on the one hand, the constant focus on the self which determines the voice and structure of the novels, and on the other hand, the well known postmodern feature of skepticism and disbelieving which determine the acts, language, and expressions that gives the transgressive nuance to this works.

## **Justification**

In the recent history of modern literature, some writers or groups of writers have occasionally appeared to break the norms of society with their lives, and with their work, the established literature patterns of scholars. After such transgression, sometimes they become protagonists of literary changes that can be categorized later as new genres.

Names such as Maurice Blanchot, Ferdinand Céline, Samuel Delany, Michel Houellebecq, Bret Easton Ellis, Anthony Burgess, William Burroughs, Hunter Thompson and Charles Bukowski, among many others, are examples of what is called *Transgressional Fiction* writers. This literary genre encompasses taboo subject matters such as urban violence, aberrant sexual practices, violence against women, use of drugs and alcohol and dysfunctional family relationships. All those elements are based on the premise that knowledge is to be found at the edge of experience and that the body is the site for gaining knowledge.

My first approach to this kind of writing was the novel of the Colombian writer Rafael Chaparro Madiedo, *Opio en las Nubes*, which won the *Premio Nacional de Novela Colcultura* in 1992. This novel contains several elements of Transgressional Fiction in terms of urban violence, use of drugs and alcohol and lots of musical references. But, in my opinion, one of the most interesting parts in this novel was the way the characters were constructed, with intense conflicts within, and phenomena like mental illness and antisocial or nihilistic behavior.

The idea of a protagonist that has a forbidden behavior has been attractive for a wide generation of American writers, aside from those of Transgressional Fiction like the *beatniks*, especially Jack Kerouak, William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, and also a matter of analysis by philosophical movements like existentialism, on Sartre and Heidegger's shoulders, or Nietzsche's nihilism.

Being aware of all these features, and focused on the fact that in these works the literary persona is developed as a transgressor with a marginal personality, I started to explore the work of the American writer Charles Bukowski, whose novels and short stories, in my opinion, have all the “transgressive” characteristics mentioned above, both in the philosophical and literary terms required to develop an entire alternative aesthetics that is going to be my main subject of study.

### **Limitations of the study**

For the purpose of this study it would be appropriate to explore, not only the political and historical background of modern American literature but also, the influence of transgressional fiction writers on those from different countries and cultures. Authors such as Pedro Juan Gutierrez in Cuba, Òscar Malca in Perù and Efraím Medina Reyes in Colombia have shown the same narrative features and themes as Bukowski and the beatniks.

The nature of this paper does not allow me to explore but a few elements regarding this matter and just one American transgressive writer: Charles Bukowski, and just one Latin American writer that has probably received Bukowski’s influence: Efraím Medina.

It is also adequate to work on a specific novel that brings together all of the features I want to consider: Charles Bukowski’s *Factotum* (1975) and Medina’s *Érase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo* (1998).

These novels are the most representative in their respective careers, and also share some other elements in terms of the use of language and narrative voice to make a proper comparison.



## Objectives

### General Objective

To explain the relationship between Charles Bukowski's novel *Factotum*(1975) and Medina's *Érase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo* (1998) in terms of literary aesthetics from the point of view of postmodernism and Self -Conscious Fiction.

### Specific Objectives

1. To identify common features between these novels like: use of language, topics, characters and voice by using a sociocritical theory.
2. To define the characteristics of Bukowski's influence on Medina's work.
3. To explain such influence in terms of narrative transculturation using sociological concepts.

## Referential Framework

### State of the Art



Charles Bukowski - [Online Image] (n.d.). Retrieved October 15, 2009, from [www.bukowski.net](http://www.bukowski.net). <http://http://bukowski.net/photos/bukowski025.php>

Heinrich Karl Bukowski was born in Andernach, Germany, in 1920. Son of a German mother and an American father. In 1923, the family went to America. Bukowski grew up in Los Angeles and had a tough childhood and adolescence due to his parent's snobbery and his father's failure in being promoted -that keeps him angry all the time-, besides his skin disease that left his face badly scarred. He was forced to be an outsider confined to a library without any contact with the opposite sex during his teen age years. After those years, Bukowski came to hate his father because of his excessive ambition to climb socially and his narrow mind:

‘My non-ambitious ambition’  
and I thought, if being a bum is to be the  
opposite of what this son-of-a-bitch  
is, then that’s what I’m going to be.  
and it’s too bad he’s been dead  
so long  
for now he can’t see  
how beautifully I’ve succeeded  
at that  
(Bukowski, 1986)<sup>1</sup>

In 1941, Bukowski traveled around the USA with the purpose of collecting experiences that would enable him to write about the real world (boarding houses, casual labor and bars). During those years he worked, among other jobs, as a furniture packer, a corpse-washer, a night porter, an abattoir worker, a bin man, a petrol-pump attendant and finally spent 15 years as a postal worker.

In his book *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (1999) Howard Sounes explained Bukowski’s lack of control during this period, but the truth is that he never stopped writing and trying to get published:

Bukowski’s legendary “ten year drunk” (much of which he spent rowing and fighting with the great love of his life, a bloated and promiscuous alcoholic called Jane Cooney Baker) came to an end in 1955 when he suffered a perforated stomach (as a result of his alcoholism). His life was only saved by a blood transfusion and the doctors told him that if he ever drank again it would kill him. For a while, Bukowski replaced alcohol with betting on the horses, but his abstinence did not last long and soon he was drinking and gambling. Bukowski survived, nevertheless, and after many years of desperately attempting to become a successful and prominent writer, his poetry was discovered by the manager of an office supply company, John Martin, who was so impressed by the poems he had read that he decided to set up the Black Sparrow Press to publish Bukowski and other neglected talents. By the late 1960s, with Bukowski already in his late 40s, Martin had finally helped to make a name for the self-styled bum, who over the next two and a half decades would bring out

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<sup>1</sup> Bukowski, Charles. *You Get so Alone at Times that it Just Makes Sense*, p.27

ten volumes of poetry, five novels and five collections of short stories. Bukowski died in 1994 of leukemia. **Sounes** (1999)<sup>2</sup>.

When talking about the influence of a writer it is advisable to understand the perception that the writer has of his work and himself. Charles Bukowski has defined himself as a social outsider who depicts the underground America in his prose and poetry through his fictional persona, Hank Chinaski. Daniel Bigna, in his text *Life on the Margins* (2005), states that Bukowski explores different periods of Chinaski's life in his writings, revealing his struggles against the absurdity of the system, and with the aesthetics of self-expression, creates a literary identity. These realistic depictions of life experiences replace beauty with an alternative view of American Society and the creative profession. This way, Bukowski transforms his ordinary life into literature (**Bigna** 2005)<sup>3</sup>.

Most of Charles Bukowski's writings have been taken as a critique to the rigid American Social Structure; even if they are correct, they are not the only interpretation. **Harrison** (1994)<sup>4</sup> stated that he has found, in several of Bukowski's texts, similar concepts to the ones expressed in Benjamin Franklin's writings, such as the importance of the individual and his natural rights, specially the right of the individual to define happiness and accomplishment by his or her own standards.

Critics of Bukowski's works are usually focused on his apparently negative perception of American society and have linked him to hard political lines like Communism, Marxism-Leninism and even Anarchy, but Harrison's interpretation claims that Bukowski can be read in two mutually exclusive interpretations which make his writings interesting to analyze.

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<sup>2</sup> Sounes, Howard. *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life*, p. 175

<sup>3</sup> Bigna, Daniel. *Life on the Margins: The Autobiographical Fiction of Charles Bukowski*. p.5

<sup>4</sup> Harrison, R. *Against the American dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski*. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow. p. 87

**Woolley** (2005)<sup>5</sup> states that many left-wing poets have received the influence of Bukowski in their work due to his conversational style, his demythologization of the figure of the poet and mainly, because of his political quality, in spite of considering him a naïve narrator (naïve in the sense that he is not looking for solutions to social problems or injustice). This political quality has a historical background in the late 1960s, when literature becomes an instrument of revolutionary politics. Many writers were involved in students' movements establishing political opposition and organizing strikes, protests and boycotts, believing that reflective social criticism was no longer enough, and that literature should not just look for altering people's perspective of society, but should also play a direct role in changing that society.

But, the point of inflection in this background, according to Woolley, is that in the early 1970s, it became clear that the revolution that the students' movement wanted was not going to be achieved. This huge disappointment was also reflected in literature as writers moved away from socially critical and politically committed literature to concentrate rather on the expression of their own individual needs, problems and wishes.

This type of subjectivity is obvious in Bukowski's work:

“Bukowski's poems are often first-person narratives which include the narrator's subjective reaction to an ordinary incident, the core of which would be too slight to even qualify as incident were it not for the narrator's reaction. In their emphasis on this subjective reaction the poems have something of a romantic sensibility about them. Yet it is not so much romantic intensity of feeling which informs the poem as the subject's extensivity manifested most obviously in the length of the poems themselves” (Harrison, 1994)<sup>6</sup>.

The works of Charles Bukowski can be placed in the field of this new aesthetics, he wrote about his own life stories so that both himself and his readers might better comprehend the nature of his alternative views about both mainstream American society and the creative

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<sup>5</sup> Woolley, J. "Informationen für das tagliche Überleben": *The influence of Charles Bukowski on the Poetry of Jorg Fauser*. "Neophilologus". Volume 92, Issue 1. p.5

<sup>6</sup> Harrison, R. *Against the American Dream: Essays on Charles Bukowski*. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow.

profession. Such views explain his lifelong quest for freedom and awareness of absurdity in the world (Bigna, 2005)<sup>7</sup>

Bukowski's literary aesthetics is constructed from his own experiences. The point of departure of all his fiction is the central autobiographical figure of Henry Chinaski; this alter ego works as a literary resource to show Bukowski's conceptions of the world, his quest for freedom through his development as a writer and drinker, and his willingness to reveal Chinaski's flaws and vulnerabilities, particularly in his personal relationships (Bigna, 2005)<sup>8</sup>.

Charles Bukowski's *Factotum* is narrated by Bukowski's alter ego, Chinaski, and fictionalizes Bukowski's real life experiences as a common worker, which is, in my opinion, the aspect that produces, in the reader, an easy identification with the main character. The use of dirty and urban language, explicit depictions of sexual encounters and portrayal of small acts of rebellion make the reader realize that his own experiences were not so different from the ones depicted in the text.



Charles Bukowski - [Online Image] (n.d.). Retrieved October 15, 2009, from [www.bukowski.net](http://www.bukowski.net). <http://www.bukowski.net/photos/bukowski013.php>

I think that the concept of beauty in Bukowski's aesthetics in this novel is linked to Henry Chinaski's sense of rebellion and search for freedom; it is possible to find among this urban

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<sup>7</sup> Bigna, Daniel. *Life on the Margins: The Autobiographical Fiction of Charles Bukowski*. p.6

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 8

environment full of thieves, prostitutes and hobos, a beautiful sense of non-conformity and, in spite of the nature of that kind of living, a trace of dignity.

It is also possible to place the work of Efraím Medina within the framework of transgressive aspects like use of dirty urban language, depiction of sexual intercourses and the representation of small acts of rebellion. The elements of his narrative structure deal with the urban topics mentioned before and are a precise example of the specific aesthetics that characterize transgressional writers.



Efraím Medina Reyes - [Online Image] (n.d.). Retrieved October 27, 2009, from [www.tierraliteraria.blogspot.com](http://www.tierraliteraria.blogspot.com)[http://tierraliteraria.blogspot.com/2009\\_05\\_01\\_archive.html](http://tierraliteraria.blogspot.com/2009_05_01_archive.html)

Efraím Medina Reyes was born in Cartagena de Indias in 1967; he had a tough childhood and adolescence due to the fact that, when he was 5, he underwent the traumatic vision of his father being hit by a car and dying. This terrible moment had a negative influence during the following years, to the point that he spent a lot of time just shut away in his room reading, in addition to the fact that he had the typical acne scars in his face. Some hard years passed until he could release himself thanks to his first encounter with a woman:

Hay una parte de mi vida que fue traumática por la muerte de mi padre hasta los 11 años. Yo no podía razonar sobre eso e iba a cumplir seis años cuando mi padre murió, lo atropelló un carro frente a mí, cruzando la calle. Eso me produjo un trauma. A partir de allí me convertí en una persona tímida y encerrada en mi misma, acomplexado. Así fue hasta los 17 años. A esa edad tuve mi primer encuentro con una mujer, una prostituta, una cosa ahí en el camino. Descubrí que el sexo me liberó, es decir, como

esa cosa que me relaja, me motiva y me sube el ánimo. El sexo me liberó de ese período oscuro y sentí que podía encontrar como una satisfacción a toda esa pesadez. A eso pesado que me rondaba, siempre sintiendo además que provenía de una familia de clase media baja y luego baja porque mi padre se muere y él era quien sostenía la media. (See Annex 1)

His adolescence was also fully marked by all of the American mass media influence, that led him to dream with the American Way of Life: “Como no podía ser neoyorkino, al menos quería imaginar que lo era”,<sup>9</sup> as he portrays it in his novel *Érase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo* which, in 1997, was awarded with the first place in Premio Nacional de Novela from the Ministerio de Cultura.

Since the beginning of his career with his book of short tales *Cinema Árbol y otros Cuentos* (Premio Nacional de Literatura 1995), Medina was catalogued by the critics as the “naughty boy” of Colombian literature, and the only exponent of Dirty Realism in Latin America, due to the nature of his language and his direct attack against the symbolic capital of the Colombian coast, especially Cartagena, renamed *Ciudad Inmóvil* in *Érase una vez el amor*:

“(…) la gente prefiere comer cangrejos y tirarse en la hamaca a lanzar eructos. Otros salen a buscar turistas (que tirados bajo el ardiente sol caribeño parecen camarones gigantes) para venderles chucherías afrodisíacas (lo único que estimula esa basura son las amibas). Como puedes imaginar, aquí los interesados en el rock y sus tendencias se cuentan con los dedos de una mano. Su dios, en el mejor de los casos, es Joe Arroyo, un mulato gordo, repleto de amibas y *swing* antillano. La mayoría adora a un tal Diomedes Díaz (una especie de chicharrón peludo envuelto en papel regalo). En Ciudad Inmóvil si no usas guayabera y pantalón con pinzas eres *raro*. A ellos no les gusta cambiar, se sienten cómodos meciendo sus hamacas frente a un mar que en esa parte se pudre. Mientras no les espantes el sueño puedes quedarte con todo”<sup>10</sup>.

In spite of its apparent argumentative disorder, *Érase una vez el amor* is coherent with the elements of postmodern novel in terms of emphasis on the self, lots of simple situations instead of few fully developed ones, particular use of language and reminiscences. On the other hand, concepts such as continuous space, linear time, psychological characterization

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<sup>9</sup> Medina, Efraim. *Erase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo*. p. 87

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 45



and transcendental principles, are omitted in his work in favour of a chaotic vision of existence, fragmented structure and the blend of genres and styles.

But, beyond categories, Efraím Medina's novel is the expression of a political stand in the context of globalization and multiculturalism. His literature appears in the historical moment when the cultural belongings, whether cultural or traditional, are being replaced by foreign identities with transnational and post-traditional values. (Araújo, 2003)<sup>11</sup>

Regarding the previous statement, it is important to define this "political stand" not in terms of activism and official or non-official political parties, but as an inner reflection based on perceptual experiences that lead the writer to assert directly or indirectly through the text, his individual vision of the world.

### **Narrative Characteristics of these Authors**

In terms of narrative construction, the presumable political intentions of those authors in criticizing the society where they live demand a two-way process. In the first place, the fact of feeling part of a culture and a system which is unacceptable and incompatible with their expectations, and in second place, the conceptual elaboration from the side of the writer that tries to solve these dilemmas with his craft. In this sense, the construction of meaning, whether critical or not, begins in the literary discourse with a self-interpretation characteristically created by an interaction between fiction and reality. This focus on the self will be the first conceptual category to explain the relationship between these two authors.

If a writer wants to break -conscious or unconsciously- the stability of a system of beliefs or criticize a certain specific ideology with his literature, one of his possibilities is to create a personal interpretation of the world that differs from the established one. In order to do so, his own life becomes the literary material; in other words, his main topic would be his own subjectivity, self-reference.

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<sup>11</sup> Araújo, Orlando. "Efraim Medina Reyes y la Nueva Novela del Caribe Colombiano". p.3

Self-referential writing demands a sharp consciousness of language and literary form together with a constant insecurity of the relationship of fiction to reality. A self-referential writer is always reflecting on his own experience of the world, and consequently, the act of writing about it.

This method of construction focuses attention on the structures of narrative possibilities in writing fiction and also the possible fictionality outside the literary text, as a metalanguage that refers to the worlds constructed entirely of language. (Waugh, 1984)<sup>12</sup>

This metalanguage is part of a literary style referred by Patricia Waugh as Metafiction, which encompasses the linguistic system itself, the world that this language refers to, the world of fiction and the world outside the fictional. Metafiction then appears as a tendency common to a wide range of novels that take fictionality as a theme to be explored.

In a creative process like this, it is not possible to follow a formal pattern or narrative model in terms of plot, chronological sequence, construction of characters or the role of the omniscient narrator. In metafiction novels, these elements acquire flexibility, this means that the author does not have to obey formal rules or follow traditional models let alone be certain of what happens to the characters. The author does not appear in the text as omniscient, but as another character who is (self) conscious of his limitations as a writer and as a human being:

The common lowest denominator of metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction. (...) The self-reflexivity and the formal uncertainty can provide models of how human beings reflect, construct and mediate their experience of the world.<sup>13</sup>

However, it's not possible to codify the creative product of self-conscious fiction because it is a re-interpretation of the world from an individualistic dimension. The writer establishes

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<sup>12</sup> Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction, the Theory and Practice of Self Conscious Fiction*. p.12

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.13

a space between the text and the previous social systems of interpretation of the world and generates new meanings through language; this means that the literary work generates a new ideology. There is no code because this ideology is born out of the text itself, it is not incorporated from any external system, the reader receives the ideology and then integrates it into his own interpretation of the world after an ethical-political personal judgment. (Pouliquen, 1992)<sup>14</sup>

The contribution of the literary text to the culture depends on the relation between the ideology generated from the text and its assimilation in the reader's interpretation. In this sense, the literary work generates new elements of meaning by deconstructing, in the case of metafictional writers, the meanings previously established in society.

The vision of the world (*Weltanschauung*) is then, the substance, the raw material for the reflection work in these novels, together with a particular semantic system that circulates inside a certain community in a certain moment of its history. That is the reason why these works must be taken as autonomous signs in the way that they don't refer to historical or social events but to evaluations of the world, to ideologies.<sup>15</sup>

In opposition to poetry, where the attention to the form and the disposition of the verbal material are the core of their aesthetic value; in these works the aesthetic value emerges from the interpretation of the world beyond the verbal system as a product of a specific structure of mental categories. This operates within the artistic text through an adequacy between a form of content inside the text (significant structure) and outside the text (vision of the world), according to Lucien Goldmann, as interpreted by Pouliquen.

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<sup>14</sup> Pouliquen, H el ene. *Teor a y an alisis sociocr tico*. p.12

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13

## **About this theory**

The sociocritical method encompasses the characteristics of these literary works in terms of style and narrative form; therefore, it is the most suitable to accomplish the objective proposed in this work. This method of analysis conceives literary texts as an interpretation of history in an innovative way, but also as a deconstruction of one or several previous systems of interpretation of the world. Moreover, it approaches the text guided by the perception of thick lines of meaning, registered in a first reading, and by the attention to possible subtler lines of meaning in a further reading.

Subsequently, the text is taken as a corpus of semantic structures which demands an awareness of the complex web of meanings that make up its narrative form. It is then advisable to relate the meanings presented in the text to systems of interpretation of the world visible in cultural history, to look at the process of deconstruction and destabilization of those systems in order to finally define the ideology that helps in the construction of a particular culture within a specific society.<sup>16</sup>

This method is a key factor if we want to explain how the writer's life, culture and influences are necessary to understand his literary work and, above all, his particular ethics with respect to a given culture. The culture here is not the social facts, but the reality that the human groups have made out of their mental structures.

Having different concepts and interpretations of the world, the corresponding literary form must change as well. The literary forms vary together with the system of values of human beings consistently, and sometimes, ahead of their time.

One of the products of this relation between literary forms and interpretation of the world is the tragic vision, which is an ideological stance where man emphatically refuses to live in his society, because he feels that he is being misunderstood. The past values of the tragic

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p.7

hero are no longer valid for his vision of the world and then he denies any possibility to reconcile his ideas with the ideas of the culture he lives in: (Ortega, 2005) <sup>17</sup>

Estas formas que presenta la literatura no son un mero reflejo de la sociedad, sino una crítica ante el mundo: esa es la esencia de todo arte, lo que lo hace ser especial. Lukács afirma que “con relación a la vida, el arte es siempre un «a pesar de todo»; la creación de formas confirma de la manera más profunda la existencia de esa disonancia”. Es por la particularidad de la visión de mundo en la literatura que este concepto resulta un instrumento ideal, objetivo y controlable, que hace parte del análisis científico de la obra literaria.<sup>18</sup>

If on the one hand, the conception of the world is a collection of feelings and ideas that define the individuality and therefore, the identity of a human being before a society, on the other hand, the way to portray him/her inside a literary work must regard the same characteristics. Consequently, the author tends to create a character that can't be related with the traditional values and qualities of a conventional hero; in other words, this type of character arises from the text as an antihero.

The concept of antihero, as opposed to traditional literary protagonists and also as a mirror to reflect social decadence, encompasses elements of transgression and inversion of values that represent the antithesis of the hero archetype as portrayed in the corresponding alter egos in question here: Hank Chinaski and Rep.

### **The Antihero**

Psychoanalysts such as Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung have defined “archetype” as a recurring pattern of situations, images or symbols found in mythology, religion, art and dreams of cultures around the world. In these terms, the archetypal hero has to have a group of specific characteristics like: unusual circumstances of birth, probably in danger or

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<sup>17</sup> Ortega González-Rubio, Mercedes. *La Sociología de la Literatura: Estudio de las Letras desde la Perspectiva de la Cultura*. p. 2

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.2

being born into royalty; leaves his family and lives with others, usually raised away from his people; presence of a traumatic event that changes the hero's life forever; a special weapon, usually the hero is the only one that can use it; supernatural help and spiritual apotheosis, an archetypal hero has spiritual guidance and is spiritually rewarded at the end of his life.

The archetypal hero has been understood as an ideal mythological representation of a collective perception of virtue according to social duties; in this sense, an isolated man is nothing from the point of view of social unity. Indifference, revolutions or exile break the vital bonds with collective structure of thought; for this reason, a traditional reading of classic literary works will lead us to conclude that the principal character of a novel is an idealization of the values of society through unselfish and altruistic actions; he is expected to behave as an archetypal hero, expressing its connection to the collective unconscious:

The hero is part of the perceptual system of a culture through which unfamiliar situations, originating either within the culture or outside it, are interpreted and fitted into old symbolic molds. In helping to pattern the relationships among basic beliefs, values, and behaviors that organize social interaction, [heroes] produce common social understanding of new social conditions.

(Breen and Corcoran, 1982)<sup>19</sup>

However, there are several examples that contradict this implicit rule, Dostoyevsky's and Kafka's characters, to name just a few, have built protagonists who have the qualities of a villain, but with the fate and deeds of a conventional hero. They could be portrayed as rude, cynical, ugly, coward and even skeptical if we consider the contemporary point of view of a modern individual.

Modern man is determined by himself according to his own experiences, not by myths or traditions, and he is also aware of the disappearance of universal symbols due to the progress and predominance of technology and communication. The former system of codes

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<sup>19</sup> Breen, Myles, and Corcoran Farrel. "The Myth in the Discourse." p. 14

and symbols is no longer inherited and the cycle of the modern hero begins; modern society is no longer based on gods but on a political – economical organization.

In the past, when powerful mythologies ruled the world, all of the meaning was concentrated in the group as a large anonymous form; today, there is no meaning in the group and everything is about the individual. However, the individual is not aware of such meaning, it doesn't know which path to take or what the nature of its vital impetus is, considering religion and beliefs as a part of all that fallen universe of symbols. Moreover, its duties as a part of the social order do not require an identification process, unless it is with individual elements, rescued from the popular culture in the midst of all this decline of heavens on Earth.

While the ancient archetypical hero brought light to the world, the modern antihero would rather stay in the dark instead, looking at the new symbols without mythical expectations and without being amazed. Nothing surprises the modern antihero anymore, demystification of the world by means of technology has changed the focal point of human wonder. The mystery of the world is no longer related to animals, plants or hidden sciences, it is human being in themselves. Society is no longer the savior and guide of men, quite the contrary, modern individuals seem to be in charge of social and political reflection through their personal despair. (Campbell, 1997)<sup>20</sup>

Regarding aesthetics, it is important to define the kind of aesthetic values that rule those literary works; as self-referential authors, the characteristics of postmodern aesthetics are the most descriptive in portraying their formal constructions.

Postmodern aesthetics refers, specifically, to the feelings the work of art generates over its interpretation. Like an evocation of a primary sensorial experience where meaning is displaced for effect; in other words, the text is displaced by a sensorial product of the world. Postmodern writers offer an image of how brutal the world is, but do not make a philosophical discourse out of it.

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<sup>20</sup> Campbell, Joseph. *El Héroe de las Mil Caras: Psicoanálisis del Mito*. p. 340

Consequently, it is possible to notice the relation between the distance that metafictional writers take from the ruling ideology in their society, -in order to stand for another new and individual one- and the evocation of the primary processes of the unconscious in postmodern works of art, because, in both instances, authors decode a set of previously established norms in society, with the purpose of creating a new one, more communicative and accessible to the readers through the manifestation of the writer's consciousness.

Postmodernism in literature also entails the inclusion of massive new codes that broaden the fields of expression; these codes often turn to adolescent language, rock and roll, comics, movies and street slang in order to make their discourse more individual, which is the first feature of postmodernism.

However, in the case of the authors considered, it is possible to see that together with the use of the language and codes related to urban culture, there is a postmodern phenomenon of *transculturation* beginning with Bukowski's urban codes, slang, language and even American references, to Medina's narrative resources.

### **Narrative Transculturation**

*Transculturation* is a well-defined concept in anthropology, but, to understand it properly in terms of literature, it is advisable to conceive the concept of culture less ethnocentrically and more universally, -as much as the concept of literature itself entails-, so we can obtain other points of view that could be more advantageous in understanding *transculturation*. This means that it is necessary to understand culture as a process of historical evolution that encompasses aspects such as economics, law, religion, art, linguistics, psychology and sex, not only from the point of view of traditional customs, but also as formative elements of a nation.

The term *transculturation* was coined in 1940 in the book *Contrapunteo cubano del Tabaco y del Azúcar* by Cuban anthropologist, Fernando Ortíz, who differentiated the term from the one of *acculturation*, widely used in sociology at that time, which is the transition



from one culture into another through a process where a dominated culture receives some manifestations from another, different from *transculturation* which explains the same phenomenon, but with an emphasis on rootlessness and its social repercussions. According to Ortiz, transculturation is the process whereby a culture acquires some elements of another by losing elements of their own and producing, in turn, a creation of new cultural expressions that can be referred to as *neoculturation*. (Ortíz, 1999)<sup>21</sup>

Angel Rama came up with the concept of transculturation in his article: *Los Procesos de Transculturacion en la Narrativa Latinoamericana* (1971), where he proposed an alternative to Ortíz' theory about the distinction between acculturation and transculturation. Rama established this difference by defining acculturation as a process of *passive submission* of one culture to another that, partially or totally, redefines its former identity, while in transculturation processes, the change does not happen in a passive but in a creative way, this means that the host culture gives a creative response in order to adapt and reform itself before the change.

In the Latin American scenario, between the 1930's and 1950's there was stagnancy in narrative techniques which were, with the exception of some attempts on critical realism, basically regionalists. Colombia has plenty of examples of this kind of novels, since *La María* (Jorge Isaacs, 1876), to *Cosme* (José Félix Fuenmayor, 1927) and *La Vorágine* (José Eustasio Rivera, 1924), whose topics were mostly rural and elaborated with traditional components from folklore.

The consequent transition between regionalism and new modern tendencies began when the regionalist novels, characterized by accentuating and defining specific cultural identities and profiles, without reflecting the social structures of their time that seemed to respond more and more to urban standards. (Rama, 1987)<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ortiz, Fernando. *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*. p. 83

<sup>22</sup> Rama, Ángel. *Transculturation Narrativa en América Latina*. p. 29

Transculturation appears then as an alternative to regionalism working on the basis of a cultural plasticity that allows the possibility of integrate external traditions and receive foreign narrative contributions, and incorporate them to local discourse through a complete rearticulation of the own cultural structure. (Sobrevilla, 2001)<sup>23</sup>

According to Rama, transculturation can be articulated in a geometrical way according to three moments: partial deculturation, incorporations of the foreign culture and finally the effort to recover the remaining elements of the original culture and the foreign ones by selective literary criteria.

This criteria of selectivity gives the writer the possibility to invent new codes and narrative elements based on cultural elements chosen, whether local or foreign, through a four-step operation: losses, selections, rediscoveries and incorporations. Each one connected with the other within a cultural system entirely reconstructed.

### **Cultural Relativism**

Along with transculturation, there is another concept within the cultural field of postmodern writers which will be useful to identify common features between the novels considered in this study. *Cultural relativism* is one of the characteristic aspects of postmodern literature that have been found in novels that contain elements of transgression. As a part of a whole theory called *Epistemological Relativism*, cultural relativism asserts that any given ethical truth is relative with regard to a specific culture. The main idea of this concept is that whatever a cultural group approves is considered right within that culture; conversely, everything that a culture group condemns is considered wrong. This means that good and evil can be judged only regarding the cultural values of the community in question, because there is not an ultimate rule of what is good and what is evil that judges culture.

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<sup>23</sup> Sobrevilla, David. "Transculturacion y heterogeneidad: avatares de dos categorías literarias en América Latina". p. 22

Moral norms are the end result of customs, as time passes by, human thoughts were evolving into a well-organized group of principles known as morality but, even morality evolves -together with the others aspects of a culture- to adapt to the changes of human mind of nowadays. There are no fixed ethical norms in morality, these are the result of social processes of specific cultures according to John Dewey, as interpreted by K. Anderson (2004)<sup>24</sup>

In this line of thought, what our conscience tell us is always determined by our social group. The moral values we stand for are not part of our “moral nature”; they have grown as a product of our upbringing and background, in terms of traditional customs or folkways. Therefore, there is not an ethical universal principle, but a different cultural-conditioning process which molds the individual’s mind under a wide range of “relative” values. This relative values determine the writer’s judgments and perceptions of the world, specially when talking about selfreferential writers whose vital experiences are the raw material of his work.

Keeping in mind the purpose of this study, what is most interesting about this concept is the kind of literary consciousness that underlies these novels as a dialogue between the writer and the reader, which leads us to the term of *dirty realism* where this dialogue takes place in terms of pleasure, both of reading and writing, narrative aesthetics and society.

### **Dirty Realism**

This term was coined by Bill Buford in “Granta” Literary magazine in 1983, when he made a reference to Roland Barthes’s *Pleasure of the Text* in order to explain the nature of the aesthetic pleasure involved in the writer – reader relation in terms of language. Language is understood in Barthes’s theory as an ideological system, therefore, any product of language has an ideological content, whether it is a novel, a magazine, chat rooms or jargons, these sociolects become language when they fit into a certain community long enough to be understandable by all its members.

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<sup>24</sup> Anderson, Kerby. “Relativismo Cultural”.

This means that languages are profoundly related to the particularities of society and its ideology until the point of consolidating strong linguistic structures that gain power and hegemony insofar as the society goes. Relations of authority between any subject and the collective unconscious are determined by language; likewise in manipulation of the truth or global domination by using the media is only possible through the empire of words.

According to Buford, Dirty Realism fulfills the writer's idea of practicing a subversive literary exercise through language in order to break that ideological hegemony. A dirty realistic literary character -who is the author himself in metafiction- is aware of the incongruities of modern society, but also of his impossibility to knock it down with a revolution, because he is not an "historically" naïve individual anymore, so his only possibility of subversion is cynically portraying himself within the text with the most brutal and frank language possible.

This is the point where postmodern aesthetics meets the reader; dirty realism emerges from the text to find the reader within a culture which is longing for a "counter cultural" program as an opposition to the ruling system that is impossible to break in daily routine, but that is widely displayed and transformed in the literary work.

# **The Aesthetics of Transgression: Origins and Development of a Literary Influence**

## **Introduction**

### **Bukowski and Medina as postmodern writers**

I remember clearly the day I went along with a friend to visit the exhibition of Colombian plastic artist, Danilo Dueñas, in Casas Riegner Gallery in Bogotá; I barely knew about his work, let alone his recent pieces, but not even knowing everything about this artist I could have imagined what I was about to see.

The exhibition was a bunch of old pieces of furniture and baseboards piled up in the middle of the gallery rooms, mixed with waste objects such as tires, pieces of wood, used props of the gallery and all kinds of garbage.

This artist works with unconventional materials to the point of getting to the gallery with empty hands and then preparing an entire exhibition with only found objects. The gallery owner explained it with notions of “no forma” (lack of form), movement, transition and progression beyond the ordinary boundaries of art. This means that the artist has the power to confer upon the work, a new aesthetic and conceptual content.

What is interesting about this historical allusion is that it is a perfect example of the interest of postmodern artists in their work process, not in the resulting image. Likewise, in Bukowski and Medina’s narrative, -which we can consider postmodern literature- one can see the attempt to break with the deep universal literary themes of yesteryear, in order to explain the world from the inside.

The work of Charles Bukowski and Efraím Medina can be considered from this sociocritical perspective: both novels, *Factotum* and *Érase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo*, elaborate a web of significance and re-interpretations of subjectivity of the modern world. Hank Chinaski and Rep, both alter-egos and protagonists, are portrayed as outsiders who take distance from the ongoing ideologies (e.g. capitalism) and the socially expected forms of behavior, tending instead, to lives full of present-day experiences, real and brutally

frank encounters with people, as a result of self-reflection of their existences and a skeptical vision of the modern world.

Both authors are constantly trying to explain the nature of these experiences in their own terms without any kind of external mediation like local culture, religion or traditional values. This means that they appear inside the text as judges, according to their own code, but at the same time, without certainty unfolding the story. They are questioning and criticizing the world from an individualistic perspective, but not in the way of an omniscient narrator; in other words, they are making a critique without any certainty about the truth, nor about the other characters nor about themselves; a critique that comes just from a profound skepticism.

It is quite impossible to talk about univocal concepts in this matter, especially when the notion of postmodernism entails the idea of non-specific meanings, just as an opposition to literary canonical tradition that tends to establish generic patterns. Consequently, in my opinion, the characters in these novels act in the story, to some extent, with a code of principles that responds to an individual sense of ethics which would be perfectly recognizable and acceptable by anybody anywhere in the world. This means that these authors do deal with universal values, but at the same time, those values cannot be interpreted as a product of a traditional collective thought or system of beliefs because they are working on the characters in a flexible (relative) way and as a result of a complex introspection.

## **Themes**

### **Values**

The main characters in *Factotum* and *Èrase una vez* share then, a particular system of epistemologically relative values; both *Hank Chinaski* and *Rep*, seem to respond to a certain individualistic ethical code which, according to my perception, is expressed in terms of rejection to authority and disobedience of social norms. This is frequently portrayed in *Factotum* where Hank Chinaski is constantly fired from one job to another after some irreverent or insulting behavior:

I waited outside with five or six young men, all of them trying to look ambitious. We had filled out our employment applications and now we waited. I was the last to be called.

“Mr. Chinaski, what made you leave the railroad yards?”

“Well, I don’t see any future in the railroads.”

“They have good unions, medical care, retirement.”

“At my age, retirement might almost be considered superfluous.”

“Why did you come to New Orleans?”

“I had too many friends in Los Angeles, friends I felt were hindering my career. I wanted to go where I could concentrate unmolested.”

“How do we know that you’ll remain with *us* any length of time?”

“I might not.”

“Why?”

“Your ad stated that there was a future for an ambitious man. If there isn’t any future here then I must leave.”

“Why haven’t you shaved your face? Did you lose a bet?”

“No yet.”

“No yet?”

“No; I bet my landlord I could land a job in one day even with this beard.”

“All right, we’ll let you know.”

“I don’t have a phone.”

“That’s all right, Mr. Chinaski.”

(...)

About 4 p.m. I was awakened by a knock on the door. It was a Western Union boy. I opened the telegram:

MR. H. CHINASKI. REPORT TO WORK 8 AM TOMORROW.  
R.M. HEATHER-CLIFF CO.<sup>25</sup>

This passage shows a character that, in spite of his helpless situation, shows a reckless attitude in a situation in which anybody would have behaved discretely and politely. I think Chinaski is more involved with himself than with the rest of the people, to the point of putting his social stability at risk. No matter what consequences he would face, his commitment is with transgressing; because transgression is the last haven of the desperate, because the only perspective where it is possible to write is from a distance.

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<sup>25</sup> Bukowski, Charles. *Factotum*. p. 15

This works on the premise that the identification of the essence of men is not anymore with reason, but with the will of action, a type of will that clashes with the products of reason and the logics of “what you have to do” to survive in a social system founded on the basis of a consumer society.

This profound rupture generates then, an inversion of values that seems to be a kind of existentialism, because these actions are not characterized by any materialistic relation with modern belongings and economical systems, together with a sense of dignity and freedom - especially before authority-, disguised in profanity and licentiousness. Even though these characters are in a status of disadvantage in society, wretched enough to feel themselves as the muck of society, they still behave as prototypical self-absorbed characters:

Some time during the night as we were talking I fell off the couch. I lay on the floor and looked up those beautiful legs. “Baby,” I said, “I’m a genius but nobody knows it but me.”<sup>26</sup>

“Swell,” she said.

“What?”

“You think you’re swell, you think you’re Hot Shit!”

“No.”

“Yes, you do. I can tell by the way you act. I still like you. I liked you right off.”

“Put your dress a little higher.”<sup>27</sup>

Ella dice que soy cien mil veces mejor en cualquier sentido pero que él es suave y fiel. *Tal vez sea feo pero la quiere y la cuida.* Salimos del anticuario y nos detenemos en una esquina. *Y yo que soy, ¿un ogro?* Ella se ríe. *Eres fuerte y engreído, por eso me gustas.* Así que voy a un bar y luego a un motel con su mejor amiga.<sup>28</sup>

Both Chinaski and Rep share elements of self-absorbed characters as long as they conduct themselves throughout the story with the only impulse of satisfying their basic personal

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibíd.* pág.69

<sup>27</sup> *Ibíd.* pág.

<sup>28</sup> Medina, Efraím. *Erase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo* p. 58



needs whether it be company, sex, alcohol or mere satisfaction of their ego. I think this is an important point in the study since individualism acts as a “generator” of situations throughout the novels and is a common point of these two characters.

## **Ego**

In the first place, it is necessary to understand the nature of this *ego* so, it will be proper to turn to the concept of *metafiction* where the author is profoundly aware of his craft as a “place” where the writer takes refuge from the absurdity of life and, consequently, uses his own life as the main reference of his work. Such individualism is closely linked to the skepticism and identity crisis of postmodern individuals and, according to my interpretation, this type of narrative allows the writer to make a narcissistic projection of the self as powerful and successful, in opposition to an unsatisfactory reality:

I'd do it too! I'd save my pennies. I'd get an idea, I'd spring a loan. I'd hire and fire. I'd keep whiskey in my desk drawer. I'd have a wife with size 40 breast and an ass that would make the paperboy on the corner come in his pants when he saw it wobble. I'd cheat on her and she'd know it and keep silent in order to live in my house with my wealth. I'd fire men just to see the look of dismay on their faces. I'd fire woman who didn't deserve to be fired. (...) I'd build an empire upon the broken bodies and lives of helpless men, women, and children. I'd shove it to them all the way. *I'd show them!*<sup>29</sup>

Vivo entre el sueño y la realidad, sueño que soy Big Rep, una estrella del cine y del arte, que vivo en New York y concedo mil entrevistas por día, que tengo un sirviente filipino y una mansión de 57 habitaciones, que las mujeres se arrastran por mí, que hago lo que quiero y digo lo que siento.<sup>30</sup>

Me llaman Rep -diminutivo de reptil- desde que recuerdo. Mido seis pies y peso ochenta y un kilos, tengo ojos negros y hundidos como agujeros de escopeta a punto de disparar, la boca sensual y

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibíd.* p. 48

<sup>30</sup> *Ibíd.* 126

una verga de 25 centímetros en los días calurosos. No soy eyaculador precoz ni suelo tener mal aliento (...) el olor natural de mi piel es fascinante. Para la eficaz e inolvidable sacudida que toda mujer sueña, soy el tipo indicado. También me destaco bebiendo (...) soy heterosexual y mi inteligencia es feroz. No es bueno meterse conmigo.<sup>31</sup>

This “over-sized” way to portray themselves can be understood as the materialization of the intellectual force of the writers, in the text, through the characterization of their alter egos; in other words, the physical and social insecurity and its corresponding feeling of frustration is somehow solved through the craft of writing and the creation of a symbolic stronger self. This compensation works in the novels as the last human subterfuge from which some personal principles like dignity or freedom can emerge in spite of an unfavorable and hostile environment.

## Sex

Due to the common obsession with sex, it is one of the aspects where these authors truly meet; both of them include a high amount of sexual references and their own experiences narrated in first person as autobiographical reminiscences with a characteristic confrontational and explicit language.

In the case of Bukowski’s *Factotum*, there is also an emphasis on sex rather than romance, as if the protagonist did not get along well with women and, thus, had to develop a kind of misogyny. Even if Medina’s novel is not precisely a romantic love story, at least it includes many references of “insurmountable love” with the unnamed character *cierta chica*, who is his lost love and later, the obsession of the main character, *Rep*. In spite of this difference, Medina and Bukowski are related in terms of three aspects they have in common:

1. Profane and sexually explicit language that is often pejorative against women:

Jan was an excellent fuck. She’d had two children but she was a most excellent fuck. We had met at an open air lunch counter – I was spending my last fifty cents on a greasy hamburger – and we

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibíd.* P. 7

struck up a conversation. She bought me a beer, gave me her phone number, and three days later I moved in to her apartment. She had a tight pussy and she took it like it was a knife that was killing her. She reminded me of a butterfat little piglet. There was enough meanness and hostility in her to make me feel that with each thrust I was paying her back for her ill temper. She'd had one ovary removed and claimed that she couldn't get pregnant; for only one ovary she responded generously.<sup>32</sup>

Monica sabía chuparlo mejor que nadie y siempre se tragaba el semen. Cierta chica no era mala pero arrastraba ciertos rezagos de su breve militancia feminista. Chuparlo, según ella, era signo de sometimiento. Pensar que sólo lo hacía por complacerme me quitaba las ganas y decidí quitar esa parte de nuestro repertorio sexual. Para compensarme me dejo metérselo por detrás tres veces al mes.<sup>33</sup>

These detailed and raw depictions of sexual intercourses evidently can be unpleasant for some people because they can hurt the reader's sensitivity. I think this harshness is explicable from the psychological dimension of the writers, whose experiences with women in the past were not satisfactory at all.

Curiously enough, both authors had serious cases of *acne vulgaris* during their adolescence; it left scars in their faces affecting their looks and generating profound shyness and insecurity in them, especially in their relation to women. Bukowski lost his virginity at 24, after lonely and grounded teenage years, and Medina often mentions his physical flaws that make his social relationships difficult during his adolescence:

Tengo huellas de acné en la cara y el culo.<sup>34</sup>

El acné y el hecho de medir un metro noventa y pesar apenas sesenta y tres kilos cuando tenía diecisiete años me llevaron al encierro, la lectura y las ganas de escribir. Ninguna chica quería salir conmigo porque las hacía ver pequeñas entonces escribí rabiosos poemas y con ellos me levanté la primera novia. (See Annex 2)

Bukowski was also ostracized as a youngster because of a terrible case of acne that produced painful boils all over his face and back.

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibíd.* p. 147

<sup>33</sup> *Ibíd.* p. 155

<sup>34</sup> *Ibíd.* p.7

The combination of his unhappy home life and his physical disfigurement molded his role as a perpetual outsider.<sup>35</sup>

Those personal conditions in Bukowski's and Medina's lives determined the nature of their literature through two main aspects: in the first place, the fact of being grounded and confined to an individual world, only inhabited by books and soul-searching experiences give them the context to develop a narrative inclination as a way to understand the world from an insightful perspective and to overcome the solitude of living without female company. In the second place, the fact of feeling physically "inadequate" to fit in certain social contexts and therefore, the impossibility of performing properly with others, turned into a resentful literary voice as they grew older and with the consciousness of being the "outsiders".

## 2. Resentful language and behavior as consequence of a hostile environment:

Las persianas están cubiertas de una delgada capa de polvo donde a veces escribo nombres y teléfonos porque me divierte ver cómo el polvo los borra. Si sobreviven tres días es mala señal y entonces los borro yo mismo.<sup>36</sup>

Uno de los mutantes se acerca: es el pequeño Nico. No sólo es estúpido sino que además piensa que tiene cosas en común con nosotros. Su sentido del humor es tan eficaz como el pataleo de una tortuga en agua hirviendo. No es mala persona, no tiene la culpa de ser escaso, un pedazo de basura genética vacía y sonriente.<sup>37</sup>

El fútbol es el deporte más estúpido del mundo.<sup>38</sup>

In *Érase una vez*, Medina is constantly criticizing the stupidity of his local cultural icons and the irrational way people around him make their decisions. In the narration, he tends to take a far-off perspective of the world, as if he were confined to his own thoughts that are

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<sup>35</sup> Bigna, Daniel. *Life on the Margins: The Autobiographical Fiction of Charles Bukowski*. p.10

<sup>36</sup> Medina, Efraím. *Erase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo* p. 8

<sup>37</sup> *Ibíd.* p. 11

<sup>38</sup> *Ibíd.* p. 29

impossible to share. The world that Medina inhabits is worthless in every sense and the only way to relate to it is by being a hostile and resentful outsider.

Another external projection of this resentment is the fact that Medina dedicates an entire chapter to the infamous romance between Nancy Spungen and the former leader of the seventies British punk band “Sex Pistols”, Sid Vicious. Medina portrays this romance as the impossibility of a real love in a world full of garbage, as if the ideal of love were no longer possible in an empty and hypocritical society -this romance ends up in the murder of Nancy by Sid and his later suicide-, but, at the same time, Medina celebrates the decadent and self-destructive nature of this romance:

El tipo que canta se llama Sid Vicious, un demente de la peor calaña. La mujer que amó se llamaba Nancy Spungen: juntos trataron de hacer lo mejor posible, romper los duros bordes de la realidad y para eso tiraron con saña, se taparon la crisma con todo tipo de drogas, vomitaron su rabia en hoteles malolientes. Hicieron valer – en todo el sentido – su libertad en un mundo lleno de muñones caminantes.<sup>39</sup>

In the case of Bukowski’s resentment, it is unavoidable to mention the troubled relationship between him and his parents during his childhood and younger years which is profusely narrated in some short stories and in his first novel *Ham On Rye* (1982); in this work, Bukowski specially portrays his father as cruel, mean and despotic.

Two people: one larger with curly hair, a big nose, a big mouth, much eyebrow, the larger person always seeming to be angry, often screaming; the smaller person quiet, round of face, paler, with large eyes. I was afraid of both of them.<sup>40</sup>

I had begun to dislike my father. He was always angry about something. Wherever he went he got into arguments with people.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibíd.* p. 11

<sup>40</sup> Bukowski, Charles. *Ham On Rye*. p. 6

<sup>41</sup> *Ibíd.* p.22

According to Bigna (2005), the aggressive nature of Bukowski's father is quite probably due to the Great Depression which causes a great many depressions and anxieties in the 30's American generation who were affected by this huge economic breakdown.

It was terrible. All the fathers in my immediate neighborhood had lost their jobs. My father had lost his job (...)What was I going to say? Maybe only the fathers in my neighborhood were without jobs. I'd heard of the stock market crash. It meant something bad. Maybe the stock market had only crashed in our neighborhood.<sup>42</sup>

His father believes in the pursuit of wealth as a desirable social goal, but is frustrated by the realities of economic hardship.<sup>43</sup>

As a consequence of this historical phenomenon, Bukowski's father strongly believed that work defines one's identity, and his personal values were founded on an economic basis. As a matter of fact, *Factotum* shows a clear image of an angry father that bills his son for living at home, charging him for laundry, room and board.

If you stay here, I am going to charge your room and board and laundry. When you get a job, what you owe us will be subtracted from your salary until you are paid up.<sup>44</sup>

I knew that my father would charge me atrocious prices for room, board and laundry and that he would also be careful to list me as a dependent on his income tax return, but the desire to find a job did not seem to be with me.<sup>45</sup>

In Bukowski's early works, it is quite easy to perceive the dominating presence of the father; *Factotum*, *Ham on Rye*, many short stories and some of his poems (See Annex 3) show different episodes of Bukowski's family life where that the relation with his father is evidently the *leit motif* and also the point of departure to characterize Hank Chinaski.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibíd.* p.67

<sup>43</sup> Bigna, Daniel. *Life on the Margins: The Autobiographical Fiction of Charles Bukowski.* p.69

<sup>44</sup> Bukowski, Charles. *Factotum.* p. 15

<sup>45</sup> *Ibíd.* p.15

I think Bukowski clearly defined the characteristics of his alter ego, Hank Chinaski, by constructing him exactly with the values opposite to those of his father; this means that while his father was obsessed with money, hard work and belongings, Chinaski committed himself to becoming a heavy drinker, a dispossessed bum, a nobody.

I have this job. Is this to be it? No wonder men robbed banks. There were too many demeaning jobs. Why the hell wasn't I a superior court judge or a concert pianist? Because it took training and training cost money. But I didn't want to be anything anyhow. And I was certainly succeeding.<sup>46</sup>

Another aspect related to Bukowski's resentment -and also related to his father- is violence, since Bukowski was severely mistreated in his childhood to the point of dropping out of college, leaving home at 21, and starting a wandering life around United States.

I heard my father come in. He always slammed the door, walked heavily, and talked loudly. He was home. After a few moments the bedroom door opened. He was six feet two, a large man. Everything vanished, the chair I was sitting in, the wallpaper, the walls, all of my thoughts. He was the dark covering the sun, the violence of him made everything else utterly disappear. He was all ears, nose, mouth, I couldn't look at his eyes, there was only his red angry face.<sup>47</sup>

In *Factotum*, Bukowski narrates his coming-back-home experience at 25, how his father was everything but welcoming, charging him again for living at home, and how the consequences of his drinking abuse turned out in a new episode of violence.

"Suddenly I vomited on their Persian \_Tree of Life\_ rug. My mother screamed. My father lunged toward me.  
"Do you know what we do to a dog when he shits on the rug?"  
"Yes."

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<sup>46</sup> Bukowski, Charles. *Ham On Rye*. p. 168

<sup>47</sup> *Ibíd.* P. 37

He grabbed the back of my neck. He pressed down, forcing me to bend at the waist. He was trying to force me to my knees.

"I'll show you."

"Don't . . ."

My face was almost into it.

"I'll show you what we do to dogs!"

I came up from the floor with the punch. It was a perfect shot. He staggered back all the way across the room and sat down on the couch. I followed him over.

"Get up."

He sat there. I heard my mother. "\_You Hit Your Father! You Hit Your Father! You Hit Your Father!\_"

She screamed and ripped open one side of my face with her fingernails.

"Get up," I told my father.

"\_You Hit Your Father!\_"

She scratched my face again. I turned to look at her. She got the other side of my face. Blood was running down my neck, was soaking my shirt, pants, shoes, the rug. She lowered her hands and stared at me.

"Have you finished?"

She didn't answer. I walked back to the bedroom thinking, I better find myself a job."<sup>48</sup>

Looking at these examples of Bukowski's family life, it is easy to conclude that there is a direct bond between Bukowski's resentfulness and his unfortunate relation with his father; but what is interesting about this situation, is the way that Bukowski projects his anger against his father toward society at large, as if his relation with his father had have determined his relation with society as a whole.

Those personal experiences of Medina and Bukowski are transposed from the authors' memories themselves to the texts, -with no apparent stylistic modification-, as an unpleasant but yet honest narrations whose frank language gives the reader the sensation of being witness of a confession. This type of language that emerges from the text without any formal limitations is one of the aspects that constitute these works as self-conscious postmodern narrations.

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<sup>48</sup> Bukowski, Charles. *Factotum*. p. 28



### 3. Language and the Grotesque

Several passages in *Erase una vez* and *Factotum* contain unpleasant expressions and references that belong to the grotesque. The concern for depicting the physical flaws and ugliness of the characters, the accurate portrayal of decadence and the use of scatological references are some of the components of self-referential narrations that contain grotesque elements.

As we have already seen, both authors deal with the matter of sex in an almost obsessive way, but there is also a component of the grotesque which matches perfectly with the deliberate intention of producing disgust.

Martha got up and turned on the radio. Loud. "I'm a good dancer," she said. "Watch me dance!"

She whirled in her green tent, kicking her legs. She wasn't so hot. Soon she had the smock up around her waist and was waving her behind in my face. The pink panties had a large hole over the right cheek. The off came the smock and she was just in her panties. Next the panties were on the floor by the smock and she was doing a grind. Her triangle of hunt hair was almost hidden by her dangling, bouncing stomach.

Sweat was making her mascara run. 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 tastes 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.

My penis rose; she groaned, bit me. I screamed, grabbed her by the hair, pulled her off. I stood in the center of the room wounded and terrified. They were playing a Mahler Symphony on the radio. Before I could move she was down on me again. She gripped my balls mercilessly with both of her hands. Her mouth opened, she had me; her head bobbed, sucked, jerked. Giving my balls a tremendous yank while almost biting my pecker in half she forced me. Sucking sounds filled the room as my radio played Mahler. I felt as if I were 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 eaten alive.

If I come, I thought desperately, I'll never forgive myself<sup>49</sup>

Entonces, en vez de llegar la hermosa chica del atardecer, se aplasta a mi lado una gorda de lo más inmunda. Las tetas se le salen por los costados, su trasero se escurre por toda la banca y su cara parece un guante de boxeo. Odio las mujeres feas. Me escupo en las manos y juego con la saliva pero no surte efecto, mi cochinada en vez de espantarla la divierte.<sup>50</sup>

These expressions are part of a self-referential discourse where the writer takes distance from the conception of creative art and traditional aesthetics; there is no longer a deep concern about style or empathy with the reader at a poetic level. These writers don't want to connect to the reader by being congenial; the ideal of transgression consists in demystifying cultural symbols and social customs that are sacred and "thin-ice" topics for the rest of the people. In Bukowski's and Medina's novels, it is very frequent to find allusions to the hilarious aspect of sexual relations or the absurdity of working life.

For these authors, art and life should not be regarded as two different instances when it comes to writing a story, the purpose of art should be to reflect life just the way it is, and from these authors' perspective, modern life is not a Garden of Eden at all. So, the premise in these works is to portray basic realities of real life without the intention of transcending them through *sacred* inspiration, as Bukowski writes in a letter to William Packard, editor of the *New York Quarterly* literary magazine:

They (the public) have no idea that it (art) can be done by a bus driver, a field hand or a fry cook. They have no idea where it comes from. It comes from pain, damnation and impossibility. The blow to the soul of the gut. It comes from getting burned and seared and slugged. It comes from being too alive in the middle of death.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibíd.* p.37

<sup>50</sup> Medina, Efraím. *Érase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo.* p. 149

<sup>51</sup> Bigna, Daniel. *Life on the Margins: The Autobiographical Fiction of Charles Bukowski.* p.9

All these linguistic aspects are related, one way or another, with a personal intention of maintaining coherence between the author's actual thoughts about the world and the actions and deeds of the characters. I think that one of the ways a writer can handle his personal demons is by throwing them into the character by means of language; and if besides that, there are particular issues about aspects such as sex or family, then language will serve as a catalyst for the process of overcoming them.

Profanity, resentment and the grotesque appear in the novels subject to the matter of sex because the combination of those three aesthetic characteristics with this matter is the most efficient and direct way to transgress the prejudices about what is expected to be found in a book, and on the other hand, it is a way to generate confidence in the reader by establishing an open and honest dialogue that ends up in a kind of complicity.

However, in the case of Medina's work, there is a particular aspect where such honesty is arguable, even if his language is crude and direct, it is not possible to set that complicity if the reader takes a sharp glance at some expressions and vocabulary that he uses which is absolutely alien to any linguistic Colombian code, but is perfectly recognizable as Spaniard slang, this aspect leads the analysis towards the phenomenon of transculturation.

## **Transculturation**

One of the main fields of analysis in this study is the one concerning transculturation, because this is, in my opinion, the most enlightening aspect to identify and interpret Bukowski's influence on Medina's narrative. As I see it, the foreign elements and references in Medina's novel act in his writing process as counterparts of his profound rejection of his local culture and his inconformity with being born in Colombia.

Pensé en Miles Davis y Jimmy Hendrix. Pensé en el primer Superman de la tele: era de mediana edad, era robusto y panzón pero igual luchaba por la justicia. Pensé en Michael Jackson y Prince (a quienes considero los más grandes artistas del siglo) y recordé la admiración que Miles Davis les profesaba. Pensé en Charlie *Bird* Parker, en lo impresionante que es el arte de Parker.

Pensé en Dimensión Desconocida y quise escapar por uno de sus laberintos. Pensé en Marilyn Monroe y el corazón me latió más aprisa. Pensé en John Wayne, en Clint Eastwood, en John Cage, en Harvey Brooks y tantos nombres que me eran harto más familiares que Alejo Durán, Jorge Villamil o Teresa Gutiérrez (...) Puedo recordar mejor algunos capítulos de *Hechizada* que la historia de Ciudad Inmóvil y sé que Steve McQueen es mil veces más importante para mí que Simón Bolívar.<sup>52</sup>

Ahora parezco un viejo *cowboy* desnudo en la solitaria cama de un hotelucho. El más anónimo pistolero del *Far West*<sup>53</sup>

In spite of this fact, Medina seems to be profoundly aware of Colombian popular culture, the basis of his sharp and aggressive social critique is precisely a whole set of T.V. characters and entertainers who represent the popular icons that Medina apparently hates so much.

A mí aceptar como propia una cultura que había producido a los Corraleros de Majagual me daba agrieras.<sup>54</sup>

Quien mejor hace telenovelas aquí es Jorge Barón, si las escribiese él mismo serían insuperables. Los otros me fastidian con sus reelaborados folletines gringos repletos de diálogos arribistas y esnobismo trasnochado. Cháchara sonsa de pareja en crisis y más y más lugares comunes vistos en *Dallas* y *Dinastía* que no encajan con el paisaje adyacente. Deberían contratarlos como trabajadoras sociales y dejarle esos espacios a Jorge Barón. El fuerte de Fernando Gaitán, otro mandril pretencioso, son el costumbrismo refrito, el chiste y la ramplonería.<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, the great amount of American references in his work, his own acceptance of wishing to be American and even considering himself an imaginary cosmopolitan person, gives the reader again the image of an unhappy man who grumbles about his origins and his culture. This aspect appears profusely throughout the text as a reaffirmation of individuality in a mediocre environment; however, the fact of denying his

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<sup>52</sup> Medina, Efraím. *Érase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo*. p. 159

<sup>53</sup> *Ibíd.* p. 177

<sup>54</sup> *Ibíd.* p. 159

<sup>55</sup> *Ibíd.* p. 142

roots and trying desperately to join a foreign culture precisely ends up in the absolute sacrifice of his individuality and the adoption of a mask that serves to find a place in the world from which to scream his inconformity.

Si no podía ser neoyorquino, al menos quería imaginar que lo era.<sup>56</sup>

No ser gringo ha sido quizá la mayor frustración de mi vida así que sólo me quedaba ser duro.<sup>57</sup>

Ella había vivido una temporada en New York. Para mí la gran manzana era sólo un montón de films, revistas y afiches. Era Capote y Woody Allen y McDonalds y los almacenes Macy y etc.,etc. Ella lo había recorrido a pie, había estado en Manhattan al atardecer, le habían hecho un tatuaje en Harlem pero aún así estoy seguro que Nueva York se me notaba más a mí que a ella.<sup>58</sup>

Bogotá ha sido mi *sueño americano* pero siempre regreso a Ciudad Inmóvil.<sup>59</sup>

The origin of Medina's transculturation can be interpreted then, in my opinion, from the mere skepticism and disappointment that came along in his life since he was a shy teenager enclosed in himself, who had lost his father tragically, and couldn't fit in his community.

### **Linguistic Transculturation**

Along with the aforementioned aspects, the nature of Bukowski's literature with its elements of transgression and skepticism, suits perfectly inside the search of a young writer who is looking for any voice, except his own. I believe that Medina knew the work of Bukowski through the Spanish Spaniard editions of his work by *Anagrama* Publishing House translated by Jorge Berlanga. This fact is relevant in the sense that Medina has found a language of hostility supported by the Spaniard slang of the Spanish editions of Bukowski's work, which constituted the core of this influence.

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibíd.* p. 158

<sup>57</sup> *Ibíd.* p. 190

<sup>58</sup> *Ibíd.* p. 158

<sup>59</sup> *Ibíd.* p. 146

The following classification includes the linguistic elements that show the type of transculturation in the novels in question:

Transcultured Spaniard slang: *hijoputa*

Érase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo	Factotum
<p>No te metas con ella, Rep. Pero si es sólo una pila de caca asoleada. Vamos afuera <u>hijoputa</u>. (p.12)</p> <p>No siempre fui bueno, más bien era un <u>hijoputa</u>. (p.124)</p> <p>Mi vecina es una cuarentona alta y en plena forma, esos <u>hijoputas</u> han debido pasarla de lo lindo. (p.179)</p>	<p>Grace salió del baño. ¿Qué está haciendo ahora este <u>hijoputa</u>? Está enseñándonos a jugar a los dados —dijo Jerry. (p.39)</p> <p>¡Te voy a romper la cara, a ti, <u>hijoputa</u>! —le gritó al supervisor. (p.75)</p> <p>Grace es su chica, pero Grace le hace mucho la puñeta. Y él es un tacaño <u>hijo de puta</u>. (p.34)</p>

Transcultured Spaniard slang: *cojones/cojonudos*

Érase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo	Factotum
<p>Quizá quiera negar aquel tiempo pero voy a estar aquí recordando que le enseñe a mover estrellas, a leer escritores <u>cojonudos</u>. (p.152)</p>	<p>Es usted un empleado <u>cojonudo</u>, pero voy a tener que despedirle. (p.45) Mierda, ya lo creo. Un tío <u>cojonudo</u>. (p.86)</p>
<p>El poema habla de amor y violencia, de irse a México en un auto rojo y matar policías. Se necesitan <u>cojones</u> para escribir así. (p.134)</p>	<p>Ese viejo de nuestro asiento, tiene carácter. Es un viejo zorro con un par de <u>cojones</u>. (p.56) Una cuestión de <u>cojones</u>. Me pregunté si tendría suficientes <u>cojones</u>. (p.5)</p>

Transculturated Spaniard slang: *coño/ de puta madre*

<b>Érase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo</b>	<b>Factotum</b>
Me gustaba más su boca que su <u>coño</u> . (p.155)	Sus manos me aprisionaban y su <u>coño</u> me atenazaba casi de igual modo. (p.71)
Jordi Heras un vasco <u>de puta madre</u> , me había enganchado seis meses atrás para que hiciera slogans en su agencia. (p.156)	La comí directamente con los dedos. Estaba <u>de puta madre</u> . (p.60) Fue un polvo <u>de puta madre</u> . (p.14)

Transculturated Spaniard expressions: *buen aspecto/tumbarse en*

<b>Érase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo</b>	<b>Factotum</b>
Algunas chicas tienen <u>buen aspecto</u> . (p.15)	Laura tenía <u>buen aspecto</u> . Estaba feliz y sonreía. (p.36) Tú tienes <u>buen aspecto</u> —dije yo—. ¿Estás sola? (p.66)
Di vueltas por ahí hasta encontrar un parque. <u>Me tumbé</u> en una banca y me quedé dormido. (p.163)  Puse un casete de Ottmar Liebert, me limpié la entrepierna con una servilleta y <u>me tumbé en la cama</u> . (p.156)	Me volví a <u>tumbar en</u> el asiento. Pude escuchar su conversación. (p.8) Me gustaba el sitio. Jan <u>se tumbó en la cama</u> . (p.66) Luego me <u>tumbé en la cama</u> y vigilé el reloj. (p.70)

These elements in Medina's linguistic transculturation have a foundational basis on the aforementioned inconformity and resentfulness against Colombian culture but, in terms of narrative structure, it is also a feature of mediocrity to construct an entire linguistic pattern using foreign expressions as shortcuts, and it gets even worse considering that he declares that he wanted to be *gringo* and brings up character *-Rep -* who has similarities with Bukowski's protagonist but, evidently, he approached Bukowski's texts in Spanish.

I think those statements of Medina's about wishing to be American, the frequent allusions to American cultural icons and this linguistic transculturation are just components of an intense wish of finding a "fictional" place where he can let off steam his aesthetic appreciations, personal likes and influences through writing.

It is clear that both authors have had discouraging experiences in their lives, especially with poverty and self-confidence and, consequently, have constructed their characters with a skeptical and non-conformist identity but, the most interesting part to discover is how all those different aspects studied, values, sex, ego and language define an alternative literary aesthetics and how they all are contained in a single character, an antihero.

### **Construction of Antiheroes**

Having in mind that both authors have decided to make narrations in first person without appealing to aesthetic complexity, just with simple and plain prose, whose stories are not related with extraordinary journeys, epic battles, sublime love stories nor universal values, and the fact that neither one of them wants to give a message, it is possible to assert that they are just trying to portray their ordinary life by showing their personal experiences openly through the characterization of their antiheroes.

In the work of Charles Bukowski, the antihero –himself – is characterized by his lack of ideology and his disdain for the world and the system that rules it. Living in a very poor way, he has to face the turmoil of the world and deal with the unexpected peripeteias of a traditional hero, but just with the component of hostility and the sense of hopelessness of his personality.

In the case of Efraím Medina, the antihero is a modern and younger character than Bukowski's *alter-ego* Hank Chinaski – but nonetheless a disbeliever –, who brings along a good number of postmodern anti-values:

Un individuo resentido y frustrado que alterna sus fracasos y sus sueños en un cronotopo heterogéneo que oscila entre Ciudad Inmóvil, Nueva York y Bogotá (...) Un hombrecillo con ínfulas de supermacho que "se vuelve mierda cuando su chica



lo abandona”. Un sujeto en crisis que, sin embargo, es capaz de reflexionar, de poner el dedo en la llaga, de decir lo que muchos piensan y no se atreven a decir.<sup>60</sup>

I think all those features are based, on the one hand, on the idea that knowledge is to be found at the edge of experience and that the body is the site for gaining knowledge, and on the other hand, they make possible the self-expression that creates a new, raw and uncompromising aesthetics which can encourage its readers to identify with an alternative vision of the world.

So far, we have seen the personal and psychological aspects of these writers that surround their literary cosmos and, consequently, are portrayed in their work through the figure of the antihero; but, along with the purpose of proposing their alternative vision of the world, there is another important function that the antihero carries out.

### **Antihero as a Vehicle of Catharsis**

As a projection of the author’s self, the antihero works as a big screen where the writer projects his desires, fears, conceptions of the world and experiences in a kind of narcissistic universe; that is why all the events in each story are focalized on the antihero and the rest of the characters are almost irrelevant.

In this sense, the antihero also works as a structure of symbols, where each personal aspect of the writer has its correspondent alternative symbol: the rejection of work and alcoholism in Henry Chinaski as an intention to counteract the strict influence of his father, Rep’s misogyny as a symbol of his romantic failure with *cierta chica*, the hipersexuality of both characters as a symbol of their ostracized boyhood, their antisocial behavior as a symbol of their resentfulness generated by the absurdity of modern life and so on.

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<sup>60</sup> Araùjo, Orlando. “Efraím Medina Reyes y la nueva novela del Caribe colombiano”. p.1

Aristotle's aesthetic principle of Catharsis normally works on the readers of a novel, – or the audience of a play –, due to the fact that, through their emotional involvement, they see the reflection of their low passions and basic instincts in the characters of the play generating a purifying effect. In the case of Medina and Bukowski, their emotional involvement is given in terms of their personal conflict and it precedes the text, precisely, because a writer's vehicle of catharsis is the mere act of creating his character.

This purifying effect of catharsis, works in *Factotum* and *Èrase una vez* in two different ways: the first one when the reader experiences an identification whether it be negative, if the reader rejects the literary persona of the character because it opposes his own principles and values, or positive, when the reader connects with the character through his ideology, behavior or emotional empathy. The second one occurs when the author himself uses his creation, in this case his antihero, to give course to his stream of repressed feelings and wishes. In both ways, catharsis occurs because both the author and the reader subdue their spirit from a transformation that helps define and strengthen their own identity.

## Conclusions

The literary relationship between Charles Bukowski and Efraím Medina is given in three specific aspects that determine the influence of the former on the latter. The first of them is the aspect of transgression, because several narrative elements that I found in their novels are subject to it. As a matter of fact, the mere denial of writing a story inside the traditional aesthetical models tending instead, to alternative aesthetic forms like the grotesque, slang and obscene language place these authors in the category of transgressive fiction.

But beside of these, there are much more elements of transgression related both with the characters' identity, – with features such as bitterness, hopelessness and skepticism –, and with political ideology, – in terms of rejection to authority and social criticism – which clearly show their profound inconformity with the modern world. Due to this inconformity, both writers tend to criticize in their works, their own social system and even their traditional cultural values, which is the case of Medina, who ridicules some Colombian writers such as Gabriel García Márquez and Héctor Abad Faciolince (See Annex 2) and TV celebrities, just for the fun that he finds in it and the kind of advertising that a writer like him wants, and also Bukowski, who uses some episodes of his novel to criticize the social system of United States and its inequities from the perspective of a blue collar worker.

This constant intention of criticizing the *status quo* is a response to certain psychological, emotional and social negative processes that occurred in the younger years of these two writers; Bukowski had a tough relation with his parents and became become an alcoholic wanderer, and Medina underwent the tragic death of his father and later, became an introverted boy enclosed in himself. As time passed by, the accumulation of such situations generated a deep resentfulness arose from the personal frustration; this energy and anger is reflected in the literary work.

In addition to this, the postmodern style of these writers is characterized by a crisis of ideology where the master narratives are no longer believable in terms of historicity and

modern human relations, and therefore, are progressively substituted by new stylistic paradigms than deal with topics that are closer to reality with respect to characters and language.

The second aspect that determines this relationship is the one related to language, through which both authors have characterized their work by swearing and using dirty urban expressions, mostly to complain and protest against a world that has been hostile towards them. Based on this, it is possible to conclude that the use of this kind of language obeys to two factors: certain small act of rebellion consisting in the refusal of offering a beautiful piece of art to a world that does not deserve it, and the need of establishing their subjectivity by showing a brutal honesty in the narration in order to connect to the reader in a more profound level.

In spite of this, in the case of Medina's novel one can find that this pretension of subjectivity cannot be achieved because of the fact that he is constantly using foreign references throughout his narration, even crying out his wish to be an American citizen; and yet more important, using expressions that come from Los Angeles slang translated into Spanish Spaniard slang which make it even worse in terms of verisimilitude. This lack of verisimilitude impedes a real connection with the reader the way Bukowski makes it, because the reader cannot establish any kind of ideological nor cultural identification with the main character.

Conversely, in Charles Bukowski's *Factotum*, in spite of the personal features embodied in the main character *Hank Chinaski* – that turn him into an aggressive outsider that barely stands the social interaction –, Bukowski does establish a kind of complicity with the reader thanks , on the one hand, to the simple social common elements that can be found in the story and allow the reader to know a lot about the writer and, on the other hand, to genuine transgressive spirit of *Chinaski* whose language and attitude towards life is coherent along the novel and represents certain working class ideals related with the search of freedom and the awareness of the absurdity and meaningless of modern life.

The third aspect that defines the relationship between these writers is the common characterization of antihero; both plots of *Factotum* and *Érase una vez* are entirely constructed only from the perspective of the protagonists *Henry Chinaski* and *Rep* respectively, which are also writers' alter egos. These alter egos encompass characteristics of the fictional persona of antihero and represent, through a symbolic construction, all those personal issues of the writers that couldn't be crystallized in their real life.

In this sense, it is possible to come to the conclusion that these authors find in the craft of writing much more than an artistic discipline or a form of expression, but also a way to redeem themselves by portraying openly their darkest thoughts, delusions of grandeur, feelings and fears, using the vehicle of antihero to construct a stronger and improved version of the self, which matches with their own alternative ideology better.

In order to accomplish this psychological construction, both Bukowski and Medina add to their novels an important amount of countercultural references related to the street life and the kind of people that inhabit it – hobos, prostitutes, drunks and thieves –, along with the cynicism and humor of the street slang that characterizes the particular narrative language of these writers which is the main aspect in their work regarding transgression.

Another important conclusion related to this topic is that even if there is a cause-effect relationships between the hostile environment in which these authors had to undergo, and the hostility towards society that one can find in the texts through the combination of crude language and the reckless behavior of the characters, it is possible to find in Medina's novel a thirst to shock the reader gratuitously, as if the purpose to disturb were prior to the purpose of express his ideas. In this sense, the work of Efraim Medina moves away from Bukowski's one in the sense that Medina does not resort to any cultural background to construct Rep's features; he takes instead, foreign elements at random, and packs them up into a single character.

This procedure shows, on the one hand, the type of transcultural influence that Medina has received to make his novel, and on the other hand, the frequent tendency of postmodern creators of hiding behind the motto of “anything goes” to turn out with a piece of art that is so elusive and hard to grasp that ends up being totally meaningless in history. According to my knowledge, the work of art is a cultural product that is meant to be understood historically, and emerge in the public’s mind by means of a dialogue between history and aesthetics.

In this line of thought, it would be desirable for this work to propose a reflection about the nature of Colombian contemporary literature; *Érase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo* won the Premio Nacional de Novela from the Ministerio de Cultura in 1997, which supposedly means that this novel was the best among hundreds of works from all over the country. In addition to this; in the recent years, - with the exception of some isolated works-, no big names have appeared in the local scenario. Next year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the last Nobel Prize from Latin-America: Octavio Paz, and it is really difficult to find a modern writer who has been following this path.

Even if modern artists tend to demystify the creative act itself, the meaning of the work of art is proposed whether it be from the author’s personal background, - as in Bukowski’s works-, or from a shared cultural or political background that allows the interaction between the artist and public. Consequently, it is possible to state that, beyond genres, themes or language, one of the constitutive elements of a consistent literary work is the one that helps the writer to communicate with the reader in such a genuine way, that can generate emotions and thoughts to the point of producing in the reader an aesthetic experience.

As a final conclusion, regarding the failure of Medina’s novel in finding its own voice, I believe that Medina’s true intention is to make himself an image to the media as a shameless and fresh author in order to get quick recognition and good sales rate even if his novel is trashed by critics –as it actually happened- , and because of his rush, he ended up with a literary *pastiche* where the reader finds lots of American references, Spaniard

slang and incoherences in the rhythm that make the novel difficult to grasp for any average Colombian reader, not to mention the pleasure of reading, which is almost nil due to the lack of common meanings and the unsuccessful identification with the reader, which is, in my opinion, the biggest of the many shortcomings of *Érase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo*.

If we take a look at Medina's furious "diatribe" against Colombian cultural references and consequently, his permanent eulogies to American culture, it is possible to infer that his desire is -anyhow- to find his ways to go away from his *Ciudad Inmóvil* by "internationalizing" his literature. Therefore, the fact of coming in contact with the reader, whether it be in an aesthetic or historical level, is the least of his intentions.

In this line of thought, the identification of the public with the work of art is each time more difficult to achieve because of the effects of globalization process. There seems to be an intention of having a single culture along with a collective way of thinking, unfortunately influenced by advertising and the media, which is leading modern creators to find inspiration and ideas in a homogeneous universe of principles and values.

Efraím Medina's work appears then, in the middle of a Colombian culture profoundly influenced by the *America- way- of- life* ideology, and like no other novel in the last few years in Colombia, represents the absence of identity that seems to deny Colombia its long-awaited "second opportunity on earth".

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## ANNEX 1

Efraím Medina's interview. Given to the Colombian journalist Miguel Angel Flórez to the website Colombia.com.

Colombia.com (7/5/2002): El Café Cinema, un pequeño bar del centro de Bogotá, fue testigo de una curiosa lectura. Efraím Medina, llegó con su novela: "Técnicas de masturbación entre Báltman y Robín", con un video Manga y con una joven que realizó un fugaz streptase. En medio de las risas y los aplausos de los asistentes, leyó fragmentos de sus escritos. Colombia.com publica una entrevista con este joven escritor cartagenero.

"La literatura es una forma de reírme de las cosas que me han maltratado o lastimado en la vida – dice-. Al final uno debe reírse y ser como su propio payaso. Uno debe ser el centro de su propia burla" y agrega, "para mí escribir es una cosa tan fácil como amarrarme un cordón".

Su nueva novela "Técnicas e masturbación entre Báltman y Robín", fue publicada por la editorial Planeta y él la define como "un experimento. Una especie de colección hecha de fascículos que trae dos novelas de regalo, unos manuales, una revista, una colección de cartas, todo, me imagino, para contar una historia".

Por ejemplo, el primer fascículo se llama "Mecánica popular, anotaciones sobre la sexualidad y el amor". Después el lector se encuentra con una novela: "Poetas y carniceros, prohibida para instructores de aeróbicos", luego con un capítulo titulado: "Mecánica de seducción: un breve y práctico manual que enseña cómo embaucar y sacudir a cualquier mujer en 9 sencillas lecciones". Así es todo el libro. Una interesante propuesta que obliga a quien lo lee a reír de principio a fin, a sufrir con la historia de su protagonista "Sergio Bocafloja" y hasta reflexionar sobre los sueños, las metas y el amor. Esto fue lo que Efraim Medina le contó a Colombia.com.

Colombia.com ¿La motivación de escribir nace a partir de las cosas que lo han lastimado?

Efraim Medina : Hay una parte de mi vida que fue traumática por la muerte de mi padre hasta los 11 años. Yo no podía razonar sobre eso e iba a cumplir seis años cuando mi padre murió, lo atropelló un carro frente a mí, cruzando la calle. Eso me produjo un trauma. A partir de allí me convertí en una persona tímida y encerrada en mi misma, acomplejado. Así fue hasta los 17 años. A esa edad tuve mi primer encuentro con una mujer, una prostituta, una cosa ahí en el camino. Descubrí que el sexo me liberó, es decir, como esa cosa que me relaja, me motiva y me sube el ánimo. El sexo me liberó de ese período oscuro y sentí que podía encontrar como una satisfacción a toda esa pesadez. A eso pesado que me rondaba, siempre sintiendo además que provenía de una familia de clase media baja y luego baja porque mi padre se muere y él era quien sostenía la media.

Me crié en un barrio difícil en circunstancias difíciles, con mi mamá trabajando todo el día y nosotros enfrentándonos a cosas desde niños, defendiéndonos como fieras en el mundo. Los problemas los convertí en fuerza y he tratado de que la literatura sea un sello más de esa fortaleza. Yo tenía dos opciones, o era asesino o tenía que verter toda esa criminalidad en algo. Lo intenté con el boxeo y gané algunas peleas. Hice 14 peleas como aficionado asistiendo durante dos años al gimnasio al pie de la Popa entrenado por Harold Grey, quien entrenó a todos. Mi ídolo absoluto de toda la vida ha sido Pambelé, después Maradona y el Pibe. Pero Pambelé ha sido mi reflejo y quien yo quería ser.

C.c: ¿Que le enseñó Pambelé?

E.M: Pambelé me enseñó que la vida es de los fracasados. Antes de ir a Venezuela Pambelé hizo 25 peleas en Colombia. Sólo ganó una. Llegó a Venezuela con un record de 24 peleas pérdidas y una

ganada. Tabaquito Saenz lo vio destrozar a tres venezolanos en un bar y decidió entrenarlo. Pepermint Frazer no se preparó y subestimó a Pambelé como al vendedor de pescado y con el peor record de la historia. Pero todavía le deben estar sonando los golpes a Pepermint. Pambelé lo tumbó dos veces en la primera y cinco veces en la segunda pelea. Entoces Pambelé para mí es como el líder de los perdedores. La vida es para perder. Pambelé empezó como perdedor. Logró ese brillo fugaz en el boxeo, fue capaz de destruir el éxito. Destruir el fracaso es sencillo porque todo el mundo quisiera ir hacia la luz. Pambelé destruyó el éxito. Pambelé fue el tipo que más dinero ganó en el deporte colombiano en esa época y lo tuvo todo. Y para destruir el éxito uso todo lo que tuvo en sus manos: el perico, las putas, el basuco y lo logró. Pienso que ir hacia la luz es bueno, pero si eres capaz de destruirla. Si no la destruyes te convierte en un monarca de mármol.

C.c: ¿Cómo se podría explicar la literatura desde el contexto del boxeo?

E.M: Nada sobre la tierra explica lo que somos los seres humanos como el boxeo. El boxeo es uno de los oficios más espléndidos que existe. El boxeo retrata esa condición básica humana como es el deseo de destruirnos mutuamente.

C.c: ¿Que fue lo que paso en su vida para no convertirse en asesino?

E.M: Aunque estaba en la universidad yo pertenecía a una pandilla del Barrio Getsemaní. Ya no vivíamos mal, pero teníamos un espíritu que nos acercaba de noche a ir asaltar gringos en las murallas. Llegué a pensar que ese era mi destino. Con ellos me sentía como entre los de mi especie, protegido y no había crítica sobre nada, no les importaba donde habías nacido y ni siquiera cómo eras. No había reglas y eso me hacía sentir cómodo porque siempre tenía la sensación que en otros lugares era señalado y estigmatizado por mi forma amoral de ver la vida. La verdad, quien me saco de ese ambiente fue una mujer, me enamore y esa es la historia que aparece en “Érase una vez el amor y tuve que matarlo”.

Fue una muchacha que representó una fantasía para mí. Representaba esas cosas que los chicos de barrio y de origen negro como yo, siempre soñamos con una chica rubia de ojos claros. Era un sueño de la infancia y yo la encontré a los 19 años, así, perfecta como la había soñado. Las chicas rubias también se equivocan. Vivimos una relación perfecta durante dos años. Ella sin quererlo me hizo descubrir el mundo, porque dije si puedo tener esta mujer es posible que pueda obtener más cosas. Salí al mundo. De ese joven que estaba como encerrado y que sólo se congregaba alrededor de esta pandilla juvenil, salí a las grandes rumbas y descubrí que tenía mucho talento para socializar, que era convincente y que había acumulado bastante fantasía en relación a la mentira que se aplica en un mundo como este.

Aprendí a mentir y me convertí en un mentiroso fantástico. Comencé a tener muchas mujeres y eso me creaba un sentimiento de poder. En la tribu de los hombres eso me convirtió en un ídolo. Era el tipo que podía asaltar gente en la muralla, que podía entrar a la universidad a estudiar medicina y a esta niña le gustaba la literatura. Hasta ese momento yo no había escrito mayor cosa, ni estaba interesado en escribir. Ella tenía un novio que estaba enamorado de ella y el tipo le regaló unos poemas que él le había escrito. Yo leí los poemas. Además quería escribir poemas y entrar en competencia con el tipo. Fui a donde un amigo que sabía de literatura y le mostré los poemas y él me dijo que los poemas eran escritos por Ernesto Cardenal. El tipo la había engañado. Le dijo eso a ella y se puso furiosa con el tipo. Y ahí gané y obtuve mi puntaje mayor. La relación con ella me acercó más a los libros.

C.c: ¿Desea ser como sus personajes?

E.M: Mis personajes son mis amigos. Es gente que camina y que vive. La literatura es una pantalla oscura en la mente que se iluminan con esos personajes, con esas imágenes. Mis personajes andan por allí y algunos vienen hoy a mi lanzamiento. Saben que yo no estoy inventando realmente y que yo no soy ninguna clase de genio ni nada. Yo deje la universidad porque me sentía inferior a la academia. Descubrí que la literatura era una cosa hecha para subnormales como yo. Para mí escribir es una cosa tan fácil como amarrarme un cordón. Me pongo a arreglar las historias de mis amigos y como todos somos unos perdedores, la historia de los perdedores son muy agradables y la liga de perdedores es la más grande que hay el planeta.

C.c: ¿Hay un personaje femenino que recorre sus dos últimas novelas. Ella es una mujer que teme definir?

E.M: Esa fue una relación sanguinaria, salvaje, como deber ser. Esa relación fue con una chica a los 19 años. Todas mis relaciones con las mujeres han sido de ese modo. Al inicio empiezan girando lentamente y luego alcanzan velocidades de vértigo estimuladas por el odio. Para mí sería humillante decir su nombre, deseo que no exista, deseo que sea algo informe, indefinido. Es una forma más de vengarme, quitándole hasta su nombre en los relatos. Ella me dejó por otro. Y es lo que siempre una mujer hará, dejarte por otro. Una cosa es que te deje cuando tu quieres que se vaya, pero yo no deseaba que ella se fuera, ella era mi vida en ese momento. Algo murió en mí cuando ella se fue. Entonces escribir para mí es también una forma de venganza y no hay nada más de que vengarse sino es del amor. El amor es un sentimiento que socava tu individualidad, que socava tu autoridad sobre ti mismo y te hace pensar horas y horas al día en un persona que es absolutamente inocua como tú, pero es una obsesión y esa obsesión convierte al amor en el enemigo. El amor es el enemigo y es contra el amor que se lucha. La muerte por eso es, cuando no es ningún tránsito hacia ninguna parte, ni nada de eso, es la fuerza máxima que te libera, como dice Borges del sol, de la luna y del amor.

C.c: ¿Debemos amar a las mujeres?

E.M: Las mujeres deben ser amadas y si no lo hacemos estamos jodidos. Pero eso no tiene nada que ver con ellas. El problema es hacerlas partícipes de eso. El amor no tiene nada que ver con la otra persona. El amor es un asunto de intensidad que un hombre refleja en cualquier cosa. Puede ser un perro, un objeto o un carro último modelo o en ellas. Cuando una ama a una mujer toda va bien hasta que uno trata de que el amor vaya hacia ella. Cuando tu entras en una relación en la cual ya no sólo quieres amarla sino que buscas que ella te ame, cosa que es accesorio, qué demonios debe importarnos que una mujer nos ame. Si tu la tienes para que quieres que te ame. Además, como vas a sentir que ella te ama, si eso no es comunicable, es algo abstracto que nosotros deseamos ensuciarla de mierda. Hacemos finalmente que ella se someta a nosotros sometiéndola. Yo digo que esta novela no puede ser catalogada como misógina, porque podría ser andrógina también. Es una novela implacable en contra de la relación que hombre y mujer han tratado de crear.

Su literatura

C.c: ¿Con sus convenciones, trampas y servidumbres?

E.M: Yo creo que la pareja es una cosa que es necesario disolver absolutamente. No son ideas literarias, lo que esta en mi literatura es lo que yo siento. La relación entre la literatura y mi vida personal es total. No hay diferencia. Lo mío es más vital o vivencial que autobiográfico. Lo que escribo no es una cosa referida solamente en relación conmigo, sino también con mi especie y mi tribu. Lo mío no son memorias, porque ni siquiera es personal. Yo no tengo un mundo personal, poseo una vida hacia fuera. Yo no tengo una vida interior. Dentro de mí no podría ser como Borges, Espinosa o Shopenhauer. Lo que yo revelo en mis novelas es mi mundo. Si alguien piensa que yo soy más interesante que eso está perdido. Me considero una persona plana en relación a lo que es la gran literatura como Cervantes,

García Márquez, Shakespeare. Me considero un escritor menor. No me interesa lograr como esas catedrales perfectas de palabras. Mis novelas son imperfectas, desniveladas, un poco salidas como puedo ser yo.

C.c: ¿Desea que sean así?

E.M: Es que no tengo otra forma de hacerlas. Ellas son mi límite. Si tuviera que elegir no elegiría ser un escritor como García Márquez, ni Shakespeare. Si pudiera elegir sería un vaquero o Brad Pitt, alguien que la tuviera más fácil. O elegiría ser bello, blanco y millonario, que más se puede elegir. No puedo aspirar a ser un clásico de la literatura, eso a mí no me sirve, lo que a mí me interesa es la inmediatez. Deseo que se consuma todo, de aquí a mañana no me interesa nada, este cadáver que somos mientras vivimos debemos consumirlo.

C.c: ¿La literatura lo ha liberado de algo?

E.M: La literatura no me ha liberado de nada, pero me permite ejercer el sano ejercicio del odio, de la venganza y también a veces el afecto como son los amigos. Yo tengo mi mundo. Y mis amigos.

C.c: ¿La literatura le ha aportado lucidez sobre sus sentimientos y el pasado?

E.M: Todo puede ser literario menos la literatura. A la literatura hay que darle pasión como los comics, debe estar viva. Además, la literatura me necesita a mí, yo no a ella. Yo no necesito la literatura para nada. He conseguido lo que he conseguido sin la literatura, lo he conseguido con mi inteligencia, mi verga y mi encanto personal. La literatura me necesita, pero yo no voy a estar en la literatura para siempre. Publicaré 15 libros y se acabó mi relación con el mundo de la literatura.

Yo soy de la generación de los ochenta. Mi lenguaje no viene de la literatura, por eso no he tratado de imitar a García Márquez. Y no los imité porque ni siquiera sabía que existían. Lo que yo recibí fue toda la televisión norteamericana, con los enlatados. Programas esenciales como hechizada, de Isabel Montgomery, Hanna Barbera, Superman y el Salón de la Justicia, Meteoro y el Capitán Centella. Yo me disfrazaba de esos personajes. De la literatura leí “El Padrino”, los grandes bestsellers de Mario Puzo, Stephen Hawkins, Frederic Forsyth. De la música escuché a Travolta, Samanta Fox, Lionel Richie, la música Disco, el vestuario de Travolta que era un hombre que vivía sin códigos, era el sueño de los muchachos del barrio, un pobretón que cuando bailaba se sentía como el rey del mundo y nosotros también nos sentíamos así en el sentido que ejercíamos la dicha de ahorrar para comprarnos una buena pinta e ir a las discotecas. Esa era nuestra máxima aspiración porque todavía me considero más un bailarín que un escritor y seguiré bailando.

## **ANNEX 2**

Interview with Efraím Medina published in the website: [www.proscritos.com](http://www.proscritos.com)

Date of access: 18 abril 09

Es el primer novelista colombiano que despierta verdadero culto entre sus lectores más jóvenes, jóvenes que nadie pensaba pudieran aficionarse a la literatura. Su novela “Erase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo” fue traducida y publicada en Italia el pasado mes de julio por la prestigiosa Editorial Feltrinelli y hoy ya se ha convertido en todo un suceso y ha sido vendida al alemán y al francés. La misma Feltrinelli publicará la versión italiana de “Técnicas de masturbación entre Batman y Robin” el verano próximo. Por esas mismas fechas la Editorial Planeta de España lanzará la obra de Medina Reyes en todo el mundo de habla hispana.

El éxito en Europa le ha valido a Medina Reyes para ser invitado como jurado en el pasado Festival Internacional de cine de Venezia y también lo será en los próximos Festivales de Cannes y Berlín.

Este año estuvo como invitado de honor en el Festival de Literatura “Carovane” realizado en Piacenza y el escritor Stefano Benni, el más famoso e importante de Italia, saludó su novela como una obra bella, intensa y feroz.

Clasificar la obra de Medina Reyes es difícil porque cada novela, cuento o poema entraña una experiencia distinta así que resulta mejor disfrutarla. Aprovechamos un descanso en su frenética actividad para conversar con este escritor del que muchos dicen es el chico malo de la literatura colombiana.

P: ¿Dicen que su crítica a García Márquez es la del hijo que quiere matar la sombra del padre?

E.M.: No podría tener un padre tan feo, enano y maricón.

P: ¿No le gusta algún autor latinoamericano?

E.M.: Me gusta Borges y Juan Carlos Onetti, el primero es un estilista de primer nivel y el segundo un escritor visceral, franco, estremecedor.

P: De su generación, ¿qué autores prefiere?

E.M.: Los prefiero a todos, creo que, al igual que yo, cada uno de esos escritores trata de hacer lo mejor posible. Entre los escritores mi amigo entrañable se llama Fran Arroyo que escribió un libro de cuentos titulado “Límites”. Fran vive en Cartagena y es un gran escritor pero no tiene mucho interés en ser publicado o comprar un yate de lujo. Con Fernando Quiroz, Enrique Serrano, Cristian Valencia, Antonio García, Luis Fernando Charry, Santiago Gamboa y Sergio Álvarez he logrado tener cierta amistad, amistad que espero se fortalezca con el paso de los años. A otros como Mario Mendoza, Álvaro Robledo, Antonio Ungar o Jorge Franco me los encuentro eventualmente y hay algunos que sólo conozco de nombre y de haber leído sus libros.

P: ¿Es capaz de opinar algo sobre ellos o el éxito ha minado su visión crítica?

E.M.: Como personas la mayoría me parecen estupendos, como escritores tengo mis reparos y pienso que sólo un idiota se tomaría la literatura como algo de vida o muerte. La gente que se toma la literatura más en serio de lo que es puede acabar siendo una momia ilustrada tipo R.H. Moreno Durán o Germán Espinosa.

P: ¿No teme ganarse enemigos por sus opiniones?

E.M.: Si alguien es incapaz de tolerar, a pesar de no compartir, lo que digo entonces lo prefiero de enemigo. Soy de los que creen que cualquier tipo de crítica debe ser bienvenida, al fin y al cabo es sólo la opinión de alguien. También creo que uno tiene la opción de responder o no a las críticas. Las polémicas, en un medio literario tan aletargado como el nuestro, atraen la atención del público y hasta generan lectores. La gente está cansada de las sociedades del mutuo elogio o de aquellos que se creen dueños de la verdad. Creo que haberme tomado el trabajo de leer a ciertos escritores me da el derecho de decir lo que pienso, recuerden que yo también publico libros...

P: Usted escribe poemas y ha confesado en varias ocasiones ser un voraz lector de poesía, ¿de Colombia qué poetas le gustan?

E.M.: En mi opinión el mejor poeta colombiano se llama Juan Manuel Roca. También tengo en buena estima a Raúl Gómez Jattin y Rómulo Bustos Aguirre. Hace poco he descubierto a Olga Malaver que me parece muy buena, también me gusta parte de lo que han escrito Fernando Linero, Miguel Iriarte y Fernando Dennis. De los nuevos mi favorito es Juan Felipe Robledo. De los malos no hablo porque son demasiados.

P: Se dice que en Colombia no existe crítica. ¿Usted también lo cree?

E.M.: Creo que Colombia, y lo mismo ocurre en la mayor parte de países del mundo, tiene algunos críticos serios y otros que viven de las reseñas. También están los escritores que escriben para elogiarse entre sí. Todo eso es normal y ha estado en la literatura desde siempre. Creo que Guillermo Linero, Andrés Hoyos y Luis Fernando Afanador son excelentes críticos. No se puede descartar la envidia porque es parte de la naturaleza humana y como ya dije soy de la opinión que toda crítica, incluso la destructiva, debe ser bienvenida. Jamás hay que vetar a los críticos.

P: ¿Le molesta que lo comparen con Bukowski?

E.M.: Héctor Abad Faciolince, en la edición especial que celebraba los 20 años de la revista Semana, hace un balance de la literatura colombiana y me incluye entre apenas 50 nombres lo cual puede tomarse como un halago. Allí dice que cada país tiene su Bukowski y cita el ejemplo de España con Ray Loriga y de Cuba con Juan Gutiérrez, según él en Colombia hay muchos Bukowski y para su gusto yo soy el elegido. A mí, y dicho sea de paso, Héctor Abad me parece un escritor mediano, hecho para el gusto de ciertas señoras que todavía se reúnen a tomar té, incluso podrían invitarlo y encajaría perfecto. Cuando alguien me preguntó en una entrevista qué pensaba del comentario de Abad Faciolince dije que igual cada país tenía su escritora frígida tipo Marcela Serrano y él era la nuestra. No significa esto que debamos ser enemigos, son puntos de vistas y a mí me gusta dar el mío.

P: Entonces, ¿le molesta o no ser comparado con Bukowski?

E.M.: Bukowski bebía seguido, le gustaban las mujeres y darse trompadas con los idiotas. Sabía que la tenía jodida en el mundo Marlboro y que nunca sería invitado a tomar el té con las señoras de bien. Mis vicios están en la misma línea pero si se fuera Bukowski por beber, andar con mujeres y pelearse, en Colombia seríamos millones de Bukowski.

P: ¿Se siente un escritor marginal?

E.M.: Me siento un hombre en este mundo y punto. Escribir es una cosa más en la vida, no tengo la literatura por religión y tampoco creo que escribiré para siempre. Tengo pasión por la vida, y el culo y la mente se aplanan mucho cuando pasas demasiadas horas frente a la pantalla de un computador. No creo que beber, bailar y decirle a algún hijueputa lo que se merece me conviertan en un escritor marginal. Los escritores malditos o que pretenden hacerse los malditos no tienen cabida en este país donde cada día hay masacres y explotan bombas en los Centros Comerciales, ¿crees que se puede escandalizar a un colombiano diciendo tres palabrotas o sacándose la verga en un coctel? Quizá haya todavía alguna abuelita ingenua por ahí pero en general lo que digo divierte y dentro de ese humor negro destilo ideas y situaciones para confrontar al lector.

P: ¿Es usted misógino?

E.M.: He tratado de expresar a hombres y mujeres dentro de una cultura y lo he hecho con la mayor franqueza de la que soy capaz. El personaje de Rep en “Erase una vez el amor pero tuve que matarlo” está repleto de contradicciones, se trata de un machista feroz que se vuelve mierda cuando su chica lo abandona. ¿Te parece que es la mejor imagen de un supermacho? Rep es tan cómico y vulnerable que su mayor orgullo es tener una verga de 25 centímetros. Y luego se da cuenta que su larga verga no le sirve ni para conservar a la mujer que ama. En “Técnicas de masturbación entre Batman y Robin” el personaje masculino, Sergio Bocafloja, es abatido por la inseguridad y la incapacidad de comunicar sus sentimientos... Mis libros no hacen apología de hombres o mujeres porque pienso que todos la tenemos difícil en este mundo. Las personas que me acusan de misógino deberían hacer una lectura más atenta de mis libros o preguntarse a qué rayos se refiere la palabra misógino.

P: ¿Se siente un escritor erótico?

E.M.: Uso el sexo para reflexionar sobre diferentes aspectos de la vida, no soy yo quien decide que durante 24 horas al día haya mujeres mostrando las tetas y el culo para vender cualquier basura. No soy quien elige cada día, al final de los noticieros, a las nueva supermodelo paisa y menos quien habla de su talento mientras la pantalla muestra sus enormes tetas y su enorme culo repletos de silicona. Además esas mujeres sueles ser horribles.

P: Pero si las muestran es por algo...

E.M.: Si soy sincero creo que hasta para echarse un polvo esas bolsas de siliconas clasifican pero una mujer debería ser más que eso. Mis exigencias entrañan agudeza, sensibilidad, curiosidad por el mundo, autocrítica, imaginación y dudo que las chicas del noticiero tengan mucho de eso, si lo tuvieran no serían usadas de esa forma.

### **ANNEX III**

Charles Bukowski poems related to his father:

#### **My father**

was a truly amazing man  
he pretended to be  
rich  
even though we lived on beans and mush and weenies  
when we sat down to eat, he said,  
"not everybody can eat like this."  
  
and because he wanted to be rich or because he actually  
thought he was rich  
he always voted Republican  
and he voted for Hoover against Roosevelt  
and he lost  
and then he voted for Alf Landon against Roosevelt  
and he lost again  
saying, "I don't know what this world is coming to,  
now we've got that god damned Red in there again  
and the Russians will be in our backyard next!"  
  
I think it was my father who made me decide to  
become a bum.  
I decided that if a man like that wants to be rich  
then I want to be poor.  
  
and I became a bum.  
I lived on nickles and dimes and in cheap rooms and  
on park benches.  
I thought maybe the bums knew something.



but I found out that most of the bums wanted to be  
rich too.  
they had just failed at that.

so caught between my father and the bums  
I had no place to go  
and I went there fast and slow.  
never voted Republican  
never voted.

buried him  
like an oddity of the earth  
like a hundred thousand oddities  
like millions of other oddities,  
wasted.

<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/my-father/>

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### **A fresh wild wind blowing...**

I should not have blamed only my father, but,  
he was the first to introduce me to  
raw and stupid hatred.  
he was really best at it: anything and everything made him  
mad-things of the slightest consequence brought his hatred quickly  
to the surface  
and I seemed to be the main source of his  
irritation.  
I did not fear him  
but his rages made me ill at heart  
for he was most of my world then  
and it was a world of horror but I should not have blamed only  
my father  
for when I left that... home... I found his counterparts  
everywhere: my father was only a small part of the

whole, though he was the best at hatred  
I was ever to meet.  
but others were very good at it too: some of the  
foremen, some of the street bums, some of the women  
I was to live with,  
most of the women, were gifted at  
hating-blaming my voice, my actions, my presence  
blaming me  
for what they, in retrospect, had failed  
at.  
I was simply the target of their discontent  
and in some real sense  
they blamed me  
for not being able to rouse them  
out of a failed past; what they didn't consider was  
that I had my troubles too-most of them caused by  
simply living with them.

I am a dolt of a man, easily made happy or even  
stupidly happy almost without cause  
and left alone I am mostly content.

but I've lived so often and so long with this hatred  
that  
my only freedom, my only peace is when I am away from  
them, when I am anywhere else, no matter where-  
some fat old waitress bringing me a cup of coffee  
is in comparison  
like a fresh wild wind blowing.