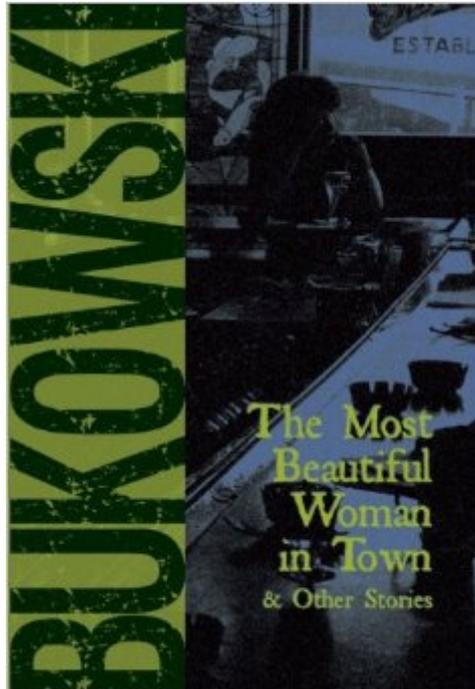


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The Most Beautiful Woman In Town & Other Stories



Synopsis

These mad immortal stories, now surfaced from the literary underground, have addicted legions of American readers, even though the high literary establishment continues to ignore them. In Europe, however (particularly in Germany, Italy, and France where he is published by the great publishing houses), he is critically recognized as one of America's greatest living realist writers. Charles Bukowski was born in Andernach, Germany in 1920 and brought to America at the age of two. Eighteen or twenty books of prose and poetry, Bukowski, after publishing prose in Story and Portfolio, stopped writing for ten years. He arrived in the charity ward of the Los Angeles County General Hospital, hemorrhaging as a climax to a ten year drinking bout. Some say he didn't die. After leaving the hospital he got a typewriter and began writing again "this time, poetry. He later returned to prose and gained some fame with his column, Notes of a Dirty Old Man. After 14 years in the Post Office he resigned at age 50, he says, to keep from going insane. He now claims to be unemployable and eats typewriter ribbons.

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Customer Reviews

Bukowski tends to, as far as I can tell, polarize readers something fierce. There are those who claim that he belongs among the highest pantheon of American writers for his no holds barred writings and ability to tell it like it is. Others will say that his stories aren't worth the paper they're printed on, full of trash writing and vulgarity, appealing to only the basest of emotions. While I don't think he's a literary genius, I certainly don't think his writing can be dismissed totally out of hand, at least not

from the representative sample presented in this collection. Most of the stories focus on a male character, who may or may not be Bukowski, going about his day in some fashion, which will generally include drinking, picking up women or otherwise seeing whatever bizarre things lie at the edge of society. His style is deceptively simple, never flowery or ornate but somehow getting the point across anyway, at its best his words take on a Hemingwayesque sparseness, the short declarative sentences forming a terse rhythm that gives them more resonance than you would otherwise think. Strangely enough a lot of those moments come at the end of a story, he's good at wrapping tales up, often finishing with a paragraph or two of sobering observation, capping it with some variation of a fatalistic, "well, whatever." At their heart the stories strike me as honest, they're rough and unadorned, but sincere all the same. The most honest ones may be the autobiographical-type tales, not knowing a whole lot about the man I can't tell how much is totally invented and how much was real but those ones (such as "Life and Death in the Charity Ward") have the ring of stark reality about them.

The merits of Charles Bukowski have been hotly debated, and no more thorough introduction to the debate is available than a quick perusal of the reviews on this site. Personally I can see both sides of the fence on this one. I love Bukowski, but the parallels between his faults and my own make me a sympathetic reader. Those who have their crap together and have no issues maintaining noble ideals might be a little less impressed (if not outright revolted). Even with my own prejudices noted, I still have to admit that "The Most Beautiful Woman in Town" has a greater hit-to-miss ratio than other collections of his that I've read (ie. "Notes of a Dirty Old Man", "Tales of Ordinary Madness"). Those that point out that Bukowski's stories tend to be same old, same old have a point, but they fail to realize that these short shorts were written as columns for an underground magazine and not necessarily meant to be compiled between two covers of the same book. I imagine if read in the original context, as just one story amongst a magazine full of varying writers, the works would come across as less monotonous. I appreciate this context and as such have not docked any points for it, as I prefer to grade strictly on the writing (those who demur would be hard pressed to deny that it's standard critical procedure to evaluate a greatest hits album based on the strength of the individual tracks, and not necessarily how well they tie together - I'm merely following the same consistency here).

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