

# Father-son relationship in charles bukowsky ham on rye

Literature



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Father-son Relationship in “ Ham On Rye” Charles Bukowsky’ novel, “ Ham on Rye” deals with the growth of its protagonist, Henry Chinaski, whose anti-heroic character, in the first place, develops as a response to his relationship with his father, Big Henry Chinasky. The author attempts to show that during the Great Depression a poor child’s psychophysical growth has further deteriorated because of his father’s superstitious as well as apparently malignant attitude towards his teenage boy’s wellbeing. Whereas the protagonist Henry should grow a harmonious and calculative view of the world through his relationship with friends, he is forced to pass his childhood and boyhood in sarcastic loneliness. In his house Henry’s father frequently beats him often for no reason and keeps alienated from his friends at home and school.

Critics often compare Bukowsky’s protagonist Henry to Frankenstein’s monster and Kafka’s Gregor. Like Frankenstein’s monster and Kafka’s Gregor, Henry is the reflection of what he receives from the people of his acquaintances and the environment in which he lives. He is the monstrous production of the environment that, in most cases, has been shaped by his father’s tyranny. The monstrous and violent nature of Henry ultimately results from his alienation and outcast imposed by Big Henry. His father’s violent behavior, instead of love and understanding, during his childhood, induces him to resort to violence as a solution to issues such as disagreements with his friends. He often becomes physically aggressive to those alienate him. Also he is hardly “ confident with his own abilities and often second-guesses whether he can win” (Fontana 57).

In Henry’s life, his father’s presence is that of a dictator who tends to

trammel the harmonious psychophysical growth of his son that is supposed to flourish through a boy's free and continual interactions with the environment in which he lives. Indeed Henry's father is affected with paranoiac psychological traits such superiority complex, hypertension, etc. He himself leads a life of social outcast and alienation. A sense of failure and hardship in life works as a pathogenesis in his psychology and the pathogenic factor tends to shape his relationship with his son Henry. Subconsciously he seems to believe that keeping his son away mixing with other boys of the society, who, according to him, belongs to a lower social order, will save his son from facing the fate that he has already faced during the Great Depression. He has lost his job; yet he appears to his neighbors as if he were employed. This self-deception of Big Henry further pushes him to be more aggressive to his son psychically and mentally. Poverty stricken Big Henry's self-hatred and hatred for poor is vividly evident in his advice for his son: "What you must do, with money and the poor, is never let them get too close to one another." (Bukowsky 251) Indeed Big Henry hates to be poor and still cherishes the illusion in heart that he belongs to a class that stands higher than the poor. Whereas parental love and care could save Henry from disparaging effect of poverty and the lower status of his family, Big Henry's physical and mental brutality produces some discouraging effects on Henry forcing him to resort to drinks and violence in order to get relief from harsh reality of life, as these negative effects are evident in his speech, "Gathered around me were.... the ugly instead of the beautiful, the losers instead of the winners.... I was like a turd that drew flies instead of like a flower that butterflies and bees desired. I wanted to live

alone, I felt best being alone, cleaner..." (Bukowsky 155)

#### Works Cited

Bukowsky, Charles. *Ham On Rye*. New York: Benthams Pubs, 1987

Fontana, Ernest. " Bukowskis Ham on Rye and the Los Angeles Novel". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*. 1985, 5 (3): 4-8