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Post Office: A Novel



Synopsis

"It began as a mistake." By middle age, Henry Chinaski has lost more than twelve years of his life to the U.S. Postal Service. In a world where his three true, bitter pleasures are women, booze, and racetrack betting, he somehow drags his hangover out of bed every dawn to lug waterlogged mailbags up mud-soaked mountains, outsmart vicious guard dogs, and pray to survive the day-to-day trials of sadistic bosses and certifiable coworkers. This classic 1971 novel—the one that catapulted its author to national fame—is the perfect introduction to the grimly hysterical world of legendary writer, poet, and Dirty Old Man Charles Bukowski and his fictional alter ego, Chinaski.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"An amazing, hilarious and unfalteringly entertaining account of a man trapped in a kind of Catch 23" Sunday Times "Takes you by the shoulders and shakes you until your teeth rattle" The Times "Cunningly, relentlessly jokey and sad" Observer "One of the funniest books ever written" Uncut "Amazing, hilarious and unfalteringly entertaining" --Sunday Times --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Charles Bukowski is one of America's best-known contemporary writers of poetry and prose and, many would claim, its most influential and imitated poet. He was born in 1920 in Andernach, Germany, to an American soldier father and a German mother, and brought to the United States at the age of two. He was raised in Los Angeles and lived there for over fifty years. He died in San Pedro, California, on March 9, 1994, at the age of seventy-three, shortly after completing his last

novel, Pulp.

This book chronicles the (fictional) later life of main character Henry Chinaski, who has for most of the book a dead-end job as a mail carrier at the Post Office over 12 years. His regular spells of drudgery there are interspersed with lots of drinking, women, race track betting, and some cynically amusing commentary. Chinaski is not upbeat by any means, yet at the same time, never seems quite completely ground down by his life. As depicted, work at the Post Office (and on at least one other job) is every bit as depersonalizing as most of us imagine. The long hours, tedium, disrespect and abuse are peppered with Chinaski's slovenly disdain for the bureaucracy and the plodding supervisors he works for. Chinaski does not seem to want to work when he doesn't have to, but for much of the book, seems to go along with it anyway, in part perhaps because it seems like the path of least resistance given his circumstances. On the surface, none of his work quite seems to totally shackle him, but in less obvious ways, he finally discovers that it has gradually wrung him out anyway, in spite of himself. I read this immediately after *Ham on Rye* (by the same author, Bukowski). Although "Ham on Rye" was written later, it is about Chinaski's early life from his time as a young boy through adolescence, and is even blunter than this one. I therefore started this book with the character from *Ham on Rye* fresh in my mind. Although Chinaski is still recognizable, one has to wonder what beat him down in between, since at the end of "Ham on Rye" I would not have said that he would be pursuing work in the way he does in this book. Although I liked *Ham on Rye* better, this is both an excellent and an easy read. Bukowski's style is simple, direct, blunt, and straightforward.

Confirms what we have come to suspect about how the Postal System worked then and still works now. Have just completed reading "Post Office" for the second time. As usual, one gets a bigger and better picture the second time around, but Bukowski, as Chinaski, paints the grim picture of life and specifically life inside the Postal System. It may be worse today depending on the Station and the particular employees and bureaucrats and "high tech" technology. I know that Route Drivers or Carriers are on some kind of monitored timer. They only have so much time to "stick" mail in say, a gang mail box for an apartment house, and then they must be off to the next address down the block. They have no extra time to talk to you or pass some time of day with the public, etc. They are automatic slaves to a system of bureaucratic slavery. It would drive anyone to drink, etc. as Chinaski displays. We have all heard and read about employees "going postal."

Wow, I must be getting old....Many times I found myself laughing out loud, that's why the 3 stars. But for some reason I felt like I had Stumbled across the diary of the creepy dirty old man down the street. The guy all the parents tell their kids to stay away from, just because of the way he looks. The language was a bit more vulgar than I had expected. I am far from being a prude, and I guess it works for the developed caricatures. Definitely not a book I would expect to be required reading, below the college level.

Toward the end of *Post Office*, Bukowski's next best novel after *Ham on Rye*, the protagonist Henry Chinaski has a revelation. Most of us scramble for job security, even if it comes at the price of our physical and emotional health, our creativity, and our identity. Anything's worth the cost of keeping a paycheck coming in on time. So we "accept" what we're given. This, Chinaski realizes, is "the wisdom of the slave" (p. 189), and he wants nothing to do with it. So he walks away from his civil service job with the postal department. Twelve years is enough. The tussle between individual autonomy and economic security is one of the more obvious themes in both *Post Office* and Bukowski's other "working man" novel, *Factotum*. We become dependent on our jobs, psychologically as well as materially, and the dependency is hard to break. *Post Office* is the story of a guy who starts out free and loose (Part I), but who finds himself drifting toward spirit-deadening "respectability" and job security (Parts II-IV), only to finally break away and face the great unknown of unemployment--and artistic creativity (Parts V & VI). Along the way, Bukowski writes a few genuinely brilliant sketches of bureaucratic stupidity, and (uncharacteristically) a few moving ones in which Chinaski plays with the child, Marina, he's sired off of Fay. There are also some moments of quite good psychological insight, as when Chinaski, disoriented by the sudden loss of routine (even though it's a routine he despised) falls to pieces right after walking away from his job. Thankfully, there's less of the relentless-to-the-point-of-tedium drinking in *Post Office* than one finds in most of Bukowski's other novels (although there's still a lot). Moreover, the novel is less impressionistic and better constructed than any other Bukowski tale except *Ham on Rye*. Even though it's difficult to understand the cult status granted Bukowski by his admirers, *Post Office* is a good novel--not great, mind you, but pretty darn good.

Hysterical is understated. Kept putting the book in my lap 'cause I laughed so hard-- took a few moments to read on. Also, felt a lot of empathy for Chinaski. The book will change perspective about your own job, especially if you're low on the totem pole. And, I mean LOW! Good therapy!

I'm by no means an avid reader, I have my adhd to thank for that, and novel was very enjoyable. I read it from time to time whenever I wanted to pass the time and eventually I could not get enough. I was able to hyper-focus on reading which is super rare for me, the book is hilarious, raw and real. If you enjoy crude humor this is a must read. Bukowski has me hooked!

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