University of Nevada, Reno

Rags, Riches and Rye: Hobohemian Practice in Twentieth Century American Literature

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by

Jennifer H. Forsberg

Dr. Justin D. Gifford/Dissertation Advisor

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We recommend that the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

JENNIFER H. FORSBERG

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Justin D. Gifford, PhD, Advisor

Ann Keniston, PhD, Committee Member

Jen Hill, PhD, Committee Member

Dennis Dworkin, PhD, Committee Member

Greta de Jong, PhD, Graduate School Representative

David W. Zeh, Ph. D., Dean, Graduate School

May, 2016
ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines hobo symbolism in the literary works of the American writers Jack London, John Steinbeck, Jack Kerouac, Hunter S. Thompson and Charles Bukowski. I argue that these authors utilize the social status of working-class identity in the tramp, hobo, migrant, or bum as a narrative technique and aesthetic model. These twentieth-century white, male writers construct an ideological and intellectual fantasy of the cultural frontier by enacting empowered mythological orders of the working class, despite its relegation to economic dispossession and social marginalization. I call attention to character types such as the tramp, hobo, migrant, and bum to investigate the circulation of mythologies about self-making, industriousness, and American progress into the twenty-first century. The inclusion of the hobo or other working-class figures in the hobo narrative incorporates, appropriates and often co-opts these American mythologies to exhibit generational and countercultural gain for white masculinity.

In composing hobo narratives, London, Steinbeck, Kerouac, Thompson and Bukowski create strategic class associations that render the social and material pressures of contemporary American identity abstract and stylized in art. The hobo narrative becomes a symbolic site for popular culture and politics to re-value working-class identity as a productive cultural appeal, including but not limited to literature and television, such as in Mad Men. The hobo symbolic institutes a tension between social status and creative enterprise in what I call hobohemian practice, a writing technique that stages working-class associations for the possession of an
American masculinity. This masculinity not only aims for hegemonic status, but values individuality and socio-economic latitude that consolidates the material conditions of an earlier generation. The concept of the hobohemian has resounding effects on the way that men construct authority as writers in the literary marketplace and as salesmen of American culture. Hobohemian practice guides my examination of the hobo narrative as it renders poverty a valuable creative association rather than a socio-economic condition.

Since the hobo is both a marginal member of the working class and a constructed cultural fantasy of dominance, the hobo narrative becomes a site for examining the pressures of gender, race and class. I construct an interdisciplinary framework at the intersections of Working-Class Studies, American Studies and Masculinity Studies to highlight these social pressures as they inform the foundation of the hobo symbol in realist and naturalist literature at the turn of the century. From this foundation, I sketch a larger narrative of cultural circulation where the above authors draw on the mythos of the hobo and the politics of homelessness to market the cultural capital of white masculinity to the mid-to-late twentieth century intellectual marketplace.
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Introduction: Working-Class Multiplicity and The Hobo Narrative

The American hobo is a historically marginalized member of the working class who conveys the ideological pressures of citizenship on the labor of able-bodied men. Study of the hobo often examines the historical pressures on a hobo body of knowledge, such as in the innovative work of Heather Tapley, Timothy Cresswell, or John Lennon. These authors highlight how economic, educational and political social institutions reinforce hierarchies of class through the mediation of race and gender. But unlike these studies, I focus on the pressures the hobo—socially and symbolically—places twentieth-century expressions of resilient masculinity within American literature and culture. This dissertation centers analysis on a network of racial and gendered tensions within the working-class literature of the hobo’s symbolic story, what I call the hobo narrative. This type of narrative features the tale of an often first-person narration of a homeless or under-class figure who travels from job to job and/or place to place, whether by rail or by road. These twentieth-century narratives map a nationalist culture of masculinity as defined against the social development of working-class figures ranging from the tramp, hobo, migrant, and bum. As a productive narrative form, the hobo narrative enlists social class-based tensions to wage cultural conflicts between elite and popular taste. It also manipulates genre conventions like the travelogue, the autobiography or memoir, the non-fiction ethnography, and the novel to make strategic gains in the literary marketplace.
The development of the hobo narrative starts with the inter-century tramp autobiographies of A-No. 1, Josiah Flynt, or Harry Kemp. As texts that were often self-published and popularly circulated between readers within distinct social circles, the tramp autobiography provides a foundation from which the hobo narrative develops as a complex and often hybrid literary form. The tramp autobiography of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century gained recognition as a genre of flexible fictional autobiography that conflated the author and narrator for ethnographic and often journalistic critiques of social class. Often interested in staging social inequalities for highly-masculine literary validations, the tramp autobiography is a life-centered production that roots itself in an expression of mobile self-aggrandizement akin to Walt Whitman. Though informed by the style and technique of the tramp narrative, the hobo narrative asserts symbolic accounts of road-related freedoms that are not limited to first-person tales or ethnographic purpose, but rather self-consciously co-opt the romantic impulse of inter-century expression emblematic of the tramp autobiography.

In this way, I define the hobo narrative as a confluence of road stories and travel narratives that draw on technological and economic transformations specific to the twentieth century. In one iteration, the hobo narrative may offer a fictionally autobiographical voice of resilient and manipulative social experience, such as in Jack Black’s You Can’t Win (1926). In another iteration, the form may exist as a strictly fictional narrative that features hobos or vagabonds through third-person or

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1 A-No. 1, or Leon Ray Livingston’s Life and Adventures of A-No. 1: America’s Most Celebrated Tramp (1910), Josiah Flynt’s sociological narrative Tramping With Tramps (1899) and Harry Kemp’s Tramping on Life (1922) are tramp autobiographies commonly featured in the study of the tramp.
experimental narration and for political commentary, such as in John Dos Passos’s *U.S.A. Trilogy* (1937). In both examples, the hobo narrative asserts itself as a flexible form that maps the social and the symbolic forms of working-class identity throughout the twentieth century. Whether for personal development or political activism, the hobo narrative emphasizes spatial mobility over social mobility, and foregrounds tales of resilient male figures like the hobo—but also the tramp, migrant, or bum—because they grant attention to both the economic and cultural poverty of America. Though the working-class figure featured in the hobo narrative changes throughout the century alongside social pressures and economic eras, I rely on the term hobo narrative to communicate the mobility of the tramp, hobo, migrant, or bum and their problematic identity, which hobo historian Todd DePastino argues issues “a crisis of home that was always also one of nationhood and citizenship, race and gender” (DePastino xix). In this way, the hobo narrative necessarily stages concerns of social class in order to mediate and/or ameliorate the social dominance of masculinity. Despite the historical figure, the hobo narrative elicits concerns of male laboring bodies and transience which institute a culture of a national masculinity. These changing features and figures are impacted by not only post-industrial or post-Fordist economics, but also by labor markets that grow technologically advanced and increasingly white-collar in the postwar.

The ideological pressures of American labor and masculinity allow me to read the flexibility of the hobo narrative as a reflection of strategic and volitional action by white, male writers in the twentieth century. Since the hobo narrative
celebrates folk forms of law bending or breaking, it provides a resilient narrative form that stages the often-fantastic cultural mythos of the hobo. Contrary to the upward mobility promised by Horatio Alger’s nineteenth-century rags-to-riches narratives that stress progress and hard work, the hobo narrative is invested in twentieth-century lateral moves across geographic space and social circles. Therefore, instead of constructing a narrative that is dedicated to the wholesome qualities of hard work, the hobo narrative communicates the capitalist exploitation of labor and often constructs countercultural or subversive attitudes that bypass the ideologies of social progress in order to assert individual agency. This means that rather than express the social pains of class climbing, the hobo narrative highlights the symbolic movement between class distinctions to assert social flexibility and masculine resiliency.

This definition also underscores how the hobo narrative is problematic, because it is complicit to a system of social inequality that identifies, utilizes and often exploits minority groups for the generation of power. This issues a highly complex and sometimes discriminatory relationship between the social and the symbolic in working-class identity. On the one hand, the hobo narrative benefits from ambiguous and malleable social classifications like the tramp, hobo, migrant, and bum from a position of selective access and spatial mobility. On the other hand, the narrative form challenges the elite literary marketplace by emphasizing not only its popular production, but also its essentialization and subordination of a marginalized working class. In complicated ways, the lateral mobility of the hobo
narrative resituates the pressures of a productive American ideology and advances democratic participation in American culture. But at the same time, this action constructs a highly-restricted space for white, masculine self-making to be earned through a privileged violation of a productive and progressive work ethic. As a literary form, the hobo narrative draws on working-class identity to advance a highly individualized but politically volatile intersection of philosophical positions. These social relationships institute not only a nationalized form of masculinity, but one that can claim authority through self-directed resourceful living and intellectual labor.²

As “the first major American writer to deal with hoboes,” I open with the work of Jack London to inaugurate the hobo narrative (Tramp 25). London’s exploration of the late-nineteenth century tramp and early-twentieth century hobo demarcates not only the importance of strategic class associations in the construction of a viable narrative form, but the literary transformation from tramp autobiographies to hobo narratives. By tracing the development of London’s tramping fictions in his unpublished Tramp Diary (1894) to the hobo travels of The Road (1907), I position London’s work as instituting the hobo as a productive literary trope. London’s use of hobo symbolism informs American cultural

² The road narrative also captures the travel of men from town to town and job to job. The hobo narrative can be considered a part of the larger road narrative, but they do not always coexist. Though the road narrative figures prominently in the following chapters, I do not use it as a classification because it excludes one major figure of my hobo analysis: the bum, who as a late-stage hobo, is tied to a specific location. Instead, the symbolic power of the road can be envisioned as a location wherein social class becomes a legible form of cultural value that is mobilized to specific aims within the hobo narrative.
productions of masculinity throughout the century, as I show in the coming chapters.

London’s unpublished *Tramp Diary*\(^3\) contains sketches of cities, travel routes, and interactions with “tramps” and lawmen while marching and rail-riding from San Francisco to Washington, D.C. with the first detachment of Kelly’s Army in 1894. Kelly’s Army was part of Coxey’s Army of homeless and/or unemployed men who marched on Washington and demanded to be put to work during the economic depression of the 1890s. Separate from the Tramp Army of soldiers displaced after the Civil War, London’s *Diary* communicates the era’s highly mobile need for work to meet both nationalist and masculinist ideologies. London’s travel alongside Kelly’s Industrial Army conducts a study of tramps that not only identifies how they move and mobilize the social, but also how that mobility designates a unique creative position for the writer.

The *Diary* features London’s struggles with his cold, sore feet while reporting the movements within and between the Army’s various camps. Never taking membership in Kelly’s Army, London exists as a writer along for the ride, who draws on a convenient tramping association for his written work. In this way, London’s *Diary* establishes the significance between a writer’s creative enterprise and class associations, suggesting that his affiliation with the Industrial Army is one of creative convenience. London’s productive and creative distance from the socially defined tramps of the Industrial Army can be seen after one particularly hard night

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\(^3\) London’s *Tramp Diary* was not published until 1979 when Richard Etulain collected the handwritten notes in the archives of Utah State University.
near Chicago. London expresses his exhaustion with the life of the tramp and leaves the detachment, explaining, “We went supperless to bed. Am going to pull out in the morning. I can’t stand starvation” (London *Tramp* 54). By calling attention to the material realities of the homeless Industrial Army, London unwittingly addresses his own traveling fantasy as a writer who can afford to leave. In this way, London describes his separation from the Army by claiming highly-selective mobility. After leaving, he heads to Chicago to receive mail and money at the Post Office, plays tourist at the World’s Fair, then travels to visit his Aunt Mary in nearby Michigan (*Tramp* 55-56).

London’s travel alongside Kelly’s Army provides him the lived experience of homeless life for his *Diary*. But London’s ability to leave the Army and pursue other destinations and interests shows how the tramp has been rendered a cultural symbolism rather than a social emblem for his readers. This locates a strained investment on London’s behalf, and challenges reception of his pseudo-tramp autobiography by rendering the *Diary* a failed ethnographic excursion with little appeal to his usual publishers.4 Finding the material conditions of homelessness insufferable, London’s *Tramp Diary* becomes a mostly-futile creative exercise with the exception of the sections “Character Studies” and “Incidents & Adventures,” which provide the foundation for his next project, *The Road*. London’s transition

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4 Etulain reports that London—a reputable and well-known writer—had trouble placing his tramping fictions until 1907: “The hobo was not an inspiring subject for teenage girls and coffee-table books—two of the unrefutable (sic) texts for measuring acceptable fiction in the last years of the nineteenth century” (London *Tramp* 21). In *Boxcar Politics*, however, John Lennon notes that London’s tramping fictions were written specifically to pay off his debts, his hobo focus a profitable and popular one for the well-known writer (87).
from the tramp to the hobo locates the American hobo as creative alternative to the social-commitments of the tramp autobiography. It also emphasizes an inter-century transition from an economic focus of dispossessed working-class figures toward a largely symbolic and self-making cultural circulation.

**Jack London and the Hobo-as-Artist**

London’s *The Road* is a foundational text of the hobo narrative and highlights the productive use of the hobo’s cultural mythos. *The Road* celebrates a highly masculine mobility that self-makes across the United States while simultaneously producing a how-to-guidebook for a hobo subculture that details hobo speech, social hierarchy, secret codes and boxcar protocol. Unlike the ethnographic aims of London’s *Tramp Diary*, London uses *The Road* to stress the improvisational spatial movement of hobo mobility, which earns productive status though subversive and often criminal positioning. In this way, London envisions the hobo as a cultural figure who can offer him the grounds from which to explore the boundaries of fiction and non-fiction, blurring the experiences of narrator and author he was unable to command alongside Kelly’s Army. To mark this distinct career move, editor Richard Etulain suggests that London’s “hoboes philosophize, speak in dialect, and spin yarns,” a narrative quality that I connect to the language acuity which London made his profession (London *Tramp* 22). London’s construction of a “persuasive hobo figure” appeals to publishers and popular audiences that were reluctant to entertain the tramp autobiography for its social critique (London
Tramp 22). Therefore, The Road locates the hobo as a productive identity whose symbolism empowers narrative creativity in line with troubadours and traveling poets, rather than factions of a dispossessed Industrial Army. The hobo also provides London the ability to manipulate realist and naturalist literary expectations and adulate performative and playful episodes of underclass identity to appropriate symbolic identities rather than social ones.

London’s The Road positions the hobo as a productive identity analogous to the creative potential of American literature. This is established by a person-to-person exchange between London and his reader in the first chapter “Confession,” which explains what the hobo must do to survive. Before knocking at the back door of a woman’s house in Reno, London tells the reader:

> For know that upon his ability to tell a good story depends the success of the beggar. First of all, and on the instant, the beggar must ‘size up’ his victim. After that, he must tell a story that will appeal to the peculiar personality and temperament of that particular victim. (London Road 6)

Attentive to his audience, London’s beggar supplies a story that responds to the demands of the situation. Able to wield creative control of the language exchange, the hobo draws on the sympathies of poor families and lonely women who answer the door. Though a transient and underclass figure that must rely on the handouts of others, the hobo makes language a performative resource that secures food or board. With this interaction, London highlights a central tenet of hobo survival, that “[t]he successful hobo must be an artist” (Road 6). London’s text emphasizes that a persuasive hobo figure is able to manipulate the severity of his material conditions through story telling, a verbal capacity for narrative construction.
By envisioning the hobo as an artist, London suggests that material sustenance can be earned through a narrative performance of an underclass identity. This, by default, means that the creative quality of the hobo guarantees survival. This creativity emphasizes a masculine resiliency that renders the hobo's linguistic ‘victimization’ of others a con-artist-like exchange of supply and demand. Predicated on the ability to identify an audience and render an appropriate story, London’s hobo-as-artist celebrates the verbal resourcefulness of the hobo. This, in turn, stresses the reflexivity of white masculinity as it is able to command control of not only interpersonal situations, but cultural institutions that include London’s work as a writer who represents the working class. Furthermore, the hobo narrative allows London to perform a specific class position and exist as “a fluid sort of organism” (Road 73). Since London is able to tell a story for survival and turn that story into cultural acclaim, he stresses the hobo-as-artist as a resilient narrative ability to “fit in ‘most anywhere”’ (Road 73).

I focus on London's concept of the hobo-as-artist to relay how verbal storytelling from working-class and/or homeless positions can stage a masculine resiliency that results not only in successful survival, but a dominant position that institutes a victim-position through interaction. London’s connection of verbal ability to an underclass positions invests creative potential in the resourcefulness of the hobo's socio-economic condition. In many ways, the hobo-as-artist communicates an alternate labor system that lets London quell anxieties over his middle-class intellectual labor. As an artist that can tell a story that appeals to
others, London’s hobo forges narrative control to satisfy his material needs, while at the same time refusing traditional notions of work through story telling. To this effect, London uses the hobo as a resource for his own intellectual labor as an American writer, claiming: “I have often thought that to this training of my tramp days is due much of my success as a story-writer” (Road 6). In doing so, London’s The Road forges a productive relationship between the presentation of an underclass position and his prolific creativity.

Throughout The Road London establishes himself as a self-proclaimed “economic master of civilization,” whose hobo affiliations and identifications can claim authorial dominance and creative aptitude (Road 42). Through this “initiative and enterprise,” London constructs the hobo-as-artist as a narrative performer able to remedy social pressures of class by issuing a cultural vocabulary to a literary audience (London Road 42). The hobo’s socio-economic condition is never more than a substructure for London’s capacity to construct a creative infrastructure as an artist. For instance, when serving a 30-day jail sentence for vagrancy in Niagara Falls, London underscores his sentence as an opportunity to gather more material on hobo life, but more explicitly highlights his ability to maintain his hobo-as-artist status (London Road 40). While in jail, London contracts his writing skills to his illiterate cellmates (London Road 44). Writing love-letters for his fellow cellmates, London prides himself on not only the monetary incentive he earns for his words, but the return-letters that praise his words and talent: “she was in love, not with him, but with the humble scribe. I repeat, those letters were great” (Road 44). Most
importantly, the episodes in The Road stress that London’s hobo-as-artist can wield a narrative authority through improvisational and interpersonal verbal ability. In addition, London’s performances call attention to the ways that the hobo-as-artist earns greater gain by putting this verbal ability into writing for an audience to consume.

In Labor’s Text (2001), Working-Class Studies scholar and literary critic Laura Hapke explains how a “new sureness of tone [is] born of the authority of the vagabond,” making “language...the experience itself” (191). Hapke’s observation sheds light on London’s hobo-as-artist, acknowledging the ability to command a sense of cultural control through narratives that gain authenticity based on underclass associations. By telling stories and making verbal appeals, the hobo-as-artist establishes himself as a culturally controlling figure able to use flexible narrative techniques to circumvent socio-economic expectations for men. As a refined storyteller, the hobo-as-artist draws on the economic condition of the hobo while stressing a privileged creative capacity to render hobo symbols as a “proletarian troubadour who [can] always get by” (Hapke 191). When read through these contexts, the hobo-as-artist becomes the motor by which the hobo narrative is driven. The hobo-as-artist’s careful and strategic narration of underclass positions becomes a productive literary technique for London. The Road expresses distinct symbolic investments in an underclass association like the hobo because he can be rendered into a creative opportunity. This opportunity allows London to express
masculine resiliency, something that the *Tramp Diary* could not offer him in the literary marketplace.

The hobo narrative presents a complicated network of tensions regarding representation of the working class in American literature. For example, London’s *The Road* identifies working-class identity not so much as a socio-economic position, as a culturally valued symbol of creative capacity. By tracing the ways that London circulates the hobo-as-artist as a figure of creative potential in American literature and culture, I challenge areas of literary study that limit working-class literature to authentic and/or realist expressions of working-class life. As *The Road* proves, the hobo-as-artist functions from an intricate social and cultural identity. The hobo-as-artist not only capitalizes on essentialized or authentic working-class expectations, but also appropriates them in stylistic ways through narrative. This leaves London and other authors of the hobo narrative in a space of problematic representation. On the one hand, London represents some realistic details of the social issues of poverty, homelessness and class inequality in his time. On the other hand, the social issues London recovers in his text are put to symbolic use to establish a highly individualistic and self-serving literary career. These tensions over working-class representation allow me to pursue how white male writers that fashion the hobo narrative invest themselves in the hobo-as-artist’s productive and creative character as proof of a cultural mobility that is able to cross class lines to command social value. This suggests that the hobo narrative not only sells poverty, but also uncovers and capitalizes on the popular appeal of social-class crossing in
the American cultural marketplace, instituting an innovative place to examine how the hobo has influenced cultural circulations in the twentieth century.

London’s attentiveness to cultural and mythological circulation is integral to this dissertation, and is of primary concern to Mark Simpson and Jonathan Auerbach’s studies on London. For example, in *Trafficking Subjects* (2005), Simpson suggests that London’s “authorial persona [was] devised to document yet also capitalize on the crisis in labor relations” (110). By incorporating the gains of the hobo-as-artist, Simpson delineates London’s strategic representations of the tramp and hobo as opportunistic cultural appeals from within the social and economic politics of the time. By envisioning London as “an agent of the culture industry,” Simpson highlights that the distribution of working-class symbols construct productive forms of cultural knowledge, social recognition, and literary community (126). Simpson’s study evades rigid claims of London's authenticity to promote cultural flows in London’s work, for which I include in symbolic representation of the hobo and the enterprising form of the hobo narrative. These symbolic manipulations are also clear areas of interest in *Male Call: Becoming Jack London* (1996), where Auerbach considers “the writer's triumph over poverty” one that is “cultural as much as economic” (1). Auerbach’s sophisticated categorization of London as telling a “very personal parable” of socio-economic triumph acknowledges that the use of a resilient under-class or working-class figure like the hobo earns London personal and professional acclaim. Auerbach prioritizes the ways that London’s fictional content is overwrought with “getting into print,” and
emphasizes how figures like the hobo allow London to enter the literary marketplace through “symbolic capital[,] mass marketing, [and] self-promotion” (2). By equating London’s name and career with adventures that could detail “the very poverty of his beginnings,” Auerbach insightfully characterizes London as aware that “an absence of cultural capital could itself be converted into symbolic coin” (2). This process of symbolic transformation speaks to the use of underclass, impoverished or homeless figures like the tramp or hobo, whom London renders into cultural capital through a manipulation of resilient masculinity.5 By envisioning poverty as a symbolic and creative opportunity for success, London’s verbal gains as a hobo-as-artist institutes professional and writerly gains through the hobo narrative.

The hobo narrative’s reliance on working-class figures for resiliency can be best explained by what Thomas Newhouse calls the “hobo mystique” in The Beat Generation and the Popular Novel in the United States 1945-1970 (2000). Newhouse’s concept suggests that the symbolic manipulation of the hobo is founded by figures like London, who constructed stylistic appeals to masculine ingenuity on the road. Newhouse explains:

The hobo mystique was as continuous a line as bohemianism, [...] The archetype for it may be found in narratives by writers such as Jim Tully and

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5 In Distinction (1986), Pierre Bourdieu defines four types of capital: economic, social, cultural and symbolic. The hobo narrative is predicated on the exhibition of social capital—or an affiliation with a community—which creates status through group membership. However, as writers enacting this social role, the authors covered in this dissertation lay claim to cultural capital that accumulates economic, social and symbolic capital. For Bourdieu, symbolic capital is the transformation of other forms of capital into legitimated forms that possess greater bearing on the population as a whole (as opposed to cultural capital dependent upon access, awareness and understanding). Auerbach’s references to mass publication and mass marketing function in the realm of the symbolic.
Jack London—tales of tough vagabonds with a hostility to the bourgeois values of work and family, who take to the road and cultivate a manly stoicism as hard-boiled and emotionally controlled as any Hemingway hero. (16)

The hobo mystique identifies a masculine potentiality in the hobo at the turn of the century. The hobo is seen as not only a resourceful artist, but as a figure that is characterized by his insubordination to and evasion of the social pressures of modern life. The concept of the hobo mystique issues a distinct definition of working-class identity within this dissertation, specifically as it appeals to mid-to-late twentieth-century popular literature and the repeated symbolic appropriation of tramps, hobos, migrants and bums. The hobo mystique communicates the symbolic and cultural circulation of a hobo or working-class mythology rather than socio-economic classifications of poverty. This concept allows me to suggest that the hobo narrative is invested in the hobo-as-artist to construct subversive cultural productions based on a highly-masculine mystique, not the real or lived facets of underclass identity.

As Newhouse points out, the hobo mystique incorporates class-based masculine attributes seen in texts like London’s The Road, and enlists an ability to ‘always get by’ to subsequent generations that draw on the highly symbolic representations of the hobo. In this way, the hobo narrative is a popular form that renders the cultural power of the hobo mystique to advance twentieth-century literary endeavors. The hobo mystique circulates the masculine resiliency and spatial mobility of the hobo to popular audiences, who identify the highly regional
identity of the hobo and associate it with the work of London and Tully. This popular readership throughout the twentieth century acknowledges not only how the hobo narrative uses the hobo-as-artist and hobo mystique to stage masculine dominance and marginality for cultural power throughout the century, but also how the hobo becomes a symbol of white masculine fantasy both tied to and disconnected from the frontier.

As a form that celebrates insubordinate and rootless masculinity, the twentieth-century hobo narrative equates self-made autonomy with an improvisational mobility across the United States, but most specifically in California. This new manifestation of destiny in the twentieth century makes it imperative to view the twentieth-century hobo not as a social victim or material body, but rather as a cultural fantasy whose symbolic order has ties to the frontier. As Richard Slotkin argues in *Gunfighter Nation* (1997), the frontier must be read as having transformed from a geographical space to an ideological one, a process detailed in part in hobo narratives (4). Therefore, reading the working-class identities of the tramp, hobo, migrant, and bum in these regional narratives is not necessarily representative of social conditions or symptoms of an economic time, but are instead co-opted symbols that confirm white masculine resiliency as a nationalist ideology. This correlates to literary critic Erin Royston Battat perspective that twentieth-century literature envisions hobos, whether “vulnerable” or “volitional”

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6 Chapter three of Lennon’s *Boxcar Politics* constructs a compelling narrative regarding the creative differences between London and Tully. As a young struggling writer, Tully idolized London but felt that he had ultimately sold out. Tully’s work, including *Beggars of Life* (1924), aimed to tell the “real” hobo experience, though it is heavily focused on the construction of an authorial position of power to earn critical acclaim in the publishing world.
as “cultural types rather than social realities” (17). As cultural types, the hobo has proliferated pop culture and been rendered into a working-class figure of agential promise. His identification is wrought with changing ideological states of twentieth century America, his existence serving new generations of readers and viewers who aim to “preserve the hobo’s rugged and freewheeling sprit as a source of nostalgic inspiration” (DePastino 174). For these reasons, I do not define the hobo as a victim of social and economic change whose mobility is forced and overdetermined. Instead, this study focuses on the hobo as a resilient character type whose symbolic definition provides American culture productive and creative episodes of masculine self-making.

In addition to London, I read these tensions in the works of John Steinbeck, Jack Kerouac, Hunter S. Thompson and Charles Bukowski to identify how the hobo and other working-class identities like the tramp, migrant, and bum challenge the social order and capitalist degradation of their different times. I am particularly interested in the hobo narrative of the mid-to-late twentieth-century, which from London’s lead, institutes spatial mobility and verbal artistry to provoke social prescriptions of masculinity. By the mid-century, the symbolic appeals of the road and rail construct more visible social disavowals that issue masculine alternatives to a prosperous breadwinning logic. Yet, ironically, by constructing countercultural or subversive affiliations with the hobo, the mid-century narrative often re-institutes the very ideological pressures that render the social struggles of poverty and class as invisible. These authors, then, re-issue working-class exploitation through the
construction of an elite new class of intellectual wordsmiths ranging from the Depression to postwar prosperity and mass-marketed late-capitalist times. These twentieth-century white, male writers use the symbolic appeal of working-class figures like the tramp, hobo, migrant, and bum to construct an ideological and intellectual fantasy of the cultural frontier by enacting empowered mythological orders of control despite economic dispossession or social marginalization.

DEFINING THE HOBO

To examine the symbolic transformation of the hobo I must first examine the social forces that define him. To do so, I rely on former hobo Nels Anderson, whose foundational sociological study is attentive to the hobo’s cultural appeal in The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man (1923; 1961). Like Jack London, Anderson sketches the hobo’s beginnings against the Industrial Army of “General” Jacob S. Coxey, who marched “an aggregate of unemployed men [...] to the nation’s capital to ask the president and Congress to launch a program of public works” in March 1894 (127). Anderson’s interest in the Industrial Army underscores a historical separation from the post-bellum Tramp Army of displaced soldiers in the mid-nineteenth century. It also advances a specifically turn-of-the-century context for work and mobility concurrent to the close of the frontier. Anderson’s examination acknowledges not only the importance for male, productive labor as a

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7 Anderson was an early student of Richard Park’s Chicago School of Sociology.
citizen behavior, but also the economic contexts that command the tramp and hobo’s mobility as politically representative.

Unlike London’s use of the term tramp to describe the Industrial Army, Anderson defines the ways that the Industrial Army is comprised of hobos searching for work. By considering the hobo a “nomad proletariat,” Anderson emphasizes that the hobo is “a transient worker without a program” (Anderson 8; 64). Though the Industrial Army adhered to some semblance of program—organized and unified by Coxey and Kelley—it is ultimately without an economic program that readily employs or pays. This lack of program allows Anderson to communicate the hobo’s revolutionary potential through the form of verbal and physical demands, and intimates how the hobo becomes a symbol for cultural production. For example, in addition to texts like The Road, the hobo becomes a central symbol to the political campaigns of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), which feature the “Wobblies’ mythic hobo” to allocate the power of a “proletarian counterculture” (Battat 18). In these ways, Anderson’s understanding of the hobo-driven Industrial Army identifies the social and symbolic hobo as both a demanding citizen and a mobilized threat against the system.

Unlike the Tramp Army that had been “scaring” America since just after the Civil War, Anderson identifies the Industrial Army of hobos as a mobilized labor force within the economic depression. This distinction is important since the tramp was unlike the hobo, defined as “an able-bodied individual who has the romantic passion to see the country and gain new experience without work” (Anderson 64).
For Anderson, the tramp is a figure that evades citizen responsibilities and denies the prioritization of a Protestant work ethic. These qualities are rather contrary to the Industrial Army’s aims. The tramp advances the resourcefulness of interpersonal communications and manipulation, asserting his status as “a specialist at ‘getting by’” (Anderson 66). Within this context, it is clear that London’s use of the term tramp in his Tramp Diary is problematic. Its wholesale use in The Road clearly constructs the hobo-as-artist as a tramp figure, not a hobo searching for work. Yet, despite this interchangeable use, London’s investment in labeling his figure as a hobo is a provocative avenue which this dissertation finds at as central focus: What does the hobo symbol provide and why? How? To find answers, I look to Anderson’s social definitions of the hobo and highlight not only the transitional-nature of London’s hobo narrative, but recount internal debates over classifying social groups and defining group membership in early-twentieth century America.

Anderson’s use of the Industrial Army as the root of hobo culture demonstrates an innate difficulty in establishing clear distinctions between tramps and hobos. For instance, when the Industrial Army traveled the country to demonstrate their need for work, their mobility and unemployment made them hobos, “migratory worker[s] in the strict sense of the word” (Anderson 64). Anderson’s text codes hobos as industrious in a traditional sense of laboring, while the tramp is defined through non-traditional industriousness that lets them get by. At the surface level, Anderson’s text establishes that hobos are mobile individuals
who look for work while tramps are mobile individuals that evade work. But London's hobo-as-artist is, by definition, a tramp. Meanwhile, according to Anderson's explanation, London's tramps are in fact hobos. These unsettled definitions raise complex and critical questions about representation and interpretation of social identity. Specifically, they communicate ideological investments in labor and masculinity without detailing what counts as work and what counts as need. These unclear socio-economic motivations place the hobo and tramp in ambiguous positions that account not only for their often-interchangeable use, but also the explicit removal of social and economic pressures to celebrate only the cultural symbolism of the hobo.

Anderson's text addresses these ambiguous classifications by calling on Dr. Ben L. Reitman's “three types of the genus vagrant: the hobo, the tramp, and the bum: [...] The hobo works and wanders, the tramp dreams and wanders, and the bum drinks and wanders” (Reitman qtd. in Anderson 61). Reitman's definitions may be tongue-in-cheek, but they serve to show that categorizing the homeless population—the genus vagrant—often resulted in the overly social-scientific typecasting or typeclassing of homeless men. To remedy this form of popular

8 Heather Tapley historicizes the tramp and hobo to make visible that discourses of masculinity were formed around the tramp's non-normative body. She argues the wandering hobo or tramp was a figure who refused work and was often seen by society as a failure of both working-class and bourgeois manhood (33). Though Tapley provides a comprehensive analysis of a highly gendered and racialized hobo culture, I want to stress that a need for work advanced in Anderson relates to the creative hobo-as-artist figure within the hobo narrative. Though my aim of following the hobo's cultural circulation is met in Tapley's analysis of medical discourse, I locate a separate afterlife of hobo culture in American literature that uses the hobo to claim both bourgeois and working-class masculinities to subversive effect.
knowledge, Anderson’s study outlines five types of vagrant or homeless men in service of constructing a more comprehensive social definition:

Although we cannot draw lines closely, it seems clear that there are at least five types of homeless men: (a) the seasonal worker [or upper-class hobo], (b) the transient or occasional worker or hobo, (c) the tramp who ‘dreams and wanders’ and works only when it is convenient, (d) the bum who seldom wanders and seldom works, and (e) the home guard to lives in Hobohemia and does not leave town. (Anderson 62-3)

Despite repeating Reitman’s definition for the tramp, Anderson’s five types advance important distinctions between the tramp, hobo, migrant, and bum that inform the production of the hobo narrative and its symbolic use of various working-class figures.

First and foremost, Anderson suggests that there is a hierarchy of homeless men. By marking the seasonal worker as an upper-class hobo, Anderson acknowledges other forms of homelessness in not only agricultural work but predicts the migratory labor of the Dust Bowl. Though Anderson includes the seasonal worker to communicate status and stability due to mobility and transportation, his definition of the upper-class hobo offers me a framework to read John Steinbeck’s Grapes of Wrath (1939) in Chapter One. By placing the hobo at the top of the homeless hierarchy, whether seasonal or transient, Anderson establishes the potential for a hierarchical system that envisions homelessness through differences in work and mobility. These differences are staged through nostalgic working-class representations in Jack Kerouac’s On the Road (1957) in Chapter Two, and in Hunter S. Thompson’s Hell’s Angels (1965) in Chapter Three.
In addition, Anderson’s five-types constructs an important definition of the home guard, and places it at the lowest rung of the homeless hierarchy to call attention to the benefit of stationary positions in the urban hobo center of Hobohemia. Adding the bum to the homeless hierarchy of tramp, hobo and migrant, Anderson’s suggestion that the bum is deemed limited by his lack of movement is challenged in Chapter Four by my reading of Charles Bukowski’s Ham on Rye (1983), where the bum is rendered an alluring American identity based on his non-productiveness. One the one hand, Anderson constructs an innovative and socially progressive homeless hierarchy based on status earned through work and mobility. On the other hand, Anderson’s hierarchy reinstitutes the ideological marginalization of those at the home guard or bum levels because they do not actively pursue work and do not celebrate mobility. These pressures inform the use of the tramp, hobo, migrant and bum into the mid-century, where my conclusion reads them into the hobo symbolic of the television drama Mad Men (2006-2015). Anderson’s homeless hierarchy offers classifications that not only distinguish the hobo as possessing the most status, but also provide the socio-economic pressures that transform the hobo as a symbol within popular culture and American literature. Here, and in Mad Men, the inherent value of a homeless identity becomes analogous to an agential and mobile ability to claim individuality against the pressures of capitalism.

Finally, Anderson’s five types possess an important slippage that becomes valued by the hobo narrative. Rather than express distinct roles within the system, each of Anderson’s types easily transform into another depending upon an ability to
negotiate (mobility) economic pressures (need) with self-interest (labor). These volitional attributes result in the bum becoming the home guard or wandering and becoming a tramp. Or the tramp that works and becomes a hobo, or stops wandering and becomes a bum. These identifications prove the difficulty of articulating a hobo identity and hobo symbolic, since the hobo figure is always caught between pressures of mobility and labor. His place in the homeless hierarchy changes not only with the historical context and political debates of the time, but with the town, the season, or the weather.

Though I have addressed the way that Anderson’s five types can be rendered into productive analysis of the hobo narrative, I also want to offer a wide-historical trajectory of the hobo advanced by Todd DePastino’s Citizen Hobo: How A Century of Homelessness Shaped America (2003). DePastino envisions the tramp, hobo and bum as a continuum of homeless men: the same figure defined differently depending on the social moment. DePastino’s suggests that workingmen “took on many forms—the ‘tramp’ of the Gilded Age, the ‘hobohemian’ of the Progressive Era, the ‘transient’ and ‘migrant’ of the Great Depression, and the skid row ‘bum’ of the postwar period” (DePastino xix). Laying out a diachronic development of the hobo, DePastino addresses Anderson’s synchronic perspective by redefining the tramp, hobo, migrant, and bum as the same white man across different historical stages. This provides a second perspective on the definition of the hobo that allows for a more comprehensive outlook that includes both Anderson’s hierarchy as well as DePastino’s historical chronology. Emphasizing mobility more than labor, DePastino
is able to address not only the socio-economic realities of homelessness, but also the
cultural construction of the hobo and his meaning. As a method for thinking about
the popularity of the hobo narrative, DePastino’s theory allows me to include not
only London’s tramping and hobo tales, but also Dust Bowl migrants, fantastic
postwar hobos by beatniks, and late-century skid row bums, who all clamor to
regain white, masculine control by selling poverty to the mid-century.

I emphasize the racialized identification of the hobo to locate specific and
strategic assertions of dominant ideologies in the American century. In defining the
hobo as necessarily white, DePastino juxtaposes the Tramp Army of Civil War
soldiers with the Great Migrations that saw African Americans flee the south for
northern industrial work. DePastino’s discussion makes clear that the
permissiveness of mobility is overtly dictated by concerns of race, arguing that the
celebration of mobility in America has been racialized, in particular by the
nineteenth-century tradition of “African Americans [who] had long idealized
geographic mobility as a crucial component of freedom” (14). Yet, he is clear to
point out that unlike tramps or hobos, “black migrants could not count on the
already haphazard kindness of strangers—not to mention railroads, missions, and
municipal authorities—upon which the transient homeless so often depended”
(DePastino 14). This distinction is important to my study of the hobo narrative for
two reasons. First and foremost, it offers a nuanced reading of not only racialized
mobility but how it becomes a larger symbolic in American literature. In addition, it
offers distinct types of mobility based on race and gender, both of which I identify as
dominant discourses within the hobo narrative. Though black male hobos and vagabonds are featured throughout American literature in the early twentieth century, such as in Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937), my central focus is to disimbricated how the hobo mystique enables white masculine projects in the mid-century. Erin Royston Battat’s Ain’t Got No Home: America’s Great Migrations and the Making of An Interracial Left (2014) provides a comprehensive study and provocative intersection of how African American texts like William Attaway’s Let Me Breathe Thunder (1939) express an awareness a racialized hobo culture, and challenge the cultural mystique as portrayed by Steinbeck or Dos Passos. Battat’s conversation about race and the hobo is a remarkable resource that provides my study the opportunity to challenge the ways that the hobo and mobility has been granted distinctly white male privilege in America.  

For instance, Ralph Ellison’s mid-1930s short story, “I Did Not Learn Their Names,” grants the distinct privilege of mobility to white hobos and shows that though ideals of mobility can be appreciated across racial lines, they are also constricted by race. Taking place at the time of the Scottsboro Case, Ellison’s boxcar takes on the political belief of the time that black mobility is lawlessness, featuring a

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9 African American literature prioritizes the political potential of the train over the plight of the black hobo. The train becomes a stage for changing modernity and new subjectivities, one that Marlon Ross argues in “Trespassing The Colorline: Aggressive Mobility And Sexual Transgression In The Construction of New Negro Modernity,” is founded on episodes of racial passing. As symbolic of modernity in both technological and social advancements, “trespassing on white turf” is “standing one’s ground in hand-to-hand combat with those who seek to impede the progress of the race” (Ross 54). The black hobo who rides in unauthorized boxcars, does not stand his ground and as such has limited ability to assist the progress of the race.
black hobo who narrates his dangerous rail-riding lifestyle where bodies are torn apart on the tracks and the boxcar is segregated.\textsuperscript{10} When caught riding illegally in a boxcar, Ellison’s white hobos are given a pass to the next town. The black hobo narrator, however, is thrown off the boxcar and imprisoned for trespassing. Ellison’s story communicates that the often-lawbreaking white hobo has more systematic privilege than any black individual who looked for work. Despite using the same transient method, the results of white and black hobo identity possess very different consequences. I include Ellison’s story to make clear the ways that hobo identity are coded not only as male, but white. This classification accounts for how mobility becomes a privilege granted to white masculinity, which has less-regulated access across institutional settings in the first half of the twentieth century. This allows me to theorize ways that the hobo narrative draws on working-class figures and the hobo mystique to perpetuate white, masculine assertions of dominance in later periods.

Though race commands significant understandings of mobility, the hobo’s movement is also distinctly defined by changing technology in the twentieth century. Anderson explains that by the 1920s “some [migratory workers] alternate between train riding and hitchhiking,” to emphasize that “[t]he important

\textsuperscript{10} The Scottsboro Case (1931) refers to nine black hobos sentenced to death by an all-white jury for raping two white women after a conflict with a group of white hobos in a boxcar. Both John Lennon’s “The Interracial Boxcar” and Erin Royston Battat’s “Race, Sex, and the Hobo” explain that the infamous Scottsboro Case is the most publicized instance of black hobos. Battat’s sophisticated disentanglement of the Scottsboro boys as depicted by the left-wing press as “vulnerable workers […] to imagine a counternarrative of masculine proletarian unity” (16). Battat makes clear that “competing hobo types […] accounted for racism within the underclass” and only to be circulated by romantic hobo narratives of the 1930s (16-7).
implication is that today the migrant is more mobile than ever before” (Anderson 131). By envisioning the hobo at his most highly mobile stage, technology impacts the homeless hierarchy for which Anderson places the hobo at the top. Mark Wyman’s study Hoboes: Bindlestiffs, Fruit Tramps and the Harvesting of the West (2010) explores how the concept of the tramp, hobo, migrant and bum are affected by technological advancements that decreased dependence on the railroad. By instituting alternative kinds of transportation that result in what Anderson envisions as an exceptional mobility, Wyman advances the concept of the Gasoline Tramp, a highly mobile worker with a privileged mobility granted by the automobile. As an expert navigator of the labor market, the Gasoline Tramp can attend to more harvests, fields and work sites. Though the Gasoline Tramp is, in essence, an “upper-class” hobo seeking work, Wyman stresses the wanderlust of increased mobility by calling them tramps. Despite establishing a clear distinction between the two terms, arguing that ‘tramp’ is historically synonymous for vagabond, whereas ‘hobo’ dictates who worked and who did not, Wyman also acknowledges the limits of rigid categorizations (38). Wyman’s interchangeable use of hobo and tramp in the Gasoline Tramp enables him to consider the fluidity of lived vagrant identity as compared to the construction of labor-specific classifications in newspapers. He suggests:

An attempt to distinguish between hobo and tramps was often complicated because it was easy to move back and forth between the two groups, and many did. A hobo might tire looking for work; a tramp might decide that he had to work to survive. (Wyman 37)
Returning to the problem of Anderson’s five types, Wyman’s offers a final level of complexity to defining the hobo, whose status changes not only with work but through different modes of transportation. Wyman’s study locates how technology like the automobile becomes part of hobo culture, and is particularly prescient to the mid-century hobo narrative’s use of a frontier-fantasy that can attain geographic and social mobility simultaneously.

**Historic Hobohemia and Hobohemian Literary Practice**

Having detailed the social definition of the hobo, I now want to characterize how the symbolic hobo and other working-class identities are configured as productive cultural strategies in the twentieth century. By envisioning the marginal working-class figure of the hobo as one of social hierarchy, I can highlight the way that white, male writers like Jack London are able to produce productive associations through the hobo, tramp, migrant, and bum. I substantiate the concept of this cultural practice with the concept of hobohemia, which DePastino defines as a “white male counterculture” (xx). As a term typically used to define an urban space where hobos dwell, DePastino’s redefinition of hobohemia advances my study of working-class appropriation in the hobo narrative. By highlighting the concept of hobohemia as a countercultural group with distinct cultural access, I am able to argue that the hobo narrative uses strategic class identifications as both a narrative methodology and for popular appeal in the literary marketplace.
Though hobo/iea has not always possessed countercultural associations, it
has historically represented an intersection of art and poverty that countercultural
figures have capitalized on. For instance, Nels Anderson defines hobo/iea as an
early twentieth century “mainline” of temporary settlement, and “the great labor
market where the hobo spent or lost his earnings and started again on the road”
(Anderson 28). This urban space is a transitional location where hobos alternate
episodes of working and wandering. But Anderson’s attention to geography also
incorporates the cultural position of the hobo settlement at a crossroads with
Bughouse Square, the bohemian Village of Chicago (Anderson 36). By indicating
hobo/iea’s capacity for cultural exchange, Anderson implicates the creative
investments of Bohemia alongside the economic pressures of the hobo.

By highlighting both hobo and bohemian investments in the hobo narrative, I
aim to call attention to a strategic practice of class affiliation by a distinctly white
male counterculture. In this context, I use the term hobo/iea/ian to indicate the
creative manipulation of social class for creative production. Like the verbal acuity
of the hobo-as-artist, the hobo/iea/ian institutes working-class representations as a
form of cultural capital. Hobo/iea/ian practice is a site where the blurring of hobo
and bohemian identity becomes a symbolic investment for literary productions like
the hobo narrative. This practice favors symbolic, cultural circulation over social or
economic realities, and envisions the tramp, hobo, migrant, and bum as a
provocative and mobile emblems of resilient masculinity.
Hobohemian practice is a strategic narrative technique that permits authors of the hobo narrative to deploy working-class identity for the acquisition of cultural capital. Hobohemian practice benefits from the ways that the hobo narrative lays claims on working-class identity, and renders poverty as a valuable class association for bohemian creativity. These intersections are historically situated at the turn of the century. As DePastino explains:

Hoboes were bohemian not only because they were comparatively rootless, but also because they were transitional figures, straddling the residual working-class world of the nineteenth century and the emerging one of the twentieth. They had broken from their class's settled belief and values but had yet to fashion new ones to take their place. (61)

For DePastino, the twentieth-century hobo is a continuation of the previous generation, the tramp. Since hobo identity must adhere to a new twentieth century world, the nineteenth-century class-values of the tramp no longer serve him. DePastino uses the hobo and the bohemian as a nostalgic entity that can bridge a century-specific gap in class identity. This provides a scope that stresses not only how the hobo narrative takes part in the nostalgic hobo mystique, but that mobilizes new forms of class identity in the tramp, hobo, migrant, and bum as the twentieth century grows increasingly professionalized through white-collar work.

Hobohemian practice allows writers to examine positions of new class identity by using historic “homelessness” not as a condition of poverty for the unemployed or traumatized veteran, but as an enterprising possibility for
contemporary cultural agency. Hobohemian practice strategically draws on the plight of the working-class to prove a bohemian—and sometimes bourgeois—expression of individual agency that results in what DePastino calls an “imagined fraternity of white men” (xx). These men are able to wage productive identifications based on “not only [...] class” as with the hobo, “but also [...] race, ethnicity, gender, and region” (DePastino xx).

I use the concept of hobohemian practice to exemplify a literary tradition wherein white masculinity adapts to new class values based on productive identifications with the working-class, including the tramp, hobo, migrant, and bum. Hobohemian practice constructs spatial and symbolic domination through the form of the hobo narrative by permitting cross-class affiliations that sell the value of working-class identity to reading publics. Since the hobo narrative is often written in the style of the tramp autobiography, taking part in hobohemian practice often elicits a performative act on behalf of the writer, enacting the slippages in Anderson’s five types as productive narrative episodes. These narrative enactments across class lines suggest that hobohemian practice is part of scholarship that aims to describe cross-class performativity. This important term comes from John Kucich’s “Reverse Slumming: Cross-Class Performativity and Organic Order in

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12 Class performativity (John Kucich), class passing (Gwendolyn Audrey Foster), and slumming (Peter Hitchcock) are some of the potential terms used to describe cross-class movement and representation. Class performativity is the best of these terms as it acknowledges the active negotiation of appearances made recognizable or normative through expectations that can be subverted such as in drag, which I cover in Chapter two.
Dickens and Gaskell” (2013), which examines the intensely Victorian foundation of slumming to indicate the staging of class associations as a form of identification in literary texts. Kucich’s discussion of class is emblematic of the study of British literature, where texts like Pamela Fox’s Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel 1890-1945 (1994) cover class as an overtly English tradition. As bell hooks’ Where We Stand: Class Matters (2000) asserts, these areas of focus need renewed pursuit within American literature and culture.13

By envisioning hobohemian practice as a class-performative act rather than just a kind of creative slumming,14 I locate how the hobo narrative allocates power from the cultural mythos surrounding the American hobo. In this way, hobohemian practice is related to what literary critic Eric Schocket calls the "class transvestite": a British or American writer who embodies the position of the poor or working class for their ethnographic writing at the turn of the century (119). Schocket specifically understand the class transvestite through sociological tramps like Josiah Flynt, and argues that middle-class masculinity requires a connection to the underclass for authenticity within writing pursuits. Despite hobohemian practice instituting a similar relationship with the underclass in the hobo narrative, the ethnographic

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13 Traditionally a British literary tradition, American versions of what Peter Hitchcock calls “slumming” are less theorized. Unlike nineteenth-century Victorian literary interests in the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the underclass, London’s investments in working-class identity serve to present a highly American version that challenges urban slumming by invoking the laboring of the Western frontier in authors like Mark Twain or Walt Whitman and guiding them into the twentieth-century. 

14 As a kind of class performativity, Peter Hitchcock argues that class-passing functions through working-class identity “represented” as metaphor, or reduced to a stock set of images or practices (ill-formed sentences, grubby clothing, squalid living conditions, etc.)” (“Passing” 5). For Hitchcock, this results in the working-class standing in for “forms of transformation” or “stylistic invention” much as I have traced in the hobo narrative (“Passing” 5).
context of Schocket’s class transvestitism limits my interest in the hobo’s symbolic poverty and countercultural affiliations and how they become cultural institutions. Where hobohemian practice stresses a fluid ability to utilize and perform the white, masculine resiliency of working-class representations like the hobo into the mid-century, Schocket’s class transvestites institute only a "sociological gaze" to pursue the knowledge of authentic human relations (119). Therefore, despite being invested in similar areas, my concept of hobohemian practice is distinctly different from class transvestitism because I envision it as a writerly technique motivated by twentieth-century concepts of constructed self-presentation for cultural control.

The impact of space on self-presentation and art become important to the literary marketplace, such as in Sinclair Lewis’ satire on Greenwich Village, “Hobohemia” (1917). I include Lewis’s short story because it is the first of its kind to designate the concept of hobohemia as a literary concern in the early-century American literary marketplace. In his story, Lewis presents Mr. Brown, an aspiring writer on an eastbound train to New York to seek a literary agent to put him “on the very latest styles in literature” (Lewis 115-116). In a meeting with his agent in the Village, Brown is introduced to hobohemia, which Lewis describes as a new class of man, the hobohemian: an artist who benefits from impoverished geographic locations and a bohemian lifestyle. The hobohemian is a member of the artistic population of the Village, a hierarchy topped by the “real Greenwich Villagers” or bohemian elite (Lewis 120). According to Lewis, the eager-to-be-seen hobohemians, or “society-slummers” share the same geographic space, but draw on the Village for
its stylization of poverty (120). This definition captures a network of tensions within American bohemianism, and differentiates the pretenses of elite artistry from the “disgustingly respectable” cultural production of society-slummers (Lewis 120). For Lewis, hobohemians are curious figures that sell their poverty for art, a predominant literary method I connect to London’s hobo-as-artist a decade earlier. But unlike the hobo-as-artist, Lewis’ hobohemians have evolved to satisfy not only material needs, but aesthetic desires.

Lewis’s contemporary, Greenwich Villager Floyd Dell also finds cultural appeal in the tensions between hobo tropes and bohemian philosophies. In his well known “Hallelujah, I’m A Bum!” (1925), Dell presents a hobo alternative to rags-to-riches narratives, placing protagonist Jasper Weed in the Village to identify “a kind of tramp he had never known before—the artist kind. These painters, poets, story-writers, were old friends in a new guise” (Dell “Bum” 142). Weed, who had pursued a hobo life until arriving in the Village, sets his sights on becoming a hobo-artist. Dell suggests that the “artist kind” of tramp possesses cultural power that allows him to make change in political realms while advancing the self through artistry. Weed’s non-traditional work in the Village institutes a direct challenge to twentieth century concepts of labor, eviscerating the pressures of the factory to present mobile opportunities for vagrants to become what London called “economic masters of civilization” through artistic ability. Dell—the left-wing cultural critic and sharp-tongued managing editor of The Masses—emphasizes that the concept of hobohemia situates the hobo as a commercially viable figure for literary treatment
and political subversion, offering a venue for his socialist views from the context of the Espionage Act of 1917.

The tramp-artist challenges the concept of *Intellectual Vagabondage* (1926), wherein Dell details the romantic inclination of bohemian impoverishment at the turn of the century. Literary hobo-critic Harry Brevda describes Dell’s ‘vagabondia’ as a specifically nineteenth-century state of mind with a romantic temperament, noting a distinct contrast from the twentieth-century’s physical locatedness and often realist literary style in hobo-hemia (115-121). In this way, Dell’s hobo-hemia highlights not only a shift in DePastino's working men through time, but also a shift in literary investments that grapple with the politics and aesthetics of new class values at the turn of the century. Though both start within the ‘vagabondia’ of the Village, Lewis and Dell locate the romanticism of working-class artistry and render the hobo-hemia through increasingly realist modes that account for economic pressures of a new century.

Within this context, the hobo narrative can be seen as a flexible and enigmatic literary production that often exists between the stylistic concerns of realism and naturalism in the early century. I see hobo-hemia practice as a method for incorporating the romantic fantasy of intellectual vagabondage, while manipulating the realist—and naturalist—techniques of the hobo narrative to communicate economic hardship. By highlighting a historical trajectory of literary style, the hobo narrative incorporates the style of the time and is able to redistribute its creative value for self-making in the long twentieth century. But since the hobo
narrative burgeons at the end of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, I want to unpack the stylistic tensions invoked by Lewis and Dell and locate the distinctly realist and naturalist tendencies of hobo-hemian practice in the long century.

To examine the realist pressures on the hobo narrative I draw on Erin Mercer’s *Repression and Realism in Post-War American Literature* (2011), which theorizes how social realism and “uncanny realism” are characteristic modes of twentieth-century American literature. Mercer’s focus on the postwar practice of “uncanny realism” examines the ways literature constructs “a semblance of recognizable reality...but...necessarily render[s] this fictional reality strange” (31). Uncanny realism offers a perspective on the genre of the hobo narrative as actively staging the material characteristics of historical trauma from within the strange cultural fictions that circulate in the marketplace. Mercer argues that uncanny realism is a consequence of American writers overlooking the trauma of World War II, moving instead headfast into an era of Prosperity and promoting consumerist practices. I extend the contexts of her definition to contend that a similar haunting effect can be seen in the realist period from the Civil War into World War I. This lets uncanny realism engage with not only the Tramp Army, but also the Industrial Army and Bonus Army which inform the hobo narrative as historical mobilizations of men who demand to be employed and/or recognized for work in strange and strained economic times punctuated by war.
Mercer’s attentiveness to realism from the nineteenth century onward designates significant pressures on the hobo narrative. Mercer calls attention to the consequences of realist literature by acknowledging that mid-century literary representations become estranged from the material conditions from which they were born. This suggests that hobo narratives are an anxiety-ridden expression of bohemian creativity that overlook or recode the onerous material conditions of postwar dispossession and economic depression. In this way, the hobo narrative uses realist modes to express the class values of the nineteenth century, but also the necessarily “strange” state of the twentieth century that has heroized the hobo. In addition, Mercer argues that realist literature “reflects the reality we imagine is true, but...counters that vision with what we attempt to omit” (Mercer 191). Hobohemian practice, then, not only calls attention to the marginal working-class figure of the hobo, but also attempts to mask the privileges that representational control institutes within art. Writers like London omit their status in light of stressing the underclass focus of their hobo narratives. But, by default, this constructs a strange reality of strategic associations that lacks material foundations or historic contexts, emphasizing instead the circulation of cultural symbols.

These realist omissions are what Donald Pizer argues define the differentiation between realism and naturalism, which emphasize “the value of the ideal” as opposed to “the commonplace in experience” respectively (4). The pressures to idealize the real and explore the everyday or commonplace are commanded by similar impulses, but necessarily omit details—economic or
otherwise—through their rendering of literary style. The hobo narrative is caught between these stylistic pressures because figures like the hobo serve as both independent political revolutionary and common and dependent working-class representative. Like Mercer’s extension of realism into the postwar, Pizer defines realism and naturalism as having influenced the twentieth century after their times, primarily into the postwar, the era in which this dissertation is primarily invested. He claims that realism is “more readily reconcilable [...] to the postwar emphasis on the role of American literary expression in affirming democratic values” (Pizer 10). But he also identifies that naturalism appears in postwar literature to communicate “the existential theme of the need for a quest for meaning in the face of the inadequacy of social life and belief” (Pizer 13-14). This description highlights the integral naturalist impulse within the hobo narrative, combining both physical movement and alternative labor relations throughout the century. Since naturalism serves “the social and intellectual concerns” of each generation, it allows the “dramatiz[ation] of ‘hard times’ in America,” and encompasses both “economic decline” and “spiritual malaise” (Pizer 14). As elements of the hobo mystique, which lays claim to the economic pressures of masculine energies, Pizer’s attention to naturalism suggests an additional pressure onto the complex enterprise of the hobo narrative.

In addition, Mark Selzter’s work in naturalism also becomes an appropriate way to read the hobo narrative. In Bodies and Machines (1994), Seltzer argues that literary naturalism is caught between fascinations with nature and technology (3).
As a study that emphasizes the "rivalry between modes of production and modes of reproduction," Seltzer articulates the ways that I can read the hobo narrative as a result of mobility granted through transportation technology (3). Though Seltzer acknowledges that both realism and naturalism are interested in the "relays articulated between the life process and the machine process," he roots the self-making impulse of life writing as a naturalist concern of the "mass literature of boyhood, adolescence, and the making of men" in writers like Jack London (3; 4). By drawing on Seltzer, I envision the hobo narrative as a naturalist mode that self-makes through machinery, whether the boxcar on the railroad, or the typewriter on the writer's desk.

As an emblem of Seltzer's concept of bodies and machines, the typewriter allows for "practices of seeing, controlling, and managing" through "new technologies of writing" (4). The hobo narrative becomes a form that calls attention to verbal episodes of the hobo-as-artist, and expresses an artistic capacity to re-value class associations through the act of writing as it is advanced through machinery. In this way, hobohemian practice is necessarily about the act of composition. It is predicated by a naturalist tendency to expose the reality of working-class life, while simultaneously forging highly subjective explorations that emphasize self-reflexive authorial claims into (post)modernity. The hobo narrative should therefore be seen as an adaptable form, able to shift between literary modes, genres and periods to exemplify the resiliency of its hobohemian practitioners and their changing artistic expressions throughout the century. As a popular trope about
cultural construction, use of the tramp, hobo, migrant, or bum allow the hobo narrative continued visibility in twentieth-century American literature. But the construction of the visible hobo is founded on a complex network of class, race and gender, which requires interdisciplinary methodologies in addition to literary study.

**INTERDISCIPLINARY METHODOLOGIES: CLASS, RACE AND GENDER**

My study of the hobo narrative aims to identify how working-class identity is constructed as a popular appeal in the American cultural marketplace. For example, *The Road* can be seen celebrating hobo mobility and resilient masculine identity to construct a culturally valuable narrative trope. Thus, the hobo narrative provides flexibility to literary endeavors by allowing white, male writers to stage underclass representations for the sake of bourgeois assertions of cultural control. In this way, iterations of the hobo narrative are both an examination of the multiplicity of working-class identity in the forms of tramps, hobos, migrants, and bums. But at the same time, the hobo narrative actively appropriates these identities to perpetuate middle-class, white masculine domination within cultural institutions. In these ways, the hobo narrative is a complicated form wrought by ideological pressures of the frontier space as well as by laboring bodies, both of which stage productive affiliations based on class, race, and gender. To stress the symbolic value of working-class identity on American literary productions, I find it necessary to draw on interdisciplinary frameworks that can highlight these tensions. I locate the intersections of Working-Class Studies, American Studies and Masculinity Studies as
productive areas with which to examine the construction and cultural circulation of
the hobo narrative.

As a project that aims to highlight working-class identity in American
literature, I draw on the methodology of Working-Class Studies. This late-twentieth
century “cultural and curricular moment” excavates working-class literatures and
subjectivities attentive to the laboring of American identity (Zandy What We Hold
x). In Liberating Memory (1995), founding member Janet Zandy advocates for
scholars to show how “working-class identities are mobile, durable, and have
democratic use-value” in agential ways (xi-1). My study of the hobo narrative
highlights that working-class identity is put to democratic use value, while also
questioning the appropriative re-production of working-class identity. Working-
Class Studies allows me to underscore the ways that the hobo narrative is a cultural
production prone to sensationalization, but also a repository for an ‘authentic’
expression of working-class life. This suggests that the hobo narrative and texts like
The Road serve as significant but complicated sites for working-class literatures and
identities.

In pursuing the hobo narrative as a working-class literature, I also challenge
unidirectional theorizations of working-class expression that overlook the complex
techniques of literary production. For instance, I take particular issue with Zandy’s
theorization of circulation:

15 Zandy’s “The Making of American Working-Class Literature” (2008) and Nicholas Coles early essay
“Democratizing Literature: Issues in Teaching Working-Class Literature” (1986), offer definition for
what makes working-class literature identifiable against other types. Though largely unsettled by
definition, these articles suggest that working-class literature can best be summarized by the
commitment of working bodies to the resistance of dominant or dominating ideologies.
What is crucial to retrieving and producing working-class culture is the reciprocal and dialogic dimension of the process. [...] Working-class histories, stories, and images are not taken to be sold in the marketplace of ideas but rather claimed as a valuable inheritance. (emphasis original, Common xiv-xv)

Zandy’s assertion for productive study forecloses the sale of working-class culture. Yet, in her language is the implicit multi-dimensional commodity exchange of working-class identity and culture. Zandy’s interchangeable use the terms “retrieving” and “producing” indicates different forms of circulation. To retrieve is to enact a privileged social recuperation, while to produce is to do cultural and symbolic work that may include writing autobiography as much as satire. Drawing on London, for example, shows how impossible it is to tell whether he is retrieving or producing working-class identity. The Road’s focus is wholly about marginal working-class culture, but exists at some kind of methodological impasse in Zandy’s theorization. Therefore, though Zandy is interested in uncovering the innate value of working-class identity and culture, her theory favors of claiming over taking or selling. In my analysis of the hobo narrative, this amounts to an oversimplification, but serves to highlight my interests in the construction of working-class representation through the symbolic.

In this way, the hobo narrative challenges the parameters of Working-Class Studies by interrogating how the reciprocal and dialogic treatment of working-class culture becomes commodified in the literary marketplace. The hobo narrative symbolically presents working-class agency through social representations of histories, stories and images of the working class. Yet, it also reflects the potential for working-class exploitation in the appropriation of those histories, stories and
images, which collapse the social and material for pop cultural appeal. In this way, the hobo narrative serves to “examin[e] the double, even multiple, work of cultural production” while also “recogniz[ing] how working-class stories and subjectivities enter bourgeois institutions and become part of a larger intellectual conversation” (Zandy Common xiv). Again, Jack London takes part in both of these interpretive possibilities, ultimately representing the working class while simultaneously claiming it as symbol with a valuable inheritance for the marketplace of ideas. Therefore, Working-Class Studies helps my study be particularly attentive to working-class expression, but is a limited resource for explaining the bourgeois circulation of working-class identity. For this reason I also draw on the fields of American Studies and Masculinity Studies, which help trace how the symbolic trope of the hobo impacts and circulates within twentieth-century literature and culture.

The interdisciplinary field of American Studies benefits my analysis of the hobo narrative because it articulates the “lasting laboring of American culture” (Denning Front 483). I am particularly influenced by the work of Michael Denning, including The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century (1996) and Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America (1987), which assert complex intersections of class, gender and race in American culture. Through American Studies, Denning’s work exposes “a working-class imprint on fiction, film, music, education, and intellectual life” that helps to execute a more comprehensive analysis of the hobo narrative (Front 483). By tracing how the tramp, hobo, migrant, and bum are recalibrated and represented
throughout the century, I too address the circulation of working-class identity as a cultural fantasy upheld by white masculinity. Like Denning’s literary study of “ghetto pastorals” and “proletarian grotesques,” I locate an “aesthetic ideology” within the mass-cultural circulation of the hobo (Denning Front 117).16 In this context, the circulation of the hobo narrative exposes not only the hierarchical politics of popular culture, but also the ideological and identitarian crises that popular culture represents, critiques, and exposes.

Though the tramp and hobo are recognizable players in the cultural scene into the Depression, they are infrequently studied as serious figures that contribute to “working-class popular arts like jazz and country” (Denning Front 486). Thus, like the aims of Working-Class Studies, Denning’s work highlights how working-class representations enter bourgeois institutions as legitimate entities. This methodological conversation allows me to identify how the literary form of the hobo narrative takes marginal working-class identity and transforms it into “part of the established culture,” which includes “histories told in museums, concert halls, and universities” (Denning Front 486). I rely on American Studies to account for the greater articulation of American culture as constructed by symbolic and social institutions.

16 Denning’s “ghetto pastorals” is the “yolking of the slum and the shepherd, the Gangster and Christ in concrete” (Front 251). In many ways, hobohemian practice takes part in the same two-part tension Denning locates in naturalist literature, “always caught in this dialectic of degradation and elevation, the grotesque and the simple” (Front 251). “Proletarian grotesques,” on the other hand, describe a “revolutionary symbolism” in the literature of the 1930s (Front 118). Drawing on social realism, Denning describes a documentarian aesthetic as a response to modernism, expressing a “plebian appropriation of the avant-garde hostility to ‘art’” (Front 123). Though neither term approximates the socio-cultural movements I locate in the hobo narrative, they each articulate important contemporary contexts that influence the development of hobohemian practice.
Through American Studies I trace the influence of the hobo on American literature and culture, what Denning calls “a lingering plebian imprint on the American century” (Front 487). This highlights not only how the hobo narrative is informed by social conditions and knowledges, but examines these contexts within cultural generations of literary forms that range from early-century realism to late-century postmodernism. Therefore, rather than express commitment to an authenticated or historicized hobo based only on social definition, Denning and American Studies permits me to expose the hobo’s “afterlife, ...the ways that its inheritance is preserved, transmitted, and taken up by future social movements” (Front 487). The afterlife of the hobo, tramp, migrant, and bum highlights the historical, social and cultural transformations of material poverty in the twentieth century. This suggests that the hobo’s imprint on mid-to-late twentieth century literature informs the use of the hobo mystique to perpetuate a white, masculine fantasy of spatial mobility and strategic marginalization to the point that it becomes a “political unconscious in postmodern culture,” carrying ideological messages of white masculine citizenry and rebellion (Denning Front 487).

The countercultural connections of white masculinity and the hobo are profuse. As DePastino reports, on “the road, the term ‘white man’ was synonymous with ‘hobo’” (81). In order to read the hobo narrative as a dominant discourse of white masculinity, I draw on Masculinity Studies to evaluate ways the hobo narrative constructs, stabilizes, and asserts control through highly racialized and gendered narrative discourses. The “male and pale” figures of twentieth century
American literature find solace in the tramp, hobo, migrant and bum because he can stage class debates that reinforce the construction of a dominant status (Hapke 12). This need for status is marked by the work of Eric Lott and Marjorie Garber as anxiety, which symptomatically works to stabilize itself through the performance and presentation of gendered, racialized and classed identity to cultural for validation. In this way, the hobo narrative provides a central location for the examination of the symbolic construction of working-class identity, which communicates frontier-era ruggedness and marginality. This results in consolidated racial and gendered associations for white, male American writers who find cultural validation and cultural power through creative manipulations of social issues.

As a development of feminism, the field of Masculinity Studies provides a precise theoretical apparatus for examining the cultural construction of classed, white masculinity in American culture. As a self-perpetuating style of writing, the hobo narrative envisions static claims of white male status by mobilizing strategic class affiliations that institute cultural command. This results in white masculinity becoming what sociologist and gender theorist Beverly Skeggs calls a “valued (and normalized) form [...] of cultural capital” (Skeggs Formations 9). Though this normalization often renders masculinity illegible in conversations of gender, Masculinity Studies aims to remedy such oversights by highlighting the dynamic construction and strategic maintenance of masculinity. In doing so, Masculinity Studies often draws on queer theory’s discussions of performativity by theorists like Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam. For example, Halberstam’s study Female
Masculinity (1999) argues that the production of white, middle-class masculinity “tends to manifest as nonperformative” (238). Halberstam’s critical insight allows me to identify forms like the hobo narrative as locations for class-based performativity that perpetuate patriarchal distinctions from within dominant and authoritative positions. The tramp, hobo, migrant, and bum, in this case, provides white male writers a resilient though fantastic identity that draws on working-class affiliations to demonstrate hegemonic characteristics. However, these hegemonic characteristics exist within the realm of frontier-fantasy, and construct larger, ideologically driven models of masculinity that are both rebellious and violent to anything that threatens masculinities dominant status. By capitalizing on class performativity, the aims of the hobo narrative appear nonperformative and illegibly monolithic in a white, male middle-class body that circulates social fantasy for status gains.17

By examining the hobo narrative as a hegemonic masculine practice, I expose what gender theorist R.W. Connell identifies as institutionalized positions of privilege. The hobo narrative commits itself to hierarchical positions despite the hobo’s marginal working-class status. It permits hobo-as-artist configurations to exhibit resiliency allowing dominant masculinity few limits in ‘getting by.’ As Connell suggests, the hegemonic masculinity of white, heterosexist and middle-class

17 Halberstam argues that "[m]asculinity...becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body" (2). As a narrative ploy, the hobo narrative allows writers to claim working-class masculinity from a position of middle-class privilege. This means that the masculine gains are visible through working-class associations, but that the project itself maintains certain invisibility as a consolidated rhetoric of hegemonic masculinity.
masculinity can only gain dominance by drawing distinctions between masculinities that subordinate segments the American population. For instance, hobohemian practice in the hobo narrative requires working-class or underclass masculinity in order to secure creative possibility, allowing the projection of rugged individualism on the white male body. Therefore, Masculinity Studies allows me to examine masculinity as a form of cultural capital from which the hobo narrative constructs a dominating positionality throughout the twentieth century. My emphasis on the study of masculinity also provides a critical interrogation of the social and cultural practices that place masculinity as a valuable and alluring part of American culture. This accounts for the circulation of the hobo narrative as well as the hobo’s influence on mid-to-late century writers that recreate it.

SELLING POVERTY: A CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The twentieth-century debates that arise from the hobo narrative are those of cultural production and the culture industry at large. It is therefore not surprising that the authors of twentieth-century hobo narratives use California as a backdrop for their class-performative practices. California is the center of what American nature writer Mary Austin calls “rural bohemia,” marking an early twentieth-century shift in American bohemianism that is neither urban nor poor. Using Jack London as an exemplar, rural bohemians settle in California because it provides temperate weather and wide-open space unseen in Chicago’s Bughouse Square, New York City’s Greenwich Village, or even San Francisco after the 1906 fire (Austin
Austin’s description of California foregrounds that hoboherman practitioners rely on spatial freedom for class performativity, and simultaneously command a nostalgic geography of the closed frontier through the industrial workers of the mid-nineteenth century. These references to nation building and Western settlement combat the highly modern developments of the twentieth century, met with urban sprawl, suburbanization and the inner-city into the 1940s. The frontier mythos locates not only the laboring reality of modern life, but also reveals California as a fantasy of fame and fortune. In the twentieth century, California offers not only land and spatial expanse but becomes an epicenter for the culture industry to sell rags-to-riches promises to American audiences. The hobo narrative, like other popular twentieth-century genres such as film noir, use California to command highly-stylized class-critiques for mass audiences, as exemplified by the work of Michael Denning and George Lipsitz.

By suggesting the fantastic imaginary of the hobo mystique, the popular form of the hobo narrative—like film noir—takes part in both the cultural fantasy and the social stratifications that California is built upon. This space is rendered through nationalist ideologies of promise and progress, but also by alienation and dispossession. In this way, California—and in particular Los Angeles—exists as Mike Davis argues in *City of Quartz* (1990), as “[m]ental geographies [that] betray class prejudice” (Davis 375). The mental geography of California assists hoboherman practice in the construction of creative and individualized positions that use the symbolic import of the tramp, hobo, migrant, and bum to violate the pressures of
middle-class masculinity without losing vitality. By selling a hobo identity to the literary market, hobohemian practice allows white, male writers to claim a dominant status in twentieth-century competitions of masculinity that circulate frontier-laden associations in California. In the following chapters, California becomes the space that shores up the cultural appeal of the hobo, allowing the symbol to exist in part as Wild-West cowboy and as Hollywood production. This allows Jack London, John Steinbeck, Jack Kerouac, Hunter S. Thompson and Charles Bukowski to sell not only regional histories, but also the resilient travel-tales of men California-bound or California-settled.

In Chapter One, “Envisioning Mobility: John Steinbeck and the Gasoline Tramp” I examine the way Steinbeck recalibrates London’s conception of the hobo narrative through the technological advancement of the automobile. Steinbeck uses the hobo-figure of the Gasoline Tramp to expose the cultural and economic opportunities available to a passenger on the road. Committed to the symbolic effects of the open road and worker mobility, Steinbeck draws on the hobo mystique to mythologize the Joad’s migrant journey in The Grapes of Wrath (1939). But he also identifies his own status as a Gasoline Tramp in his autobiographical tale of a cross-country drive in Travels with Charley (1962). In doing so, Steinbeck tracks historical movement and cultural mobilities from the New Deal to the dawn of the

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18 The study of American literature and masculinity is exemplified by David Savran’s Taking it Like a Man (1998), Sally Robinson’s Marked Men (2000) and James Penner’s Pinks, Pansies and Punks (2010). Though offering range of foci in the construction of twentieth-century American masculinity, these texts collectively suggest that masculine assertions in literary enterprises serve a rhetorical purpose that strengthens the self, commands symbolic power in society, and resists emasculation or disempowerment by staging strategic—and often masochistic—visibilities.
Civil Rights movement. He advances a literary politics of working-class masculine whiteness that achieves cultural acclaim through mythologizing the American experience through working-class forms of mobility.

In Chapter Two: "Gray Flannel Suits and ‘Existentialist Costumes’: Jack Kerouac’s Hobohemian Self-Fashioning" I explore a mid-century fascination with the American hobo, who Kerouac claims in Lonesome Traveler (1960) has vanished. Unlike Grapes of Wrath’s critique of the hobo mystique, Kerouac's road travels romanticize working-class and nostalgic tramp, hobo, migrant, and bum associations to challenge the pressures of postwar prosperity and consumerist middle-class values. I read both On the Road (1957) and Big Sur (1962) as hobo narratives that claim working-class identity through the presentation of class-specific clothing. I argue that Kerouac's working-class appearances represent an option to literally self-fashion life on the road to combat mid-century ideals of prescriptive identity. I draw on Marjorie Garber’s social codes of clothing to articulate the practice of working-class drag, a playful, self-conscious and class-specific performance that classes the body for audience recognition. Kerouac's attention to the sartorial suggests that hobohemian practice not only employs, but also enacts fluid class representations that romanticize, reference and equate to the margins of the working-class from a previous era.
In Chapter Three: “The Cultural Work of Hunter S. Thompson’s Strange and Terrible Sagas,” I trace the hobo mystique through the practice of New Journalism, which draws on working-class appeals to secure cultural access and creative entrepreneurship through postwar and postmodern hobohemian practice. Thompson fetishizes the class politics of the early twentieth century to express command over a countercultural politics that has lost its political aptitude in the Vietnam era. In Hell’s Angels (1965), Thompson uses the privileges of cultural omnornvacity to construct a limited-autobiographical working persona that earns status through romanticizing historic working class culture while criminalizing the social deviance of the contemporary working class. This manipulation of the symbolic and cultural capital of class identity is highly individualized and self-serving, and becomes the grounds for exceptionalist critique in his most popular book, Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas (1971). Here, Thompson makes an anarchistic challenge to liberalist creative freedoms on the road in American literature, indicting authors like Kerouac or Steinbeck who rely on representing—and exploiting—the fantasy of the hobo mystique for a creative edge that merely maintains a mass-marketed status quo.

In Chapter Four: “Commodifying Skid Row: Selling Charles Bukowski and Henry Chinaski,” I argue that Bukowski’s masculine opportunism and purposeful

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19 Part of this chapter has been previously published as “Working Through Hunter S. Thompson’s Strange and Terrible Saga” in Persona Studies Journal, Vol.1, No. 2 (October 2015): 88-98, which falls under Creative Commons License 2.5 (CC BY-NC 2.5 AU). I consider this chapter a ‘Derivative form’ of my original ‘work’ to accommodate the larger scope of analysis for which it was originally intended. I have indicated the original work with citational footnotes that reference each full paragraph. In addition, I have changed all Australian spellings to maintain consistency throughout the dissertation. A full text of the license can be found in the Appendix.
commodification of a Skid Row persona offers a later-stage version of Thompson’s narrative reflexivity based on a working-class symbolic. Bukowski’s narrator Chinaski is a working-class man that fights the monotony of life by drinking, womanizing and gambling to secure his downward mobility. In *Ham on Rye* (1983), Bukowski’s depiction of a late-century home guard populated with bums does not prioritize the financial hardship of the era of Reaganomics, but rather privileges the income disparity of late-capitalist life by enacting a non-productive hobo-as-artist lifestyle. Yet, by capitalizing on the Skid Row identity that makes him famous, Chinaski exhibits anxiety over his impending upward mobility, which becomes the primary compositional concern of Bukowski’s novel *Hollywood* (1989). These self-conscious debates expose not only the privilege of hobohemian practice to ward off emasculating middle-class masculinity, but also the limitations of constructing virility and earning acclaim through the creative register of a semi-autobiographical working-class voice.

Finally, my conclusion “Cross-Country Drives: *Mad Men* and the Hobo Mystique of Don Draper/Dick Whitman” anticipates how the hobo mystique has articulated techniques for self-making and self-marketing in twenty-first century cultural productions by disputing the feigned classlessness of contemporary America. I examine the hobohemian practice of the critically acclaimed television show *Mad Men* (2007-2015) to offer that the self-consuming performance of one’s persona, both public and private, benefits from being both hobo and bohemian. Don Draper’s class performance as a Madison Avenue ad executive and his hobo-driven
born identity Dick Whitman provide Mad Men a class-performative volley of identity that is rooted in the nostalgia of the twentieth century hobo-as-artist. The class-duality of Draper/Whitman suggests not only that Mad Men's mid-century narrative relies on the hobo mystique to describe postwar masculinity, but draws on the hobo narrative continues to sell the appeal of a working-class identity to middle-class cable subscribers in the twenty-first century.

The concept of the hobohemian has resounding effects on the way that men construct authority as writers in the literary marketplace and as salesmen of American culture. The interdisciplinarity of Working-Class Studies, American Studies and Masculinity Studies allows me to pursue the circulation of the hobo narrative while critically examining the practitioners that benefit from its form. These white, male writers who employ hobohemian practice are often overlooked figures in literary study for various reasons, including their production of popular literature and notorious expressions of disreputable attitudes. But Kerouac, Thompson and Bukowski all maintain a significant and popular audience of new generations of readers who celebrate their construction of youthful rebellion and counterculturalism. Their inclusion alongside more canonical writers like London and Steinbeck helps to highlight not only the construction of a masculine literary politics, but the cultural appeal of that politics to popular audiences within twentieth and twenty-first century American literature and culture. I am invested in identifying how the hobo narrative permits authors, who are often overlooked or discredited, to use complex working-class associations to claim privileges of white
masculinity. In doing so, my study aims to recognize the ways in which the hobo narrative is a genre caught between the subcultural and the mass cultural, and uses the literary marketplace to participate in strategic capitalist disavowals, co-options and absorptions.

Since the active recalibration of the hobo narrative suggests a reworking of male dispossession rooted in displaced veterans or unemployed laboring bodies, the hobo represents a complex historical network of issues regarding not only class identity, but also identifications of race and gender in the American century. Thus, by drawing on the hobo narrative and hobo mystique, I present a historical trajectory of masculine anxiety within the culture industry, for which working-class appropriation establishes and/or proves men a visible and symbolic resiliency. This suggests that the hobo narrative and subsequent circulation of the hobo mystique offers a new perspective of working-class representation. In addition, it provides a detailed analysis of how white masculinity is constructed and mythologically celebrated in American literature throughout the twentieth century.
Chapter One: Envisioning Mobility: John Steinbeck and the Gasoline Tramp

As text that circulates the hobo mystique to large audiences, John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (1939) both remembers the hobo and redefines him as a migrant to define a new social context for the twentieth-century. When read through the lens of the hobo mystique, Steinbeck's work locates complex creative associations with the plight of the underclass in both realist and fantastic fashion. Like London's *The Road*, *Wrath* is a provocative frame for the study of the hobo narrative because it highlights itinerant working-class life in the figure of the migrant, who for the sake of argumentation is considered a special type of hobo within Anderson's definitions. Unlike London's tramping with Kelly's Army or hoboing with roadkids, *Wrath* renders working-class identity through fictionalized second-hand information from labor organizers like Tom Collins, to whom the novel is dedicated.20 Robert Demott, editor of Steinbeck's journal *Working Days* (1989), claims that Steinbeck's composition of *Wrath* went so far as “incorporating... ‘great globs’ of information” from Collins' resettlement administration reports, initiating the valuable experience of migration without needing to leave his writing desk (xxviii). As a strategic hoboherian practitioner, Steinbeck marks a shift in the hobo narrative by finding purchase in the performance of class position for fiction as much as for creative life. Notably, during Steinbeck’s composition of *Wrath* he presents himself as both a “shabby” “laborer” in Los Gatos, and a “radical bohemian” that hosts Charlie

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20 Tom Collins was a settlement administrator for the Weedpatch Camp in California known for its “Okie” population during the Dust Bowl. Steinbeck traveled with Collins to visit the migrant camps and talk with families. Steinbeck also had access to the reports that Collins wrote for submission to the government (Demott xxvii-iii).
Chaplin\textsuperscript{21} and other celebrities in his large Monte Sereno home (Demott xv).

Steinbeck’s novel is rife with hobohemian tensions that find American writers struggling to represent working-class plight or poverty from a privileged bohemian position. This positionality impacts the value of representation, and often grants authorial control and stability of the self by exposing the class volatility of the time.

While London’s naturalist texts assert the ability to survive on the road by channeling hobo mobility or migrancy for improvisational creative possibility, Steinbeck’s social realism redefines the popular value of the hobo narrative and renders it an epic American tragedy rooted in the economic tensions of the Depression and the Dust Bowl. Like the nineteenth-century depression that set forward Coxey’s Industrial Army, the Stock Market Crash of October 1929 issued social disintegration onto the Thirties, including the failure of banks and record-high levels of unemployment. These social ills challenged America’s understanding of class status and obliterated the concept of financial security. After the Crash many Americans underwent a riches-to-rags trajectory that left the country questioning the nature of their position in a class hierarchy that perpetuated the now-impossible ideological pressures of progress and productivity. These contexts inform the Bonus Army of World War I veterans who march on Washington in 1932 demanding cash payment for their service. Finding themselves dispossessed like both the Tramp Army of the Civil War and the Industrial Army at the turn of the century, the socio-

\textsuperscript{21} Charlie Chaplin, discussed further in Chapter two, famously performed as a tramp in his films in the early century, and is thus representative of more than just Hollywood networking at the Steinbeck residence. Chaplin’s own interest in the tramp/hobo/bum transformation as creative enterprise can be seen not only in his stage performances, but also his association with former hobo Jim Tully. Tully’s autobiography \textit{Beggars of Life} (1924) is dedicated to Chaplin, “A Mighty Vagabond.”
economic condition of the Depression era forges integral connections to the tramp, hobo, migrant and bum’s visible mobility and communicates the political and cultural importance of the laboring male body.

A similar destabilization of socio-economic life in America occurred with the Dust Bowl, or the Dirty Thirties. This period of drought and poor soil conservation overlapped the Great Depression, black blizzards of dirt bringing additional hardship to rural and mid-western agricultural areas. Rendering the land useless, Dust Bowl migrants left the mid-west in search of work in California, an agricultural hub of self-making possibility in the American landscape. California, however, was already under strain by the Depression. The flood of new hopeful-laborers onto an already limited market resulted in further economic strain, excessive homelessness and exploitative labor practices throughout the west coast. As a symbol of economic hardship and homelessness, the hobo presents a central focus for the epic hardship of the time, analogous to new populations searching for work during the Depression. Homeless and economically destitute, the migrant allows Steinbeck to mobilize the ideological fantasy of America’s geography, instituting the literary potential of survival on America’s roads.

Yet, in doing so, Steinbeck draws on the migrant worker of the Dust Bowl in a way that stages a new era of the hobo in the Gasoline Tramp. Mark Wyman defines the Gasoline Tramp as an early-twentieth century worker within western agricultural communities. More than other hobo types, the Gasoline Tramp exhibits a privileged mobility through the use of the automobile. Despite the forced
migrations of destitute agricultural communities, Steinbeck's treatment of the mobile migrant renders poverty into a literary trope that issues national fortitude, familial bonds and subversive politics. Whereas the hobo of previous generations rode illegally in boxcars, the Gasoline Tramp gains cultural and economic access as an automotive passenger across the landscape of America. Steinbeck's use of the Gasoline Tramp reasserts the romantic potential for hard-working and hard-earned upward mobility in an era that had lost everything. By incorporating a new form of itinerancy in the twentieth-century Depression era, Steinbeck stages white, male American resiliency through technological advancements in economic crisis. Steinbeck's *Wrath* not only issues a new form of hobo narrative that draws on popular and populist appeals in a new economic world, but pin-points the construction of self-making hope in the hobo mystique. These highly recognizable and visible forms include not only Steinbeck's novel, but incorporate the near-simultaneous release of John Ford's film *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) to substantiate the iconic popularization of working-class identity and spatial mobility in California.

The Joad's westward movement from Oklahoma to California on Route 66 exhibits the importance of becoming passengers on the road. Steinbeck connects the family at the center of *Wrath* to a long-history of pioneers, tramping travelers or hobo rail riders who arrive at the scene of the Depression era as migratory Gasoline Tramps in search of work and deliverance. By dramatizing the automotive “path of a people in flight... [that] come into 66 from the tributary side roads, from the wagon tracks and the rutted country roads,” Steinbeck provides visibility to the figures that
traverse “the mother road, the road of flight” (Wrath 160). By calling upon earlier stages of westward mobility, Steinbeck stages Route 66 as a new paragon of American progress. The road becomes a place where individuals from diverse starting points throughout history meet and face the complex political and economic state of the twentieth century. In doing so, Steinbeck promotes California as collective promise that not only advances a new-century form of manifest destiny, but echoes a hobo mystique that celebrates white, male travel on the road.

Steinbeck’s descriptions of travel draws on the popular iconography of turn-of-the-century tramps and hobos, and symbolically renders them agents in a new era, depicting roads populated by migrants and Gasoline Tramps in automobiles, and “ain’t none of ‘em goin’ east” (Wrath 235-6).

Steinbeck centralizes the cultural mythos of the hobo alongside the itinerant labor that bolsters the twentieth-century economy. Like the railroad in the nineteenth century, the United States has been transformed by changing technologies that change the labor of men. In the case of the Gasoline Tramp, the technology of the automobile has been largely beneficial, though Wrath highlights its negative consequences on the migratory individual. Steinbeck’s novel renders traditional notions of the hobo narrative, which depicts a mobile, itinerant laborer from job to job and place to place, into a widely circulated and sellable genre by incorporating the automobile. Steinbeck redefines the hobo mystique by instituting the Gasoline Tramp, a working-class figure that can gain cultural access from the technological advancement of the automobile. This, in turn, emphasizes the
importance of being a mobile passenger on the road, whether as a traveling tramp, hobo or in the case of *Wrath*, as a migrant. This nuance to the hobo narrative uses the symbolic representation of the working class to appeal to popular and populist cultural consumption. It also predicates Steinbeck’s mid-century travelogue *Travels With Charley* (1962), where the Gasoline Tramp is used to reissue the political state of the hobo narrative. *Charley* expresses how Steinbeck’s authorial construction requires working-class affiliations to appeal to a mid-twentieth century literary marketplace.

**The Gasoline Tramp as Passenger**

Steinbeck links the physical mobility of working people to the important technological advancement of the automobile in the jalopy. The jalopy is “[o]ne of them cut-down cars full a stoves an’ pans an’ mattresses an’ kids an’ chickens. Goin’ west, you know” (*Wrath* 215). The jalopy is a mobile home that has undergone transformation that houses not only the children of a family, but also the quotidian necessities of sleeping and eating. In this context, Steinbeck’s jalopy becomes a mobile symbol of homelessness for the twentieth century. Unlike the leisurely status symbol of the automobile that enters the American scene alongside suburbanization, the jalopy necessarily combines economic hardship and the Gasoline Tramp’s western travel for work. Like the hobo whose itinerant nature is marked by alternating between work and destitution in boxcars and jungle camps, the jalopy provides Dust Bowl migrants both a home and mobility, focusing the
pressures of labor under modern capitalism that sends individuals on the road to struggle for subsistence. In this way, *Wrath* is defined as much by its mode of transportation as the people it transports. Steinbeck uses these relationships to highlight the kind of agency available to the Joads based on the jalopy:

The family met at the most important place, near the truck. The house was dead, and the fields were dead; but this truck was the active thing, the living principle. The ancient Hudson, with bent and scarred radiator screen, with grease in dusty globules at the worn edge of every moving part, with hub caps gone and caps of red dust in their places—this was the new hearth, the living center of the family; half passenger car and half truck, high-sided and clumsy. (*Wrath* 135-6)

The jalopy possesses the ability to unify the Joad family as interpellated subjects under capitalism. As a combination of car and truck, the jalopy is a hybrid technological advancement that can carry, transport and deliver the family to better land and opportunity in California. Described as an “active thing,” the animated machinery of the jalopy enables the Joads to become passengers who can participate in the “living principle” of the road, leaving the “dead” land behind. In motion on the road, the Joads are granted hopeful new opportunities celebrated by the hobo mystique. The jalopy predicates Steinbeck’s new hobo narrative, and constructs the Joads as Gasoline Tramps. By considering the Joads as Gasoline Tramps as well as Dust Bowl migrants, I offer an intervention into Steinbeck’s work that questions the active and agential possibility of a mobile passenger on the road. By exploring the

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22 DePastino argues that the hobo figure—whether depicted as the tramp, bum or gasoline tramp, served as “victim[ ] and agent[ ] of the new economic system,” as well as “convenient screens onto which middle-class Americans projected their insecurities, anxieties, and fantasies about urban industrial life” (4). I use DePastino’s explanation to emphasize how Steinbeck’s work serves to expand the potential of the tramp figure while also indicating the socio-economic pressures that contextualize him.
privileged discourse that surrounds the selective movement of the tramp and hobo, I locate ways the dispossessed state of the Dust Bowl migrant and the Gasoline Tramp map the transformation of the hobo narrative as not only circulating the hobo mystique, but challenging American ideologies of masculine-progress in the west.

My interest in the passenger draws from Non-Representational Theory: Space | Politics | Affect (2008), wherein Social Geographer and spatial theorist Nigel Thrift critiques the historical determinism of Michel De Certeau’s The Practice of Everyday Life (1984). In his chapter “Driving in the City,” Thrift addresses a hundred-years of “automobility” in order to “valu[e] the fugitive practices that exist on the margins of the known” (i). In doing so, Thrift revises De Certeau’s popular theory of walking in the city with the highly visible and ubiquitous automobile. Thrift makes clear that possessive technologies like the automobile provide access to geographic and social space and render new subjectivities. Thrift’s “system of automobility” marks these expressions of subjectivity in the driver and the passenger, arguing that there are “embodied practices of driving and ‘passengering’” (Thrift 80). The productive and agential possibility of passengering issues a discourse of control and access that connects to my exploration of the hobo narrative. Specifically, I argue that since the Gasoline Tramp is a figure of exceptional mobility, his geographic access allows Steinbeck to revise the hobo mystique and install new, subjective possibilities.
While the act of driving is easily grafted onto discussions of access and mobility, the same claims of passengering require more thoughtful examination. Passengering is often considered a passive position, one that rides through or passes alongside with little agency in relation to the active driver. Passengering can be a voluntary transportive means for work or leisure, but also a dangerously involuntary marker of enslavement or genocide. Thrift’s interpretation of passengering asserts volition like De Certeau’s ‘fugitive practices’ of walking, but rather than exploring unexpected paths, institutes visible and known positions. Thrift’s passengering is a subversive activity that does not need to be hidden. This visibility permits passengering to signal not only subjective “new capacities” but also “new modes of control” through automobility (88).

As a working-class passenger, the Gasoline Tramp serves as an emblem and icon wherein automobility attains new controls over complex socio-economic situations. Steinbeck advances the automobility of the hobo mystique by incorporating not only the jalopy, but also a new working-class subject in the migratory Gasoline Tramp. As an automotive passenger, the Gasoline Tramp embodies the machinery of the automobile as an extension of his own capacity, an active and agential claim that contrasts with Wrath’s destructive machinery of over-farming or bank repossession. Rather than be subordinated by Fordist forces of early century mass production and capitalist aspiration, the Gasoline Tramp
manipulates his ‘fugitive’ social position through mobile subjectivities in the automobile, allowing him to increase his chances for economic gain.23

Evaluation of the Gasoline Tramp’s impact on Wrath signals the increasing mobility of the hobo and that new forms of hobo subjectivity are articulated through legitimated passenger positions, not illegal boxcar rides.24 I consider the Gasoline Tramp a hobo-like passenger to highlight a productive and nationalist reworking of the hobo narrative that can garner citizen-like social status and a frontiering sense of independence. Rather than endure the bodily risk or danger of rail riding, the Gasoline Tramp uses his mobility to garner an advantage among the itinerant working-class. This legitimated position is provocative because it suggests that the hobo narrative has also been granted status through its cultural valuation. Therefore, Steinbeck’s incorporation of the Gasoline Tramp can be seen as a method for gaining symbolic command over socio-political status via the hobo mystique.

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23 The automobile is often a site for fugitive practice in popular culture. This potential is perhaps best represented decades later by Wayne Kemp’s song “One Piece At A Time,” (1976) made famous in a recording by Johnny Cash. In the song, a worker in an automotive factory steals one piece off the assembly line each day and creates his own car for free, allowing for a literally free form of mobility.

24 Like John Lennon’s early hobo scholarship “Interrogating American Subculture: The Hobo Figure and Negotiations of Invisibility” (2005), I find productivity in the boxcar rider, and allocate the hobo a trespassing passenger that inhabits the “invisible” space of the boxcar as a lawless and limitless subject. Yet, by mapping the hobo’s transition to the Gasoline Tramp, the invisible and lawless space of the boxcar no longer exists, and results in a redeployment of hobo tropes in an era of new modes of transportation. This challenges De Certeau’s limited and passive train passenger, “placed there like a piece of printer’s type on a page arranged in military order” (111). Lennon’s assertion of productive trespassing assumes that unticketed status on the train provides a distinct violation of the order De Certeau indicates, while Thrift’s visible passengers construct an alternative subjectivity that bypasses authorization.
CRITICAL ROADS INTO WRATH:

The concept of the passenger also intervenes in Steinbeck’s bifurcated body of scholarly critique. As Peter Lisca’s *Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism* (1972/1997) reflects, *Wrath* garners critical attention in one of two ways, through the “social” or the “creative.” Those who study *Wrath* ultimately focus on either the political representation of historical labor movements, or the biblical and/or mythological symbolic construction of the texts. In essence, these two critical camps attempt to compartmentalize an epic like *Wrath* to conduct manageable readings. But the separation between the politics of social realism and the creative symbolic is a problematic practice, and one that tends to limit the reading of the hobo narrative. My introduction of the hobo-passenger in the Gasoline Tramp provides a focus that bridges American mythography and the socio-economic climate of *Wrath’s* time. By drawing on social plight of the passenger in the new era of the Gasoline Tramp, Steinbeck deploys a hobo narrative that capitalizes on the cultural unconscious of the hobo mystique. But this circulation of the hobo mystique also denotes the pressures of homelessness over time, ranging from the tramp to the hobo to the migratory Gasoline Tramp.

Steinbeck's work asserts abundant creative enterprise in a period defined by economic scarcity, a compositional focus that equates to the pressures of hobohemian practice. The social concern over Steinbeck’s symbolic representation become central to the novel’s reception. Specifically, the Gasoline Tramp refines readings of the “Okie exodus,” something Michael Denning argues is “taken as an
emblem of depression-era populism” when it serves only as “one part of the artistic and social formation” of the time (Front 259). Denning’s “Grapes of Wrath: ‘The Art and Science of Migratin’” argues that Steinbeck’s novel rose to “national attention” because it features the strategic treatment of “white Protestant ‘plain people’” (Denning 259; 267). Denning’s conception of Steinbeck’s literary aims on the road correlates to the hobo’s iconic white, male identity in the hobo mystique. In doing so, Steinbeck constructs what Denning argues is a “cultural campaign,” that aims to “inform and engage an audience and to memorialize the events as a mythic narrative” (Front 263). Denning’s perspective highlights that practices like the hobo narrative construct one part of Wrath’s mythic scope: the appeal of the hobo mystique as a substantial part of American political ideology. Thus, examining Steinbeck’s use of the Gasoline Tramp lets me trace the circulation of the hobo narrative and highlight the significant advancements of subjectivity allowed by passengering in an era of automobility.

**THE PROLETARIAN PASSENGER**

Wrath opens in a wide-panoramic description of the Dust Bowl impacting farmers in Oklahoma to provide the historical transformation of the land over time. This is juxtaposed with the introduction of Tom Joad (unnamed in the beginning), who has been separated from the land while serving time for murder in McAlester State Penitentiary, and recently released on parole. Eager to get to his family farm but exhausted from walking, Tom aspires to become a passenger as a hitchhiker,
and waits in a parking lot of large trucks observing the bustle of a nearby restaurant. When Tom approaches a mode of transportation, the “huge red transport truck” he is in desperate need of, its appearance becomes a symbol of progress and opportunity (Steinbeck *Wrath* 8). As a literal vehicle of mobility, Steinbeck pans over the machinery, describing: “[t]he vertical exhaust pipe muttered softly, and an almost invisible haze of steelblue smoke hovered over its end. It was a new truck, shining red, and in twelve-inch letters on its sides—OKLAHOMA CITY TRANSPORT COMPANY” (Steinbeck *Wrath* 8). The truck is coded as upwardly mobile, its verticity expressed in not only the exhaust pipe but also the perfect lettering naming the company. The novelty of the new, shining truck becomes a beacon of hope, offering a passengering opportunity to Tom who will wield its technology to “transport” him to the Joad farm in the front-seated cab, not alongside the freight of commodity goods like a fugitive.

The prohibitory sticker in the windshield of the truck that reads “No Riders” impacts Tom’s passengering hope. This regulatory message reveals a strict policy in writing, making passengers a legal transgression. The sticker asserts company practice and policy, and aims to foreclose personal inclination by the driver. This situates Tom as a criminal passenger with multi-directional capacities. This status evokes the hobo, who on the rail is able to catch a ride and transgress social limitations. Yet rather than trespass in a boxcar, Tom views himself as a potential passenger and ignores the sticker while waiting for the driver (Steinbeck *Wrath* 8-9). Asserting what Thrift calls a new mode of control, Tom asserts power as a
potential passenger even though uninvited and unwanted. Tom’s control gains definition with the driver’s approach, his very presence making Tom a passenger. Steinbeck deftly uses Tom’s initial passengering scene to set up the ethos of the hobo and the advent of the Gasoline Tramp to express interest in the tensions between the freedom of the road and the strict regulation of the workingman:

The hitch-hiker stood up and looked across through the windows. “Could ya give me a lift, mister?”

The driver looked quickly back at the restaurant for a second. “Didn’t you see the No Riders sticker on the winshield”

“Sure—I seen it. But sometimes a guy’ll be a good guy even if some rich bastard makes him carry a sticker.”

The driver, getting slowly into the truck, considered the parts of the answer. If he refused now, not only was he not a good guy, but he was forced to carry a sticker, was not allowed to have company. If he took in the hitch-hiker he was automatically a good guy and also he was not one whom any rich bastard could kick around. He knew he was being trapped, but he couldn’t see a way out. And he wanted to be a good guy. He glanced again at the restaurant. “Scrunch down on the running board till we get around the bend,” he said. (Steinbeck Wrath 11)

This often-overlooked moment initiates the role of the hobo-passenger within the novel. By hitchhiking, Tom evokes the hobo mystique, staging a conversation that exposes binaristic tensions to implicate the economic moment: the rich and poor, the criminal and citizen, the good and bad, the urban and rural, the working and middle class, the hobo and bohemian, and most importantly, the driver and passenger. By emphasizing the lack of agency the driver possesses, Tom’s passenger position establishes control of the situation and earns entry onto the truck. Steinbeck’s use of the hobo mystique places Tom in the position of a new kind of hobo known as a Gasoline Tramp. Wrath overtly configures Tom as a hobo, the highway directly underfoot on the running board, similar to the risk of “sitting in the
corner of the open boxcar” and exposed to the elements (Lennon “Subculture” 28).

But when the driver turns the corner, both literally and figuratively, Tom enters the truck as a passenger and his evocation of the lawless hobo is redistributed to a new hobo status. The new positionality afforded by becoming a passenger and Gasoline Tramp allows Tom to take on an authorized role and exhibit mobility without bodily risk, challenging only the career path of the policy-violating driver.

Now a passenger, Tom becomes a defining presence in the cab of the truck. He embodies the possessive technologies of passengering leaving the working driver anxious. The driver is particularly attentive to the tension between Tom’s lawful and permitted transgression into the truck and his new clothes issued upon prison release, instituting a criminal identity:

The hitch-hiker stood up, eased the door open, and slipped into the seat. The driver looked over at him, slitting his eyes, and he chewed as though thoughts and impressions were being sorted and arranged by his jaws before they were finally filed away in his brain. His eyes began at the new cap, moved down the new clothes to the new shoes. (Steinbeck Wrath 12)

Tom’s duality as trespassing hobo and authorized Gasoline Tramp asserts an active resistance against the ordering gaze of the driver. Evasive but honest, Tom’s conversation with the driver institutes control over the distribution of information in the truck. As John Lennon explains, “[a]s passengers [...] we play the passive role. When there is a break or rupture in the order in this ‘social contract,’ we realize the amount we depend on others to follow their prescribed roles” (“Subculture” 24). As a passenger, Tom refuses to play the passive or prescribed role, leaving the driver unable to command control of the truck but for its mechanical functions. Just as Tom
becomes the passenger upon the arrival of the driver in the parking lot, the passenger in the cab of the truck reissues the driver’s expectation of agency within the truck. The driver, as an active force that commands the truck, takes on the air of a dominant position within the expected binary configured by Tom’s immobile, hobo desperation. But, as a hobo-passenger, Tom asserts command over not only the driver’s job security, but the interpersonal conversation in the truck that grasps for Tom’s ambiguous identity.

In the “tone of a subtle examination,” the driver constantly questions Tom’s own employment status, including the state of the Joad farm for which he expresses surprise that “[Tom’s old man] ain’t been dusted out and he ain’t been tractored out” (Steinbeck *Wrath* 12). By implying the likelihood of agricultural devastation of Tom’s family farm, the driver declares an elevated status: free to circulate information in contrast to Tom’s prison seclusion and confinement. The driver’s discussion the Joad farm is not a friendly conversation of common ground regarding work, but an assertion of the driver’s distinct employed status built upon geographic and economic mobility. The employed driver, who knows the conditions of the time instituted in the opening passages of *Wrath*, suggests the proletarianization of Tom Joad and the Okie migration by asserting a hierarchy of employment.25 In doing so, the driver attempts to reinstitute an authoritative and active status of socio-economic control over the hitchhiking passenger.

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25 In “Agriculture and Working Class Political Culture: A Lesson from *The Grapes of Wrath*” (2007), Paul Thompson argues “the Joads have become proletarians when they arrive in California, even if they were not already in Oklahoma” (Thompson 174). What Thompson points out is suggestive of Steinbeck’s interest in the new type of worker, here represented by the Joads who become iconic representatives of the proletarianization of whiteness through the formation of the Gasoline Tramp.
The driver’s threatened response continues when he not only stresses his employment, but his opportunity to class climb. The driver explains, “Why, I’m thinkin’ of takin’ one of them correspondence school courses. Mechanical engineering. It’s easy. [...] Then I won’t drive no truck. Then I’ll tell other guys to drive trucks” (Steinbeck Wrath 16). By visualizing his economic ascent against an inevitably destitute farmer like Tom, the driver marks his territory as upwardly mobile, and issues himself an elite status that can move into the management middle-class. This, by default, orders Tom as a member of the underclass, his industry devastated by dusty land and foreclosed loans. Though the driver aims to produce distinction between men of different classes, the driver and the passenger are mutually constituted initiating a hoboheian competition of classed masculinity. This tension institutes the kind of differences that the Gasoline Tramp brings to the hobo narrative. Specifically, Steinbeck’s draw on the hobo mystique foregrounds that the driver is a subordinated figure that is overruled by social classifications and capitalist dedication. Meanwhile, Tom’s hitchhiking passenger position relays the promise of a transgressive agency made emblematic and iconic in the Gasoline Tramp. Tom violates the company rule by gaining authorized entry into the truck. In doing so, he proves that the passenger has the ability to reorder space from a mobile position on the road.

Steinbeck’s strategic revision of the hobo narrative finds opportunity embodied by the Gasoline Tramp. This new passenger figure is able to command control and gain mobility by disrupting the agential binaries of driver and
passenger. Despite a passenger status, Tom’s internal command of the truck evades any dependence on the driver’s truck-based mobility. Instead, Tom’s hobo-hemian position gains possession of the cab by enacting the destitution of the hobo, while claiming the driver’s aspiring middle-class controls.

EMBODIED PASSENGERS

Nigel Thrift’s theory of the passenger foregrounds embodiment as a primary method of constructing new subjectivity. As Tom’s body trespasses the space of the cab, his productive automobility arrives at the farm. His youthful white male body is put in contrast with Grampa Joad’s reluctance to leave the land as a passenger in the jalopy. Unlike Tom’s careful capitalization on passenger transgressions, Grampa’s passenger position is forced and has deadly consequences. Grampa’s body is unable to take on the productive challenge of the Gasoline Tramp like Tom. This leaves the multi-generational family’s trip a series of episodes that situate who can and cannot use the entitlements of a passenger status.

Grampa’s reluctance to head out on the road to California is clearly indicated by his demand to stay on the land despite the bank’s threats to forcibly remove him by tractor. Recognizing the older generation’s connection to the land, Tom questions if leaving the land is the right choice: "Grampa killed Indians, Pa killed snakes for the land. [...] Maybe we got to fight to keep our land, like Pa and Grampa did" (Steinbeck Wrath 45-6). Tom’s brief historical reference to the male settling of the land initiates his distinct difference from Pa and Grampa. Tom knows that being a passenger on
the road can serve to reorder the social status of the family and he convinces them to pack the jalopy. On the day of the Joad’s departure, Grampa is medicated and carefully loaded into the jalopy. As an unwilling passenger and migrant, Grampa represents the express violation of losing the land that possesses the family’s history. The forced removal of Grampa from the land marks the end of the Joad’s agricultural past and grants their entry into a new, highly proletarianized state. Grampa’s unwilling passengering onto the jalopy to California reorders the entirety of the family, offering them new but unclear positions on the road. Steinbeck describes their departure:

The light was sifting rapidly over the land. And the movement of the family stopped. They stood about, reluctant to make the first active move to go. They were afraid, now that the time had come—afraid in the same way Grampa was afraid. [...] The stars went out, few by few, toward the west. And still the family stood about like dream walkers, their eyes focused panoramically, seeing no detail, but the whole dawn, the whole land, the whole texture of the country at once. (Wrath 154)

The family’s desire for land-rootedness makes universal claims of settlement and American industrial development. As Grampa represents the past settlement of the physical terrain in a pastoral sense, the family’s departure from that terrain suggests a fearful future that turns them into “dream walkers” unable to recognize the details of the economic situation or their subordinated, exploited positions as mobile workers. Steinbeck calls attention to the mode of transportation, “walkers” able to see the land in full grand scale, while their inevitable passenger state on the jalopy will hurry the scenery in small scale. The lamentation over the land envisions Gasoline Tramps as following the hopes of Westward possibility in the land of milk
and honey. These, however, are stars that go out, “few by few,” indicating the dispossession of hard-working ‘plain people’ who must abandon their land for unsure and insecure futures on the road. With the tractors at their heels, the Joads take to the road and leave the farm behind, and Grampa’s presence becomes a stark reminder of their rooted past and the danger of being a passenger.

Grampa’s forced inclusion suggests the non-productive qualities of the migratory Gasoline Tramp, who in his automobility lacks an ability to connect to the land. As an elderly and unwilling passenger, Grampa’s near-immediate death on the road occurs when the family stops the first night and camps alongside another family, the Wilsons. Temporarily returned to the land for the night’s camp, Grampa’s health fails quickly and a “good quick stroke” kills him (Steinbeck Wrath 188). Steinbeck’s description of Grampa’s death undoes the pastoral panoramic image of the land and imposes the destruction of the land by the road:

> Life began to move again. The sun touched the horizon and flattened over it. And along the highway there came a huge line of freight trucks with red sides. They rumbled along, putting a little earthquake in the ground [...] The trucks never stopped; they thundered day and night and the ground shook under their heavy march. (Wrath 189)

By highlighting the interminable movement and cacophonous presence of vehicles over the land, Steinbeck asserts incompatibility between Grampa and his forced passenger status. Unlike Tom, who was able to manipulate mobility through the “freight trucks with red sides,” Grampa’s body cannot survive a passenger position. His tie to the land—now shaking with the thundering movement of cars and trucks—deems the road not as a route to a better life, but as a final un-resting place.
Anxious about the cost of burial and fear of being blamed for foul play, the Joads inter him themselves. Grampa’s burial scene constructs a distinct homage to the simplicity and manual labor of the farmland, but offers stark contrast to the destructive mechanical, earth-shaking vehicles ripping through the land nearby:

On the edge of the ring of firelight the men had gathered. For tools they had a shovel and a mattock. Pa marked out the ground—eight feet long and three feet wide. The work went on in relays. Pa chopped the earth with the mattock and then Uncle John shoveled it out. Al chopped and Tom shoveled, Noah chopped and Connie shoveled. And the hole drove down, for the work never diminished in speed. (Steinbeck *Wrath* 194)

Requiring the male, working bodies of the Joad family, Grampa’s interment intimates a brief return to the land-based roots with which he was defined.

Emphasizing the patriarchal role of Pa and Grampa settling the farm land, the male bodies of the Joad jalopy unsettle the land with Grampa’s body. The paternalistic symbolism of the men’s manual labor suggests a distinct shift in generational experience that has become separated from the land, recognizing that the land has ceased to provide order in the era of the Gasoline Tramp. By willingly becoming passengers, the young male Joads have given away their claim to the land. Migration provides them with hopeful economic opportunity, but also equates to an excessive instability for their lives and the life of the family.²⁶ In this way, the dead land of the farm in Oklahoma and the tremulous land of Grampa’s roadside death reflect the futility of male mobility in modern America. Steinbeck’s description of Grampa’s

²⁶ Steinbeck’s attentiveness to men’s ability to control their situation can be seen throughout the novel. An opening scene shows men conversing about what to do about the loss of their land while the women watch them: “The women knew it was all right, and the watching children knew it was all right. Women and children knew deep in themselves that no misfortune was too great to bear if their men were whole” (*Wrath* 7). Here, economic devastation is equated to the destruction of man, both of which can be seen taking a toll on the women and children.
burial emphasizes not only the absence of the women in the ritual, but the overt phallic nature of the mattock uprooting the barren land. Steinbeck’s depiction of Grampa as an impossible passenger advances a critique on the impotent progress of migration on the road, and the potential pains of a new century of perpetually mobile Gasoline Tramps.

Granma’s decline after Grampa’s death is not caused by disconnection with the land so much as the loss of her passenger-partner on the journey. “Granma, who had survived only because she was as mean as her husband,” gets sicker the closer the family gets to the promise land of California (Steinbeck Wrath 105). As a willing passenger, Granma is more resilient than her husband. Yet, her body struggles with her new position on the road, leaving her hallucinating on a mattress in the back of the jalopy. Granma’s loss of Grampa problematically constructs her as an invisible passenger, unseen by the family or the agricultural inspectors that stop and question the Joads. As an elderly female passenger, Granma’s position of invisibility substantiates the youthful male character of the Gasoline Tramp. Whereas ongoing movement stimulates a Gasoline Tramp like Tom, it is rendered detrimental for Granma, who attempts to regain her health in the back of the jalopy when it is not moving. When the jalopy is sent down the road by law enforcement who refuse the Joad’s camp, the motion reinstates Granma’s sickness. Denied a stationary position for recovery, Granma’s death goes unnoticed in the back of the jalopy for hours as
the truck plows through the desert landscape.\(^{27}\) Granma is entombed by automobility. Her passenger status on the road makes her invisible to both the family and law enforcement.

Able to survive as a passenger longer than her husband, Granma exhibits fortitude atop her mattress in the back of the truck just long enough to be delivered from the deadened land of her Oklahoma and into California. Granma’s passenger position is rewarded by Ma, another female passenger, who insists she “’get buried in a nice green place,’’ with “’[t]rees around’ an’ a nice place’” since “[s]he got to lay her head down in California” (Steinbeck \textit{Wrath} 311). Ma’s desire for the older-generation to survive long enough to see California’s fecund land institutes the generational divide of passengering promise. Granma’s death suggests that the Gasoline Tramp is necessarily a young man’s game, instituted by privileges of white masculinity. Ma’s treatment of Granma’s loss suggests that the elderly and female challenge the distribution of benefits to be gained from the passenger position. This can be seen in not only Grampa and Granma’s deaths, but also the death of Jim Casy, and particularly in the hardships endured by Rose of Sharon and her stillborn baby. These aged and gendered distinctions become central to the potentiality of passengering positions, something Steinbeck highlights in order to acknowledge the youthful male privilege of the hobo mystique from within the social hardship of migration.

\(^{27}\) Ma is aware that Granma has passed, but refuses to tell the family because she is fearful it will slow their journey. Ma’s emotional response to Granma’s passing is suggestive of additional incompatibilities between female figures and the Gasoline Tramp.
This generational and gendered distribution is clear in Tom’s response to Ma and Pa’s lamentation over Grampa and Granma’s loss. Tom’s response to them articulates that the perpetual movement of passengering subjectivity is incompatible with an older generation that is overly connected to the land:

They wouldn’t of saw nothin’ that’s here. Grampa would a been a-seein’ the Injuns an’ the prairie country when he was a young fella. An’ Granma would a remembered an’ seen the first home she lived in. They was too ol’. Who’s really seein’ it is Ruthie an’ Winfiel.’ (Steinbeck Wrath 313)

Tom’s assertion while driving his family of newly made passengers institutes a generational divide within the Gasoline Tramp. Potentially implicating his parents, too, Tom envisions the uncomfortable passengering of his parent’s generation against the youthful wild potentiality of the rootless mobility available to his younger siblings. Seeing his grandparents unable to divorce themselves from their early-history on the land and as reluctant migrants, Tom recognizes the benefit and privilege of being a young and mobile passenger, one who is not so much uprooted from the land but without definitive roots. This leaves Steinbeck’s inclusion of the Gasoline Tramp to indicate not only a socio-economic shift in the hobo mystique to incorporate the migrant, but to institute a generational shift in American culture that designates who can survive as a passenger and who cannot.

RECASTING PASSENGERS:

Tom’s insistence that the older generation could never really “see” California amalgamates the passenger as a cultural opportunity for young, white, male figures like the Gasoline Tramp. This almost-countercultural group of new hobo-
passengers is strengthened by technologies of mobility and can leave the land with little to no consequence. By redesigning what it means to be a migratory worker and a passenger, Steinbeck’s *Wrath* reorders the nostalgic draw of the hobo mystique that claims an itinerate past but sells an automobile future. Steinbeck’s emphasis echoes the hobo mystique and redistributes a frontier mythos that accounts for the modern developments in technology and economy in the 1930s. Part of this appeal is the incorporation of an American landscape littered with modes of transportation, both past and present from the wagon to the jalopy:

> Wrecks along the road, abandoned. Well, what happened to them? What happened to the folks in that car? [...] And here’s a story you can hardly believe, but it’s true, and it’s funny and it’s beautiful. There was a family of twelve and they were forced off the land. They had no car. They built a trailer out of junk and loaded it with their possessions. They pulled it to the side of 66 and waited. And pretty soon a sedan picked them up. Five of them rode in the sedan and seven on the trailer, and a dog on the trailer. They got to California in two jumps. (Steinbeck *Wrath* 165)

Exhibiting concerns over the wrecks as well as those who traveled in their transportive means, Steinbeck constructs a complex meta-story that reflects not only the epic mobility of the Gasoline Tramp Joads, but also offers that technology has changed the larger, cultural conception of travel. Twelve in number and forced off the land, Steinbeck’s reference widens the scope of the narrative epic, and makes the Joads a universal symbol of the Gasoline Tramp era. Though the Joads do not wait by the side of 66 for a sedan or travel in two legs, Steinbeck offers a close-approximation of the Joad’s migratory journey. This allows him to place them in every vehicle, traveling westward while fighting the tendency to be broken down, split up or separated.
Steinbeck’s relay of travel legs and separate rides draws on Ma’s concern with keeping the family together, claiming that as passengers “[a]ll we got is the family unbroke” (Wrath 231). As the Joad’s sole possession, the passengering unit that leaves the Oklahoma farm undergoes five subtractions, making the number twelve a representation of the whole family unit. This unit of twelve takes on mythic proportion near the end of the novel, when the Gasoline Tramp Joads settle in abandoned boxcars:

The boxcars, twelve of them, stood end to end on a little flat beside the stream. There were two rows of six each, the wheels removed. Up to the big sliding doors slatted planks ran for cat-walks. They made good houses, water-tight and draftless, room for twenty-four families, one family in each end of the car. No windows, but the wide doors stood open. (Steinbeck Wrath 558)

Though much of 1960s-era Steinbeck criticism would emphasize this passage’s biblical representation of the Apostles, I want to emphasize that these boxcars permit Steinbeck to make transparent his strategic manipulation of the hobo mystique. Moving backward from the jalopy of the Gasoline Tramp to the boxcar of the hobo, Steinbeck reorders the chronology of homelessness to attend to the severity of the era’s poverty. The abandoned boxcars intimate the familiarity of the hobo narrative while allowing the Joads to become new boxcar inhabitants as Gasoline Tramps. As the symbol of itinerant homelessness, the boxcar offers shelter to the Joads in Wrath. The boxcars, numbered twelve to correspond to the whole

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28 The deaths Grampa and Granma, eldest son Noah Joad’s departure, Connie’s abandonment of his pregnant wife, Rose of Sharon, and the death of Jim Casy disrupt Ma’s family unit.
unit, become rooted homes constructed by abandoned and non-mobile symbols of homeless mobility.

As a symbol of the hobo mystique, the boxcars represent the new challenges undertaken by displaced families and communities during the Dust Bowl. Though the boxcar has typically represented the potential for male flight, reflected by both Connie and Noah’s abandonment of the group, Steinbeck surprisingly includes the boxcars at the end of *Wrath* to suggest a larger critique of white, masculine road mythologies. Though *Wrath* draws on the celebrated mystique of masculine heroism of on the road, Steinbeck also calls attention to the failure of men to provide for the family, in their Oklahoma farms or on the road to California. This demarcation of new economic pressures suggests that the individualism of the boxcar is revised by a familial collectivity in the boxcar that issues the milk of human kindness under Ma’s feminine control. This potential critique of hobo-driven self-serving masculinism can be corroborated by the profuse images of displaced and destitute mothers and children that circulated in the era. Domesticating the boxcars in the final scenes of the novel allows Steinbeck to institute a self-conscious participation in the hobo mystique, rendering it modern for the times while also acknowledging its limitations.

When Steinbeck places the Joads in the abandoned boxcars they find a home in homelessness. The abandoned boxcars are an example for what De Certeau calls, “the premium mobile,” which articulates that the train “not only divid[es] spectators and beings, but also connect[s] them; it is a mobile symbol between them, a tireless
shifter, producing changes in the relationships between immobile elements” (De Certeau 113). Off the track and immobile, the boxcars no longer possess value in their ability to move freight. Yet, when inhabited, the Gasoline Tramp Joads reinstitute the boxcars as the premium mobile of an earlier hobo mystique. Steinbeck's boxcars animate the connections between the members of the Joad family as a productive unit. Their unity as passengers on the road stages the transformation of their status as rootless Gasoline Tramps, only to secure them in the homeless hobo boxcar. As machines that reconfigure space, the boxcars represent the “tireless shifting” of the migratory families impacted by the Dust Bowl, and more specifically the interminable movement of the Gasoline Tramp. As Gasoline Tramps, the Joad’s command the ability to “see” through the windows of the jalopy. But in the boxcar, they have the ability to settle the space through large doors, an opening that permits them to “to move through” space similar to the panoramic view of their Oklahoma farmland (De Certeau 112).

Though the boxcars are rooted in the land and are useless for their original intent, their presence lets Steinbeck pit the hobo and the Gasoline Tramp against one another to redefine social classifications. This draws on the hobo mystique as an ongoing working-class history with cultural value, attentive to the symbols of generational homelessness in the tramp and hobo. But it also acknowledges the mystique as a privileged symbol of western economic exchange through modern technology. In this way, the boxcars invoke the hobo while simultaneously allowing the Joads—as Gasoline Tramps—to construct social status: “The Joads had been
lucky. They got in early enough to have a place in the boxcars. ...[T]hose who had the boxcars were old-timers, and in a way aristocrats” (Steinbeck Wrath 559). Steinbeck traces an “old-timer” quality that establishes belonging and rooted settlement, but through a privileged kind of mobility like that of the Gasoline Tramp.

Steinbeck takes part in the hobo mystique while critiquing history and mythology from strategically hobo and/or bohemian positions. Steinbeck’s use of the hobo-passenger Gasoline Tramp provides a productive method for envisioning a “shotgun” position of access. Steinbeck’s careful manipulation of the hobo narrative has power to not only reorder laboring bodies through drivers and passengers, but acts to mobilize the free roaming hobo subjectivity of the Gasoline Tramp. While Steinbeck’s revision of hobo tropes serves to map the epic geographic journey of the Joads for a new generation of homelessness, he also institutes the Gasoline Tramp to capitalize on the hobo mystique and its appeal to the literary marketplace. This also becomes an area of concern in the travel memoir Travels With Charley (1962), where Steinbeck stages white, male mobility on the road as a mid-century comment on the hobo mystique he helped popularize twenty years earlier.

STEINBECK AS GASOLINE TRAMP

In Travels With Charley (1962), Steinbeck uses the hobo narrative to issue new forms of mobility in the postwar. Published the same year as Steinbeck wins the Nobel Prize for Literature for Grapes of Wrath, the travel memoir follows Steinbeck’s late-life journey “in search of America” alongside his poodle, Charley in
1960. As a hobo narrative, Steinbeck’s composition draws on the tensions of hobohemian privilege which class-performs both hobo and bohemian positions through a Gasoline Tramp persona. Not searching for work, but for content to add to his travelogue, Steinbeck’s Gasoline Tramp maintains self-conscious creative control through strategic class associations on the road.

As a writing adventure, Steinbeck recalibrates the hobo narrative by enacting his own Gasoline Tramp identity. This permits Steinbeck the capacity to recode his memoir-like travelogue and fashion it into the romantic long journey he equates to undertaking a novel (Charley 20). In his truck the Rocinante, Steinbeck begins his quixotic quest across the expanse of the United States driving from east to west. Driving cross-country in the cab of his truck is equated to the creative process of writing, issuing white, male control of the hobo narrative an extension of the fantasy of white, male control of the country. This asserts the kind of possessive technology Nigel Thrift argues of passengering, giving the passenger the power and privilege to command authority and creative power. Though despite his best efforts to code himself as a fugitive passenger, Steinbeck drives the narrative, articulating the flexibility of a hobohemian position. He writes: “Having a companion fixes you in time and that the present, but when the quality of aloneness settles down, past, present, and future all flow together. A memory, a present event, and a forecast all equally present” (Steinbeck Charley 106). Steinbeck’s explanation suggests that one may drive alone, but a passenger, who requires another to exist, changes the tone and temporality of the event for both parties. The existence of another in the truck
allows for Steinbeck to feel rooted, but at the same time transgress space and time within his automobility and creative control.

*Travels With Charley*’s attention to mobility, including the migratory nature of the American people on roads like Route 66, establishes Steinbeck’s decades long fascination with the hobo mystique. As a figure that rose to fame depicting the epic migration of Americans in the Thirties, Steinbeck’s own road trip relays his curiosity about mobility as a part of the American unconscious. He wonders:

> Could it be that Americans are a restless people, a mobile people, never satisfied with where they are as a matter of selection? The pioneers, the immigrants who peopled the continent, were the restless ones in Europe. The steady rooted ones stayed home and are still there. (Steinbeck *Charley* 80)

By marking the evolution of the American people as European-based, Steinbeck institutes the hegemonic power of the hobo narrative. Issuing mobility as the providence earned by restless populations, Steinbeck celebrates the highly male rootlessness of youth he descried in *Wrath*. Yet, based on the theorizations of David Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991) and Eric Lott’s *Love & Theft* (1994), the characterization of an American people from immigrant populations is based on strategic racial claims that construct whiteness. Evoking the Gasoline Tramp of the Depression as well as the Beat travelers of the postwar, Steinbeck’s meditation of his own white, male position on the road envisions mobility as a historical development granted to white men through the hobo mystique. But unlike *Wrath*’s critical depiction, Steinbeck now capitalizes on what the mystique can offer him in at the dawn of the era of Civil Rights.
Steinbeck constructs a link between whiteness and mobility that is procured not only through institutions of privilege in the colonization of the Americas, but through the subordination of any and all other groups. Like Wrath’s racialized fear of becoming sharecroppers, Steinbeck’s assertion of white mobility in Travels With Charley emphasizes the dominant and dominating character of the hobo narrative. Though Steinbeck himself knows the troubled contexts of westward expansion and American nationalism, his explanation of restlessness is rooted in a dominant identity’s ability to move, a hegemonic masculinity perpetuated through the hobo narrative. When Steinbeck directly acknowledges the legacy of slavery and racial inequality during his drive through the South, he does so from the secure position of a highly mobile Gasoline Tramp. These acknowledgments of social realities do not alter Steinbeck’s fantastic investment in the hobo mystique. Instead, Charley stresses America’s fantasy-driven proclivity for white, male domination on the road. Steinbeck addresses the appeal of this thinking: “I thought of these things as I read the historical markers across the country, thought how the myth wipes out the fact” (Steinbeck Charley 63). Steinbeck’s ability to invest himself in myths, such as the hobo mystique, rather than the historical realities he reads on roadside placards institutes a position that can enact geographic mobility as a method of mobilizing strategic and self-serving narratives of individualism and resiliency.

In this way, Steinbeck’s calculated composition draws on the hobo narrative to move through space and claim it as his own. Steinbeck’s autobiographical tale exhibits ownership of the country through his time on the road, where he highlights
his ability to ignore authoritative notices indicating private property, or national borders (Charley 67) or national parks (Charley 123). Steinbeck uses the road to challenge any and all bureaucratic entities that impede his mid-century performance of hobo-as-artist, a self-possessed and self-important kind of passengering across America. These fugitive acts offer him the opportunity to enact a hobo persona that can transgress the law as a matter of “myth” rather than “fact.”

For instance, Steinbeck’s interactions with a groundskeeper upholding a “No Trespassing: Private Property” sign draws on his capacity to “size up” the man and convince him to let him camp. Steinbeck’s depiction of the scene mirrors not only Jack London’s improvisational hobo-as-artist, but also Tom Joad’s hitchhiking interaction with the truck driver. Making appeals to the everyman held fast by policies that are not his own, Steinbeck’s exchange with the groundskeeper participates in hobohemian practice for control. Steinbeck explains:

Normally his tone would have sparked a tinder in me. I would have flared an ugliness of anger and he would have been able to evict me with pleasure and good conscience. We might have even have edged into a quarrel with passion and violence. That would be only normal, except the beauty and the quiet made me slow to respond with resentment, and in my hesitation I lost it. I said, ‘I knew it must be private. I was about to look for someone to ask permission or maybe pay to rest here.’

‘The owner don’t want campers. They leave papers around and build fires.’

‘I don’t blame him. I know the mess they make.’

‘See that sign on the tree? No trespassing, hunting, fishing, camping.’

‘Well,’ I said. ‘that sounds as if it means business. If it’s your job to throw me off, you’ve got to throw me off. I’ll go peacefully. But I’ve just made a pot of coffee. Do you think your boss would mind if I finished it? Would he mind if I offered you a cup? Then he could kick me off quicker.’

The young man grinned. ‘What the hell,’ he said. ‘You don’t build no fires and you don’t throw out no trash’” (Charley 84-5).
Steinbeck places himself in the position of a hobo in need of shelter, but at the same
time stresses his mastery for manipulating situations as a famous figure. Steinbeck
leads the conversation and maintains a hobo position that plots rather than pleas for
approval to trespass on private property. He points out, much as Tom Joad does,
that the enforcing agent is an employee who gains little from following the rules of
his employer. This appeal to the subordinated worker is met with Steinbeck’s poor
tempered masculinity that feigns activist connections, equating his temper to “a
tinder.” The hobo mystique overwhelms the reality of private property, leaving
Steinbeck to take the privileges of being a Gasoline Tramp and camp where he
wants. Steinbeck’s interactions do not warrant the need to “fight” because he has
strategically positioned himself in the seat of control.

Steinbeck’s hobo adulation proves his philosophical potential on the road.
This practice lets Steinbeck reinstitute the hobo narrative in the mid-century,
introducing not the new kinds of migrant workers and homeless plight of Wrath, but
a calculated construction of the hobo mystique for mid-century appeal. By the time
of Steinbeck’s 1960s trip, the trend of examining the wanderlust of the American
character had been well documented in American fiction not only by early-century
writers like Jack London, but by postwar writers like Jack Kerouac. Like the hobo-as-
artist authors before him, Steinbeck’s Gasoline Tramp enacts hobo associations to
advance his sole autobiographical piece of writing, providing him bourgeois control
to code his life story through a youthful, masculine fantasy on the road. Steinbeck is
compelled to earn hobo-credibility through hobohemian practice, evidence by his
choice to stay in fancy hotels or camp out and “trespass” on private property for
effect. These hoboherman tensions issue greater transparency within the hobo
narrative of the postwar, refusing claims of authentic working-class representations
for marketable cultural circulations of the mystique. As a highly visible iconography
of populist appeal, Steinbeck’s reliance on working-class identity traces a trajectory
that moves from the hobo to the migrant and

The working-class identities of the hobo, migrant and Gasoline Tramp
permit Steinbeck to question figures of authority, his road-centered mobility
providing him the narrative grounds for a symbolic bohemian “romance” that
defeats social and economic “reality” (Charley 105). In this way, Steinbeck
constructs strategic associations with the working class and other dispossessed
figures of the road to shore up his own anxieties over literary representations that
draw on tensions of home and homelessness, as well as movement and stasis in
America. Steinbeck’s history with the hobo mystique acknowledges the monstrous-
mythos of the road epic in American culture, both popular and political. In this way,
Steinbeck points out the migrant’s changing cultural visibility as a passenger, and
ddictates how the hobo mystique—not the hobo himself—has become a symbolic
cultural entity informing a new generation of young men epitomized a decade
earlier by Jack Kerouac’s On the Road (1957).
Chapter Two: Gray Flannel Suits and ‘Existentialist Costumes’: Jack Kerouac’s Hobohemian Self-Fashioning

In *Lonesome Traveler* (1960) Jack Kerouac self-consciously celebrates himself “on the road, as hobo, railroader, Mexican exile, [and] Europe travel[er]” (Kerouac vii). In doing so, Kerouac stresses a fascination with the epic mythos of figures like the Gasoline Tramp and glorifies the hobo mystique for a new, youthful generation of restless young men. Kerouac's essays and narratives present his “mishmosh of life as lived by an independent educated penniless rake going anywhere,” proving that movement across geographic space produces creative identity in the mid-twentieth century (Kerouac *Traveler* viii). Unlike *Grapes of Wrath*’s critiques of the hobo mystique, Kerouac's road travels romanticize working-class and nostalgic hobo associations to issue a challenge to the pressures of postwar prosperity and middle-class consumerist values. Like London, Kerouac approaches the hobo narrative as a self-serving creative enterprise that grants individualization through the complication of an authorial voice that blurs autobiography and fiction in its aims for “natural description” (*Traveler* viii).

Kerouac draws on the verbal acuity of the hobo-as-artist and circulates the hobo mystique in his compositions, which document “all that hitchikin” and “all that railroadin,” to assert a masculine resiliency as an author who provides “VISIONS OF AMERICA” (*Traveler* 1).

Kerouac appoints hobo and working-class identities to display a “lonesome traveler” status in his work. Like London and Steinbeck before him, Kerouac calls
upon the creative potential of working-class associations to establish critical perspectives on America’s social fabric, including but not limited to his own self-identification and social position. However, Kerouac often takes his underclass associations to new class performative levels, which allow his autobiographical narrators to incorporate themselves into the hobo mystique and prove hobo-as-artist creative capability in various self-affirming episodes on the road.

In “The Vanishing American Hobo” (1957), for instance, Kerouac highlights the state of the postwar hobo to locate a self-conscious tension of middle-class masculinity.29 Kerouac’s essay balances the near-mythological ‘vanishing’ hobo of an earlier era against a contemporary demand for creative self-identification, which includes upward mobility and productive citizenry. The social and cultural complexity of the hobo helps Kerouac self-identify:

I myself was a hobo but only of sorts, as you see, because I knew someday my literary efforts would be rewarded by social protection—I was not a real hobo with no hope ever except that secret eternal hope you get sleeping in empty boxcars... (Kerouac Traveler 173)

The hobo allows Kerouac to articulate his creative method. He is able to balance being a hobo and not being a hobo to issue the construction of his novels as an autobiographical narrator and removed author. The hobo allows Kerouac to not only foreground his artistic potential, but by default his socio-economic privilege. By claiming a temporary hobo position, Kerouac emphasizes his personal potential for upward economic mobility based on the inevitable success of his literary efforts.

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29 The estimated publication date is based on Paul Maher’s Kerouac, the Definitive Biography (2007). On the Road is also published in 1957, but its road journey and composition take place in the late 1940s. Erin Mercer considers this decade-long process as the reason for the dualities of conservatism and alternative lifestyle in the novel between conservatism and alternative lifestyle (168).
While Kerouac is able to draw on working-class identity for creative productivity and symbolism, the economic position of the hobo is held-fast by working-class distinctions and social prescriptions. This maps Kerouac’s association with the hobo as one of convenient representation and manipulative motivations. While highlighting his own advantageous and creative mobility, Kerouac details that the ‘real hobo’ has ‘no hope ever’ of changing his social status. In this way, Kerouac’s use of the hobo displays a tendency for hobohemian practice in his narrative production, utilizing tensions between hobo and bohemian identity to re-value the cultural capital of the hobo mystique for his own creative benefit.

Unlike Steinbeck’s viable and often journalistic claims for authenticity and economic hardship, Kerouac draws on the working class and hobo mystique to fashion and present his narratives as an innovative repository for nostalgic interpretations of the tramp, hobo, migrant, and bum within the Beat Generation. By perpetuating a cultural circulation of the hobo, Kerouac’s essay traces an evolution of the culture of the American hobo as constructed by the literary renderings of Steinbeck or Dos Passos in the late Thirties. This provides Kerouac an opportunity to claim creative associations with a specific era of working-class identity and bolster his creative position as writer. But Kerouac also importantly calls attention to his special position of “social protection,” granted through hobohemian practice. In these contexts, Kerouac’s work becomes a productive space to examine how white masculinity engages class performativity within American culture, selling hobo and bohemian associations for acclaim.
Kerouac’s essay marks the hobo’s disappearance, an effect of police action and road violence. But ultimately, “The Vanishing American Hobo” feigns a sociological study of the hobo in mid-century America to perpetuate the hobo mystique. By celebrating the continued importance of the hobo in mid-century American culture, Kerouac makes him highly visible, not invisible like the title. Kerouac highlights the hobo’s shifting status to render a power-driven homage to predominantly male and status-based roles like founding father, conservationist, politician and poet (Traveler 174-6). These figures are all deemed special hobos, and Kerouac self-identifies with the list. He argues that hobos were great men and in turn, made America great to include his unique mid-century voice. These moves place value on hobo identity by recirculating the hobo mystique, which serve Kerouac’s narrative through hoboherian practice. Kerouac stresses his physical and geographic mobility as a “hobo of sorts,” but also his bohemianism as an “independent educated penniless rake going anywhere.”

These class-crossing tensions gain Kerouac the title of “the latrine laureate of Hobohemia” in a 1958 Times Book Review for The Subterraneans (“Blazing”

30 Kerouac’s emphasis on the American hobo also moves beyond American culture with references to: “Li Po was a mighty hobo. –Ego is the greatest hobo. […] Jesus was a strange hobo who walked on water. –Buddha was also a hobo who paid no attention to the other hobo” (Kerouac Traveler 176). Claiming the universal appeal of the hobo alongside significant spiritual and worldly types allows Kerouac to actively mythologize the hobo and his cultural circulation.

31 Kerouac shows the variety of hobo that has influenced American culture: “Benjamin Franklin was like a hobo in Pennsylvania…John Muir was a hobo who went off into the mountains…Teddy Roosevelt, political hobo—Vachel Lindsay, troubadour hobo, seedy hobo” (Kerouac Traveler 174-5). As an included member of Kerouac’s list, Franklin’s The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin (1789) can be seen exhibiting a hoboherian position throughout, constructing narrative material throughout that distinguishes its privilege by outsmarting and exploiting the beer drinkers and other laboring groups. Kerouac’s suggestion of Franklin attests to the long-standing tradition of not only hoboherianism in American literature, but class performativity.
By examining the critiques issued against a new generation of tramp-like bohemian artists like Kerouac, I locate cultural apprehension over not only hobo and bohemian identities, but the value of working-class and middle-class identity in the literary marketplace. Though the *Times Book Review* acknowledges Kerouac’s creative force by calling him a laureate, it also links him to the scatology of an urban hobo space from an earlier time. As a self-proclaimed “hobo of sorts,” the *Times* review constructs Kerouac’s work not as an original expression of hobo mobility, but a transparent and strategic manipulation of a hobo-american counterculture community for effect. This perspective relegates Kerouac to what Norman Podhoretz called “Know-Nothing Bohemians” (1958) in the *Partisan Review*.

Frustrated by the false radicalism of the mid-century, conservative editor of *Commentary* and literary critic Podhoretz claimed that the Beat era had a privileged suburban fascination with an unfashionable bohemianism that represented itself through image and not reality (Podhoretz 482).

Podhoretz describes the youthful and spirited men of Beat novels like *On the Road* (1957) as forcefully representing themselves as “restless, rebellious and confused youth living it up” (482). This provides a stark contrast against the “thin, balding, buttoned-down instructors of English composing ironic verses with one hand and changing the baby’s diapers with the other” (Podhoretz 482). Podhoretz

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32 See also Paul Goodman’s *Growing Up Absurd* (1960) and Norman Mailer’s *The White Negro* (1957), which discuss the social pressures on young men in a new economic moment best articulated by William H. Whyte’s *The Organization Man* (1956).

33 The reference to the English professor offers the distinction between young Beat writers who saw cultural criticism as a lifestyle, and the older-guard that studied—as Podhoretz did under Lionel Trilling and other New York Intellectuals—in institutions that advanced the discipline. Podhoretz
makes clear that the new generation of unfashionable bohemians is at odds with the domesticated lives of an established and professional older generation. For Beat-bohemians, this generational gap of masculine identification is one represented by classed interests that claim individuation within conformity. The prosperity of the postwar has reorganized society by marketing American-dream inspired suburban communities propelled by consumer possessions, not individualization. As William H. Whyte describes in The Organization Man (1956), postwar prosperity lead to homogenous suburban settlement that appeared classless in its ability to consolidate white, middle-class privilege (311). While the conspicuous consumption of suburban dwellers indicated triumph over the economic pressures of the Depression and World War II, it also established new practices where consumer acts and images provided status in the new social scene.34

For Kerouac and the Beat-bohemian generation, the down-and-out urban locations of Allen Ginsberg’s Howl (1956), or the pursuit of homeless hobo-rambles cross-country offered confrontation to the conformist pressures of the Organization. To this effect, Podhoretz identifies the Beat generation as invested in the “vitality and virtue in simple rural types and in the dispossessed urban groups” while on the “heroic road” (482-3). I include Podhoretz’s explanation of Beat motivations to expose the self-fashioning impulse of mid-century counterculture as pressured by

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identifications informed by hobohemian practice. Podhoretz calls attention to Kerouac’s need for appearances—even unfashionable bohemian ones—to indicate an assertion of agency amid mid-century masculine dispossession. These unfashionable appearances offer a provocative study of the Beat generation’s self-fashioning, one that relays what literary critic Thomas Parkinson calls in 1961, “existentialist costumes” that combat the squareness of the “gray flannel suit” (Parkinson 449). Parkinson’s indication that the Beats were merely “American Bohemia newly garbed, new beatnik being old bum writ bold,” suggests the distinct advantages of constructing strategic appearance that could produce countercultural affiliations (449). In particular, Kerouac’s self-conscious self-presentation of the working-class allows him to explore the masculine claims of creativity and ingenuity established by the hobo mystique, and transform them for progressive individuation of the beatnik and the bum.

As critiques of Kerouac’s-time, the essays of Podhoretz and Parkinson foreground a tension between hobohemian practice and male self-presentation in the literary marketplace. Beats like Kerouac express an active impulse to appropriate or designate class appearances away from the Organization Man by fashioning the self as an unfashionable bohemian or through existentialist costumes. In this way, Kerouac’s narrators enact a masculine performance as a ‘hobo of sorts,’ drawing on working-class appearances that possess cultural value in the hobo mystique. By exhibiting a sense of privileged classlessness through these fluid associations, Kerouac’s productive associations with old and forgotten margins of
working-class culture such as the tramp, hobo, migrant, and bum, become highly visible forms of rebellion against the “second melting pot” of conformist suburban communities and utopic American dreams (Whyte 311). This allows Kerouac’s novels to reinvent the naturalist discourse of the hobo narrative in service of a highly modern era that stylizes itself as distinctly different from the status quo. But it also requires his novels to enact a self-conscious presentation of working-class identity, and demonstrate that grey flannel suits and existentialist costumes reinscribe rather than subvert the fantastic power of white masculinity on the road.

As hobo narratives that claim and sell the appearance of working-class identity, On the Road (1957) and Big Sur (1961) serve as pillars of hobohemian practice that express the creative freedoms of the hobo-as-artist while simultaneously communicating anxiety over class performativity. Kerouac’s texts offer the complexity of self-conscious self-fashioning that asserts cultural control by dressing up. My readings call attention to mid-century interest in acts and appearances, including but not limited to the use of strategic class appearances as a creative tool for literary production. My emphasis on Kerouac’s use of clothing within his hobo narratives signals a mid-century concern with both exposure and superficiality. This suggests that while hobohemian practice stresses the hard-boiled and grit-confidence of the hobo mystique, it does so to placate anxiety-ridden fictions of white, masculine identity that has been dispossessed on the road.
PERFORMING WORKING-CLASS DRAG

As a hobohemian practitioner, Kerouac becomes a twentieth-century representative of hobo subculture who can draw on the symbolic hobo to achieve cultural power and (cultural) capital through cross-class affiliation. In this context, Kerouac’s narrative episodes of “putting on” a working-class or hobo appearance for the sake of creative resiliency demands closer attention. Kerouac’s hobohemian “performing self”35 embraces the appearances of the working class to forge agency by existing fluidly between the boundaries of hobo and bohemian. Thus, class performance becomes a strategy for constructing subjectivity in a changing world like Steinbeck’s passengers, but through an image-based appearance and strategic self-identification that emphasizes looks as much as location.

I consider Kerouac’s practice as one of self-identifying and self-fashioning because neither clothing nor class performativity can achieve his narrative effect alone. In a radical departure from Judith Butler’s insistence that one cannot go to the closet and try different genders on like clothing, I question in what ways clothing can construct class identity through “the repeated stylization of the body” and “repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance” (Butler Gender 45). By utilizing the essentialized clothing of working-class identity within the hobo narrative, Kerouac repeatedly styles his male body to achieve a sense of control over himself as a

35 In this period, Featherstone argues that audiences see their individuality “within consumer culture [...] as role players,” finding investments in “appearance, gesture and bodily demeanor [...] expressions of self” (189). Featherstone refers to the process of outwardly appearances reflecting the inside “the performing self” (187). This concept advances discussions of working-class drag by showing that an appearance can serve as individualization.
subject. Since class performance is a self-conscious and strategic practice asserted by rigid social hierarchies of white, middle-class masculinity, Kerouac’s use of hobo culture provides him “the appearance of substance” against mid-century majority-rule while simultaneously issuing a masculine position of control.

Kerouac’s narratives repeatedly stylize the male body to communicate the pressures of hyper-normative mid-century America, which is suspicious of superficial acts and appearances. Kerouac uses working-class images and appearances to perform white, masculine class-fantasy that attempts to address masculine ambiguity. For this reason, I connect Kerouac’s hoboehemian practice to the study of drag, as it aims to identify pressures of discontinuity in the intersections of gender, race, and class. Unlike nineteenth-century American literature’s use of cathartic class-transvestitism that results in what Eric Schocket calls a shared “proletarian pain,” I equate Kerouac’s process to a highly-visible presentation of the body through working-class drag (106). I define working-class drag as a self-conscious form of hoboehemian practice that refuses and/or negotiates middle-class identifications by stylizing the body in working-class clothing. By drawing on the foundational work of cultural anthropologist Esther Newton, Judith Halberstam constructs a definition of drag as both concerned with gender and with performance, exhibiting “discontinuities between gender and sex or appearance and reality [...] In a drag performance [...] incongruence becomes the site of gender creativity” (236). In the scope of Kerouac’s work, I link class performativity with drag because it exposes a self-conscious theatricality of class performances where
majority and minority are put in service of constructing productive tensions between masculine appearance and reality (Halberstam 21; 235). By performing class acts, Kerouac identifies a creative opportunity to assert his masculinity in the site of the hobo narrative, incorporating class as an essential identification in the formation of gender and sexual identity.\textsuperscript{36} By highlighting the performativity of class in Kerouac’s highly gendered narratives, I stress that working-class drag calls attention to the performative aspect of masculinity. But, by doing so, I argue that class performativity serves to shore up or stabilize the privileges of white masculinity, which is able to appropriate and adulate minority positions within Beat culture.

Kerouac’s working-class drag stages appearances of authenticity while locating the impossibility of representation, a central tension within realist and naturalist styles transformed by modern literary forms. The anxiety produced by ambiguous identifications results in strategic self-presentation, issuing debates of cultural legitimation at the core of American Studies, as exemplified by Michael Denning’s study of class ventriloquism in Mechanic Accents (1987). Denning’s perspective on class ventriloquism communicates the possibility of both cultural appropriation and authentic expression in Kerouac’s performance of working-class identity and use of working-class appearances. Kerouac’s strategic association with

\textsuperscript{36} Halberstam and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick emphasize that class puts pressures on gender and sexual identity. Halbertstam’s Female Masculinity (1999) pays special attention to the class-based identifications, and argues that “[m]asculinity...becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body” (2). Sedgwick’s Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (1985) suggests that class affiliations police the protocols of homosocial and/or homosexual behavior throughout. Her Coda “Toward the Twentieth Century: English Readers of Whitman” particularly draws out the importance of working-class identity to articulate distinctions against middle-class homosexuality.
the working class provides him an opportunity to perform cultural consciousness related to the hobo mystique. As an appropriative process and an expressive means, Kerouac’s working-class drag is an embodied form of hobohemian practice that becomes an enterprising form of creative labor in the literary marketplace.

These intersections of self-presentation and legitimation are benefitted by the work of Marjorie Garber and Eric Lott, who each examine ways that class performativity directly informs and produces anxiety through gendered representations. For instance, Eric Lott’s “All the King’s Men: Elvis Impersonators and White Working-Class Masculinity” (1997) provides an important evaluation of performative white masculinity which is able to “capitalize on the theatrics of excess” (213). Lott’s investigation of Elvis impersonators highlights how lavish presentations of certain Elvis-era appearances elicit an “imaginary triumph over...working class circumstances,” and provide performers a chance to “refuse [...] middle class dictates” (Lott 211; 216). I include Lott’s analysis to envision the practice of impersonation as an act of “unmarked transvestitism,” a performance of unnoted or overly naturalized expectations of a specific identity (Lott 193). For instance, middle-class white male appropriation of the hobo is of unmarked performativity, overwhelmed by normative expectations of dominant masculinity.

Lott draws this concept from Marjorie Garber’s Vested Interests: Cross Dressing &

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37 Denning’s introduction argues that popular literary forms like the dime novel provide not only an alternative to the class-bravado of genteel fiction, but can also represent the interests of the working class as a reading public (Denning Mechanic 3). These class-debates are read closely through class ventriloquism in Chapter 5, where “the mechanic accent” becomes a technique for establishing working-class affiliations. Though Kerouac technically ‘ventriloquizes,’ the primary effect is not to speak through but to speak for characters. Kerouac’s efforts to produce bodily appearances rather than linguistic ventriloquism points to asserting narrative control through authorial self-making. See also Michael North’s The Dialect of Modernism (1994).
Cultural Anxiety (1992), where transvestitism is linked to the mutual performances of class and gender identity (Garber 32). Lott and Garber articulate a tenuous relationship between class and gender and use transvestitism to examine the impulse to self-fashion image as an analogue for substance. Both studies advance that the performative construction of identity relies on visible recognition rather than claims of authentic identity or self. This takes particular importance in Lott’s study, where he suggests that Elvis impersonators are privileged by their ability to position themselves as both fan and king, existing simultaneously as impersonator and original. This observation is integral to my study of the hobo narrative, wherein authors use the hobo not only for for legitimated visibility as an underclass identity, but to be a hobo-of sorts, who can command cultural access through highly visible surface-level associations.

These intersections suggest that Kerouac’s class performativity is best theorized through working-class drag because there is not and cannot be an authentic class or gender identity, but only strategic reiterations of appearances. To approach class performativity as drag stresses the self-conscious and strategic performance of class as an articulation of minority and majority positions within mid-century masculinity. By enacting both working-class and middle-class identities fluidly throughout his novels, Kerouac explores stratified roles for men, which include “unmarked” gender performances like working-class drag. In this way, the tensions of class image and substance entitle Kerouac and many others to a
culturally visible and rebellious masculinity. But these performances and acts are not without consequence. As Butler notes:

...if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. (Butler Gender 191-2)

Butler provides a provocative addition to my theorization of working-class drag by calling attention to the ‘appearance of substance’ through the construction of image. Kerouac’s performative accomplishments to a ‘mundane social audience’ provide only a fantasy of white masculinity through working-class drag. This presentation to an audience convinces Kerouac himself that he is a man, a hobo, and a literary talent, his class performativity and narrative composition integral parts of self-identification. In this context, Kerouac’s engages in working-class drag to capitalize on what Garber calls the “language of clothing,” which creates meaning through “dress and address” (Garber 356). Garber’s concept attends to Kerouac’s productive self-fashioning while stressing the important element of audience indicated by both Butler and Lott. In these ways, the language of clothing locates a performative potential that can strategically fashion the self within the regulatory frames of “class constructed” and gender specific “dress codes” upheld by an audience (Garber 21).

Kerouac’s attention to fashion and sartorial presentation integrates the importance of the performative in the development of the twentieth-century hobo narrative. Kerouac’s performance of strategic class acts signals that his work (literary and cultural) is emblematic of a “media economy ... [that] values men less
as productive workers than as sellable images” (Leland 72). By emphasizing the performing self, Kerouac’s narrative work addresses the value of white masculinity to a new media economy that has removed social definitions in order to circulate a highly-symbolic and fantasy driven hobo mystique. Critic John Leland highlights these valued images in productive tension in Kerouac’s work, calling attention to both his notorious slacker narrators as well as an incorporation of “radical lessons about work, money and the pursuit of stylish poverty” (60-1). Kerouac’s *On the Road* is an essential part of the development of hobohermian practice that uses clothing and bodily-appearance to “shun[ ] the decade’s shining new businessmen in favor of hoboes and hustlers and jazz musicians who seem to come from an earlier time” (Leland 70). Emphasizing London’s hobo-as-artist, Kerouac enlists an embodied hobohermian practice by performing working-class drag. This bodily self-presentation becomes Kerouac’s narrative method for evading the pressures of the Organization Man, while conveniently associating himself with the historical contexts of dispossessed men on the road. Thus, *On the Road* provides the groundwork for tracing not only how the hobo and underclass provides a fantasy of white masculinity for authors like Kerouac, but also a site where the hobo-as-artist institutes an avoidance of physical labor. This results in Kerouac being connected to “a tradition of hardworking American loafing that dates back to Whitman and Thoreau” (Leland 61). These nineteenth-century correlations suggest a long-standing concern with the laboring male body, to which American literature often gestures only toward depicting rather than enacting. So despite Leland’s description
of *On the Road* as being purely about work, it is about verbal and compositional ability: “Sal’s work, including the voice telling the story,” stresses only an intellectual and creative form of labor (Leland 61). The symbol of the hobo, then, becomes a creative venture that allows Kerouac to use working-class drag as an agential act when written into literary production. By intimating work, Kerouac performs his “primitive poverty” and establishes the male body as a source of credibility on the road (Leland 61).

**THE HOBO’S NEW CLOTHES: KEROUAC’S APPEAREnces ON THE ROAD**

Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957) is a sprawling and romantic account of Sal Paradise’s first-person narration of cross-country travels. Semi-autobiographical and non-traditionally composed on a 120-foot roll of paper without page numbers, paragraphs or chapters, *On the Road* conflates the freedom of the road and a new generation’s creative vitality to escape the confines of suburban America. *On the Road* stages strategic class appearances in order to break free from the mid-century ideals of productive and prosperous masculinity. This can be seen first in Sal’s investment in class appearances, which he uses to classify the American masculine character in the physical laborer, the cowboy, and the hobo. These working-class appearances permit me to highlight Sal’s use of these classifications in the exploration of his own character through the class performative act of working-class drag as a comic tramp and an agricultural laborer.
Sal’s closest friend and fellow traveler Dean Moriarty frames Sal’s cross-country journeys as cross-class associations. In the opening of the novel, Dean is introduced by Sal as body, purely musculature in clothing: “[Dean’s] suffering bony face with the long sideburns and his straining muscular sweating neck [...] his dirty workclothes clung to him so gracefully, as though you couldn’t buy a better fit from a custom tailor” (Kerouac Road 7). Sal’s middle-class gaze onto Dean’s working-class body infers the power of the laboring body in creative enterprise. Dean’s clothes fit him as if custom made, asserting a celebrated status unhindered by Sal’s pun on Taylor-made uniformity. This allows Sal to observe and value Dean’s working-class identity, which institutes a legitimated control over his narration. Sal’s interest in Dean relates to the attractive power of a laboring male body, one that expresses a perfect fit for the intellectual malaise brought on by Sal’s position as a Columbia college boy. Everything Sal needs to know about Dean is at the surface level of his body, not his intellect. Dean is an essentialized working-class figure with ragged but perfect clothing, and a “criminal” demeanor that offers a minority figure with which Sal can construct his difference as an “intellectual” (Kerouac Road 7).

For Sal, Dean’s body is a productive identity that possesses value within mid-century hobo-hemian practice. Caught between the appeal of Dean’s working-class

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38 In This is the Beat Generation (2001), James Campbell points out that Neal Cassady/Dean Moriarity’s nakedness is a recurring image in the work of both Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg (65). I choose to emphasize the economic implications of working class bodies as clothed throughout Kerouac to indicate the possibility of hobo-hemian self-fashioning. Though nakedness becomes a central area of concern in Big Sur, it serves to express anxiety over the limitation of self-fashioned appearances.
body and Sal’s bohemian intellectualism, Kerouac initiates hobo-hemian tensions as a collective and creative tool for calling on the hobo mystique.39

Sal’s opening description of Dean constructs a class-based model with which to categorize the experiences of the road. Sal’s alternation of hobo and bohemian identifications becomes the primary method for his narrative development. This hobo-hemian practice allows Sal to sample the American experience from town to town, and emphasize the clothing to invoke his own self-fashioning power. For example, Sal knows he has spotted his first real cowboy in Omaha when he sees a man “walking along the bleak walls of the wholesale meat warehouses in a ten-gallon hat and Texas boots,” who could be “any beat character” with the exception of “the getup” (Kerouac Road 17). Refusing the cowboy a working identity at the warehouse, Sal stresses only his region-specific apparel as a distinction of difference. Because the cowboy is considered only in terms of his cowboy approximation, his ability to be ‘beat’ is foreclosed. Sal uses ‘beat’ not in the terms of working-class subordination in a postwar economy, but rather the countercultural appearance of a beat type. Sal takes part in a social game based on clothing that identifies the cowboy in order to classify himself as a status-driven Beat who would never be seen in such apparel. By emphasizing the cowboy’s hat and boots, Sal draws a distinction that not only identifies others through appearances, but self-identifies by default.

39 Dean Moriarty’s father is a hobo who exists in the periphery of the narrative. Dean provides Sal not only working class credentials, but a direct connection to hobo lifestyle.
Not long after his cowboy sighting, Sal encounters another figure of the frontier mythos, Mississippi Gene. Sal immediately identifies Mississippi Gene based on his “hobo rags...old clothes that had been turned black by the soot of railroads and the dirt of boxcars and sleeping on the ground” (Kerouac Road 23). The only way for Sal to recognize Gene is through the character of his clothing, authoritatively described as the consequence of riding rails, foreclosing any other means. This claim authorizes Sal to stress his shared similarities with Gene, an itinerant worker hitchhiking across the country, though not in hobo rags. Sal shares the truck bed with Gene to offer the evolution from hobo to Gasoline Tramp, marked by the harvest chasers alongside him. Gene’s tattered clothing allows Sal to emphasize the cultural value of an evolving hobo mystique for his creative adventure, which he observes spectacularly. Because Gene is dressed the way Sal would expect, he becomes a paragon of that identity: a specter of an earlier time that Sal is dedicated to preserving. But Sal’s description of Gene configures him as an object of interest, not a subject with agency. While Sal defines Gene by his appearance, he refers to himself through action and exposes his ability to conduct a gaze over working-class men for the purpose of his hobo narrative. Sal’s hitchhiking interplay with Gene serves to bolster his identity as a class-performing traveling writer who can be both a temporary hobo and bohemian subject. Mississippi Gene’s presence permits Sal to foreground his own privilege and capitalize on the hobo mystique, drawing on both class positions for definition.
When Sal arrives in Denver he continues to draw on Gene to solidify his privileged hobohemian status. Like his relationship with Dean, Sal requires Mississippi Gene’s hobo identity to value his own resilient status. He muses,

Only a few days ago I’d come in to Denver like a bum; now I was all racked up sharp in a suit, [...] bowing to dignitaries and chatting in the lobby under chandeliers. I wondered what Mississippi Gene would say if he could see. (Kerouac Road 52)

In this scene, Kerouac draws attention to Sal’s change of status as luck, made visible by appearances: a change of clothes and a new social circle. But for Sal’s rags-to-riches performance to function, he needs Mississippi Gene and his hobo rags to acknowledge his elite status. Sal’s new clothes afford him access into the swank hotel and provide him a position from which to flaunt his flexible social mobility.

But as Butler argues, Sal’s “appearance of substance” can only be made believable by a social audience. Thus, by requesting Mississippi Gene to observe his performance, Sal provides his clear distinction from Gene’s objectified lowly class position.

As the previous examples show, clothing becomes a method for Sal’s assertion of individuality. Yet, to be productive, this method requires the balance of a minority and majority class position rendered legible by an audience. Kerouac represents Sal as vacillating between classes to emphasize that he can accumulate experience through the strategic deployment of class-based appearances. For Kerouac, appearances based on clothing cross boundaries of expectation by adhering to visible structures of identity, but they also endanger the productiveness of hobohemian practice by exposing its superficiality. On the one hand, Sal’s ability to compartmentalize the world based on clothing is one of artificiality and
appearances, contributing to the status quo of the containment era. On the other hand, Sal’s provides access to an ‘authentic’ or ‘Beat’ experience of refusal and rebellion which violates the status quo in its ability to dress up and self-fashion. This complexity suggests that appearances are both liberating and conforming, issuing the cultural climate of the time.

Sal’s attentiveness to clothing allows him to highlight his privileged identification as a hobo-as-artist. Clothes serve as a performative opportunity through working-class drag, where an audience legitimates Sal’s class-performed appearances. This dual-act of “dress and address” is explicit in Mill City, where Sal gets a temporary job patrolling barracks alongside college-friend Remi Boncœur. Remi lives in a “collection of shacks in a valley, housing project shacks built for Navy Yard workers,” and Sal marvels that it is “the only community in America where whites and Negroes lived [...] together voluntarily” (Kerouac Road 61). Sal’s naïve perspective on the voluntary projects defines his temporary visit as an immediate privilege. His majority-status is rendered classless idealism in order to overdetermine the socio-economic conditions of “so wild and joyous a place” (Kerouac Road 61). These social tensions provide the positional intensity for Sal’s hired work: to patrol the laborers by enforcing a social hierarchy that keeps them in the canyon and aims to limit their leisurely activities. Hired to assert state-power over the underclass, Sal requires a very specific hobo-hemian practice to remedy the pressures of the situation. Working-class drag provides him an escape from the class hierarchy of the canyon and fashions him as a comic laborer. Sal’s performance of
working-class drag sanctions his appearance as a patrolman, but allows him to evade doing actual work, instead spending the shift unproductively as he drinks and fraternizes with the men.

Sal is “sworn in by the local police chief, given a badge, a club,” and is turned into a “special policeman” (Kerouac Road 64). Kerouac describes Sal as ‘special’ not to offer privilege, but to indicate the artificiality of the label ‘policeman’ that grants power to appearances. This carries on when Sal’s job requires a uniform that he does not have, and he borrows Remi’s “trousers” to dress the part. Remi’s trousers are uncomfortable for Sal physically and ideologically. Sal calls attention to this discomfort by distinguishing himself against Remi, claiming the trousers do not fit “since [Remi] was so tall, and had a potbelly from eating voracious meals out of boredom, I went flapping around like Charlie Chaplin to my first night at work” (Kerouac Road 64). Disconcerted by the uniform’s symbolic command of uniform social positions that render men listless, Sal uses the policeman’s uniform as an opportunity to take part in the hobo mystique and stress male vitality. The ill-fitting and ill-suited uniform permits Sal to conduct a performance that borders farce—a comic production by the likes of a Chaplin film. Unlike Dean’s custom tailor fit into a working-class identity, Sal literally cannot fit into the confines of a laboring uniform despite his desperate attempts to garner experience through it. Instead, Sal puts on the uniform and produces a show. From this stance, Sal’s performance of

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40 Chaplin’s Modern Times (1936) depicts the workplace as a hostile environment full of over-efficient machinery, the workers and their humanity becoming mere cogs in the machine. Chaplin’s character is not only an individual that is abused by the system, but becomes a subversive agent that disrupts that system, suggesting the tramp’s ability to challenge ideological pressures on man.
working-class drag becomes not a labor for wages, but an opportunity to subvert the pressures of work to an audience. This side-step from the labor market suggests not only a class position that can choose what work to take, but also that his middle-class embodied masculinity does not risk losing status from within hobohemian control.

Kerouac’s careful connection of Sal to an extraordinary tramp like Chaplin articulates the audience’s valuation of the hobohystique in popular culture. Chaplin began his iconic tramp performances in silent film in 1914, rendering his tramp a highly identifiable figure in mid-century American culture. Never playing a hobo, but always a historically situated tramp that avoided work and the notion of home, Chaplin’s tramp is a comic enterprise that challenges notions of vagrancy in the early twentieth century. Kerouac’s use of Chaplin draws on the excessive comic potential of Sal’s physical labor, rendering his uniformed body into a performance like the comic tramp, who was "marked by a particular appearance [...] Ill-fitting clothes and odd-sized shoes were all part of the tramp identity" (Cresswell 143). Sal’s evocation of the comic tramp in the era of the Gasoline Tramp and alongside the vanishing of the American hobo prioritizes the hobo mystique’s ability to define a bohemian, creative self. Kerouac’s depiction of Sal as a comic tramp is a highly visible form of working-class drag connected to presentations of tramps, hobos and bums in vaudeville, burlesque shows and comic strips. Like Sal’s interest in what Mississippi Gene would say about his high class appearance, Sal invites his

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41 Tim Cresswell’s chapter “Laughter and the Tramp” unpacks the cultural value of Chaplin’s tramp by connecting it to a carnivalesque tradition that uses social fear of tramps as a comical critique of American society.
bohemian intellectual crew to observe his performative work as a comic tramp, wondering what “Dean and Carlo and Old Bull Lee would say” if they saw him (Kerouac Road 64). Sal’s self-conscious presentation of working-class drag requires an audience to see him flop around in his clothes, and to acknowledge the dissimilarity between the reality and the appearance of his hobo-romantic practice.

Sal’s performance of working-class drag earns power through the presentation of class associations to the audience. Sal’s performance evokes the privileges of white, male hobo fantasy to reconfigure the boundaries of labor as entertainment. This is especially clear when Sal is given a .32 automatic for his patrol, which makes him muse over frontier-era fantasy in the film The Mark of Zorro. While located on “a road like all the roads you see in Western B movies” the gun becomes an accessory for Sal’s appearance and transports him to a carefully-crafted cultural space of free-roaming frontier masculinity (Road 64-5). Sal claims, “I used to take out my gun and play cowboys in the dark,” suggesting not only a departure from the laboring reality of the special policeman, but a temporal shift to childhood fantasy (Kerouac Road 64-5). For Sal, dressing up in Remi’s uniform and carrying a gun is likened to a youthful game of ‘cowboys,’ his Beat character challenging mid-century expectations of masculinity by dressing up and performing highly-recognizable roles like the police man, a comic tramp and a Hollywood

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42 Contrary to Sal’s initial description, Dean is now part of the “intellectual” list of his friends, which includes Carlo (Allen Ginsberg) and Old Bull Lee (William S. Burroughs). This inclusion is not so much a testament of intellect so much as a self-serving connection that allows Sal to exist as a “special” workingman in ill-fitting uniform unlike Dean’s “Natural Tailor of Natural Joy” (Kerouac Road 7).

43 The 1940 film follows Zorro, son of a well-to-do California rancher who masks his identity to defend the common people in the region.
cowboy. As a participant in a “Western B movie,” Sal’s performance of working-class drag emphasizes the hobo mystique as performative escapism, an express production of identity for an audience. These productions take the place of physical labor, and encourage hobo-hipster practice to allocate working class or underclass identity to secure bohemian status.

The practice of working-class drag also sheds new light on one of On the Road’s most critically discussed scenes: Sal’s laboring in the California fields with Mexican migrants. For instance, Mark Richardson’s “Peasant Dreams: Reading On the Road” (2001) argues that Kerouac’s characters pursue a “Fellahin identity in a long-standing American tradition of minstrelsy. This racial preoccupation allows Kerouac “to put on the mask of the Fellahin people” and “take off the mask of the White bourgeois” (Richardson 224). But when Sal romanticizes the option to pick grapes and cotton, his appropriative strategies invoke not only racial or ethnic associations, but also class-based appearances that render him an authentic Gasoline Tramp and migrant attending to California fields. Like Kerouac’s hobo-of-sorts, Sal describes himself as Mexican “in a way” to affirm a position of creative opportunity through the practice of working-class drag (Kerouac Road 98).

At first, Sal declares that the chance at fieldwork is a way to connect with Terry, his “Mexican girl,” and her family: “We bent down and began picking cotton. It was beautiful” (Kerouac Road 90). Despite claiming early on that he had “found [his] life’s work,” Sal’s aching back and bleeding fingers impede his ability to continue.

44 The Fellahin appear in Kerouac’s texts as not only an ancient peasant race, but as a representative figure of earthly, primitive and/or peasant figures. Critics recognize that the use of the Fellahin provide Kerouac multiple identities, including but not limited to concerns of race, ethnicity, sex, gender and class.
Instead, Sal spends his time in the field observing and objectifying other laborers, including an old Negro couple that “picked cotton with the same God-blessed patience their grandfathers had practiced in ante-bellum Alabama” (Kerouac Road 96). Unlike the productive work of the old Negro couple or Terry’s brother, Sal is busy watching others labor and his bag never really fills. He is astonished that he makes only $1.50 for his backbreaking work. Sal responds to this small amount by placing himself back in the fantasy-position of a migrant worker, observing himself as an “old man” who “couldn’t support his own ass, let alone theirs” (Kerouac Road 96). By allocating his body unfit for the familial fiction he has constructed with Terry, Sal stresses that his laboring body has little value compared to his laboring mind. Rather than see Sal as a blackface or brownface performer in the field, working-class drag calls attention to Sal’s self-fashioning tendencies that issue ultimatums to masculinity based on class status. Sal’s claim of “being Mexican” asserts a migrant identity alongside other workers in the grape or cotton fields, and allows him to perform an appearance of work but not the substance. Sal can only access what it means to be Mexican or Negro by equating it with labor that he is not only incapable of doing but is unwilling to do. Sal’s privilege to stop and observe, or choose to dress and enact the role of the worker for narrative development institutes a fantasy of white masculinity predicated on class status.

Performing working-class drag becomes a discouraging reality that Kerouac explores through the national myths of breadwinning by strong, laboring male bodies. Gesturing toward an intimate family unit, Kerouac depicts Sal hindered by a
fantasy where Sal is not the “nice college boy” in a “lovely sweater” as Terry calls him, but a laboring provider (Kerouac Road 84). But since Sal has already shown his inability to financially support them through his fieldwork, his work routine becomes a performance that functions only on appearances. Sal’s daily routine from inside a tent shared with Terry and her son Johnny is described as follows:

I got up with my towel and toothbrush and went to the general motel toilet to wash; then I came back, put on my pants, which were all torn from kneeling in the earth and had been sewed by Terry in the evening, put on my ragged straw hat, which had originally served as Johnny’s toy hat, and went across the highway with my canvas cotton bag. (Kerouac Road 97)

Sal’s routine communicates a mid-century and heteronormative expectation for men to rise for work, even if it destroys their clothes and body. Sal’s dressing for work communicates not so much his work ethic, but his ability to create a fashionable performance, what John Leland called “stylish poverty.” The scene follows Sal prepare for work that he never does, only intimates. To this effect, the only working figure in the scene is Terry, who mends Sal’s pants each night, enabling him to continue his laboring performance. Without Terry, Sal could not fashion himself for work or pursue the fantasy of picking cotton; she exists much as the cowboy or Mississippi Gene—to indicate distinction. This laboring fantasy becomes clear when Sal’s hat is described as a child’s toy. Like his Charlie Chaplin comic tramp performance in Mill City, the toy hat suggests a cultural resourcefulness able to use labor, but only be a laborer ‘of sorts.’ The uniform that Sal dresses in to perform the labor serves to call attention to Sal’s body as performative against the essentialized
and stable identities of ‘real’ migrant laborers. To assert his own status, Sal requires Terry, Johnny and the Others in the field.

Sal’s ‘college boy’ identity is at odds with his performance of labor in the field as it is patrolling the barracks. Both scenes of working-class drag emphasize working positions that lead to subject-building creative ventures. Sal performs working-class drag in On the Road to identify the limitations of containment era identities and the productive though subversive quality of strategic self-fashioning.

Sal’s performances indicate that he is never at risk of losing his white male privilege, since the loss of a job or poor pay for fieldwork is inconsequential to his well-being. But, Kerouac’s depictions of Sal also provide a glimpse into the white-male vulnerability of the postwar, reading working-class drag as instituting as much anxiety as cultural power. These tensions between image and substance, appearance and reality, and art and life become staged techniques of hoboherian practice. In Sal’s case, this articulates the white, male fantasy of the hobo mystique through tensions of middle and working-class identities. Kerouac’s associations with the hobo mystique and working-class identity allow him to assert a sense of masculine power despite Sal’s tenuous and illusory status marked by superficial appearances. In this way, working-class drag is a method for dressing up the potential vulnerability of being naked on the page, which becomes integral to Big Sur when Kerouac and his narrator Jack have little to no separation, and the performance of strategic class appearances cease being productive.45

45 In the Original Scroll edition (2011) of On the Road, Sal and Dean are referenced autobiographically as Jack and Neal. Though the novel was popularly circulated under character
**Big Sur and the Nakedness of Fame**

*Big Sur* (1961) is an addition to Kerouac’s ‘Duluoz Legend’, which starts with Sal’s travels in *On the Road*. *Big Sur* maintains Kerouac’s stylistic blend of author and narrator in a confessional and meditative text about finding peace and groundedness. Following *On the Road*’s cultural reception and popularity, *Big Sur* follows narrator Jack, author of *On the Road*, as he attempts to dry out in coastal California.\(^4^6\) Exhibiting little to no distinction between Kerouac as author and Jack as narrator, *Big Sur* challenges the playful hobo-hemian practice of *On the Road* while suggesting the distinct and destructive potential of being caught between appearance and reality as a Skid Row drunkard. Framed by the reality of Jack’s body and the notoriety of Sal’s persona, *Big Sur* uses clothing to serve as a method of survival through disguise. But these appearances also become an oversimplification of identity that stress the superficial gains of working-class drag. Kerouac’s use of clothing directly addresses the failure of class performativity to be a means of escape, and suggests that hobo-hemian practice can become a charade that overexposes the self through unyielding demands of acts and appearances.\(^4^7\) Jack’s evasion of working-class drag is expressed through his aims to be “completely nude of all poor protective devices like thoughts about life or meditations under trees and

\(^{46}\) The cabin Jack stays at belongs to Lorenzo Monsanto, a fictionalized Lawrence Ferlinghetti of *City Lights*, who provides Kerouac a location to dry out in the late 1950s.

\(^{47}\) Kerouac uses the phrase “one fast move or I’m gone” to describe both the incessant movement and improvisational quality of his fame, but also the importance of escaping fame’s expectations to save his sanity (*Sur* 7).
the ‘ultimate’ and all that shit” (Kerouac Sur 41). To undress and expose the superficiality of his narrative, Kerouac frequently returns to the analogy of clothing and its characteristic draw to ascribe performative subjectivity. But whereas Sal’s self-fashioning adulated the freedoms of the hobo mystique, clothing now only communicates Jack’s lack of control over himself and his writing. In this way, Big Sur uses dressing up to indicate the failure of appearances to expose raw honesty and experience, addressing hobohemian practice as an unreliable narrative technique with self-destructive qualities.

Big Sur incorporates working-class drag to expose what critic Stephen Schryer calls the “tragic flaw” of being middle class (124). As a successful writer that earned fame through his participation in the hobo mystique, Kerouac permits his autobiographical narrator Jack to reveal his struggles of identification, painfully middle-class, that once found working-class performativity productive. Jack laments his well-known status as a famous writer, which he earned by playful working-class acts on the road. Jack opens the novel with the confession:

[A]ll over America highschool and college kids thinking ‘Jack Duluoz is 26 years old and on the road all the time hitch hiking’ while there I am almost 40 years old, bored and jaded in a roomette bunk crashin across that Salt Flat.’ (Kerouac Sur 5)

Jack’s economic security as a ticketed passenger on the California Zephyr is a far cry from being on the road in the back of a truck with harvest-following Gasoline Tramps and hobo Mississippi Gene. Jack as narrator and Kerouac as author combine collective knowledge to identify the expense of a bohemian freedom that rode comfortably, yet overdetermined in a passenger car pretending to be a hobo. These
class performative episodes become a source of anxiety, which motivates Jack and Kerouac to undress themselves as speakers in a psychological and physical reveal that addresses a reading public that expects the hobo-as-artist of *On the Road*. Garber’s concept of dress and address advances the construction of identity and the naked vulnerability of mid-century masculinity in the joint-narration of *Big Sur*. Where Kerouac’s earlier texts celebrated the performative possibility of clothing, *Big Sur* grapples with the empty security of clothing and appearances. And though Jack shows a continued investment in the ritual stylization of his body, the novel itself communicates the ultimate failure of performativity to construct a stable, or reliable identity, resulting in what Butler calls only the appearance of substance.

In preparations for his journey to the coast, Jack readies his body with “a shower in the hall, new T-shirt and socks and underwear” (Kerouac *Sur* 8). This stresses Jack’s interest in cleaning his body for the journey while at the same time emphasizing the metaphoric new start of his new undergarments. Jack’s sojourn to the Big Sur cabin to dry-out communicates an inviolable and sanctified natural environment, which requires his bodily confessional and a baptism of sorts.48 The t-shirt, socks and underwear are a foundational beginning, the items that Jack wears closest to his naked, clean body. The interiority of Jack’s fresh fashioning prepares him for a trip that requires him to be stripped down. But Jack still relies on layers of coverage, his prepared rucksack deemed a “survival kit” filled with “the last little survival sweater and handkerchief and tennis sneakers (for hiking)” (Kerouac *Sur* 48).

48 Scholars of Kerouac’s work have noted that Catholicism impacts his fiction. In these opening scenes the importance of confession to initiate the sacraments of penance and baptism indicate Jack’s search for faith to deliver him from rock bottom.
While his new outfit intimates the chance at a fresh start and new journey, his attempt to clean and cover his body—that of a self-proclaimed skid row bum—corroborates his need for a narrative journey that can reveal and expose his addicted body. This vulnerability is ever-present, Jack’s “survival kit” of clothes described next to “a strewn mess of bottles all empty, empty poorboys of white port, butts, junk, horror…” (Kerouac Sur 7). Big Sur suggests that appearances fail to represent complex identities, depicting Jack as both junkie bum and purified survivalist who wants to use clothing for security but knows the futility of doing so.

The failure of clothing to provide protection can be seen when Jack refuses to let go of his sneakers even though they have caused him great pain. The sneakers possess more value than their use as protective footwear. Jack explains: “The moment [Joey Rosenberg] sees my battered blue little sneakers […] he wants them for himself, he wants to swap the snazzy Las Vegas sports shoes (pale leather, untooled) for my silly little tightfitting tho perfect sneakers” (Kerouac Sur 72-3). Joey’s interest in Jack’s well-worn and blood-filled shoes is a stark reminder of the hoboheinian practice of Sal Paradise. The exchange of beaten sneakers for more valuable shoes suggests Joey’s own interest in performing working-class drag, fascinated with the worn-character of Jack’s blue shoes and the story they tell to the gazing public. But Jack is reluctant to trade because he has finally used his own body to establish an authentic status of worn-in, the state of being “battered” a badge of hobo honor that Jack has worked to achieve.
When Jack eventually exchanges shoes with Joey, he meditates on the cost of the transaction. Jack reports, “in reality, a few months later I threw away his shoes in the ashcan back home because I felt they had brought me bad luck and wishing I’d kept my blue sneakers with the little holes in the toes!” (Kerouac Sur 73-4). For Jack, the fancy shoes—handmade leather and ‘snazzy,’ are a symbol of middle-class status that he is uncomfortable enacting. Jack is caught between the hobo’s canvas sneakers with the hole and the bohemian’s pale leather and untooled shoes, though neither fit comfortably nor offers him a secure identity. Despite aspiring toward nakedness to avoid the “poor protective devices” of clothing, Kerouac shows Jack’s continuation of class-performative appeals to an audience. Jack’s gesture toward the audience—the only witness to him throwing the shoes away—acknowledges that he prefers his well-worn and canvas hiking shoes in order to mask the appearances of middle-class privilege. Ironically, Jack’s privileged act of throwing the shoes away instills the very appearances he aims to avoid, making the expensive shoes casually disposable. Jack’s loss of the canvas shoes, tight fitting and full of holes, suggests a failure in working-class drag to provide a secure appearance. The social protection of Jack’s one time hobo fantasy of privileged self-fashioning now betrays him, becoming prescriptive and limiting.

Kerouac highlights that Jack must meet the challenge of accommodating—not creating—an identity that has already been fictitiously constructed, and made famous and notorious by an audience that holds him accountable. With all eyes on him, Jack’s self-fashionings become futile and allow Kerouac to lament that fame
disrupts the free construction of an identity (or identities, as the road provided). Jack’s audience recognizes him at inopportune times and inhibits his ability to break away from the act of hobo-hemian practice to uncover—or recover—an authentic self. Since Jack’s readers see him as a successful cultural insider, he must stress his outsider status and alienation. “Since the publication of ‘Road’ the book that ‘made me famous,’” Jack reports being hounded by fans at all hours of the night, like “the time the reporter ran upstairs to my bedroom as I sat there in my pajamas trying to write down a dream” (Kerouac Sur 4). Kerouac takes pains to make Jack’s situation quotidian, an intimate scene of masculine vulnerability and domesticity, wearing pajamas in the security of his bedroom while both his home and intellect are violated by fame.

The audience’s expectation of Jack’s appearance and his reality are at odds when young kids—the same ones that expect him to be hitchhiking and not riding the California Zephyr—call for Jack at his window, looking for the legend that supposedly “wears a beard” (Kerouac Sur 5). Instead, they find a much older, beardless and pajama-wearing man imprisoned by the reality of fame behind the walls of his American dream. Where class-appearances at one time served Kerouac as a creative enterprise, they now hold Jack accountable to an audience, exposing the privilege that was able to appropriate working-class identities in writing. These scenes mark not only Jack’s anxiety over middle-class exposure, but also suggest that working-class drag is less productive when the audience is uninvited. Jack’s

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49 Fred W. McDarrah’s essay “Anatomy of a Beatnik” (1960) explores the simplistic labeling of Beat appearances, arguing that the beard is the most recognizable aspect of a hipster’s appearance. McDarrah’s argument suggests that fashioning appearances is of central importance to the Beat era.
audience, who once confirmed his creative identity, have become entities of prescriptive expectation who want him to conform to his fiction.

Whereas self-fashioning once entitled a performing self to assert an appearance that stimulated creative subjectivity, Big Sur exposes that appearances become rigid and limiting social expectations. This includes the audience’s expectation for the Beat “legend” to give an animated performance which, in reality, requires Jack to impersonate himself as he self-fashioned in On the Road: a young man tramping along for experience. These repeated acts and stylizations have given Jack the appearance of substance, but as Judith Butler's work asserts, such performative acts make all gender an impersonation (xxx). Jack’s impersonation of himself, in turn, renders him a construction of artificial masculinity that relies on fantasies like the hobo mystique to give the appearance of the real. Once a productive option that proved his creative and resilient masculinity, hobohebian practice becomes an overly rigid performance of empty substance, beholden to social recognition and audience expectation.

This expectation results in Jack’s impersonation of himself, “[m]e drunk practically all the time to put on a jovial cap to keep up with all this” (Kerouac Sur 5). Jack’s method of coping uses the ‘jovial cap’ as a representative of an appearance that is distinctly different from the reality. Jack uses the jovial cap—as a clothing item and an emotional state—to cover his lack of control as a famous figure, both of himself and his drinking. Unable to be Jack or Sal, Kerouac reiterates that working-class drag no longer allows for successful self-fashioning. For instance, when Jack
arrives at City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco he is recognized “even tho [he] was wearing [his] disguise-like fisherman’s hat and fishermen coat and pants waterproof” (Kerouac Sur 3). Attempting to mask his bohemian credentials at his publisher’s store with working-class garb, Jack fails to fashion himself a real disguise. The fisherman’s garb, instead, becomes a non-critical example of Sal’s Mill City police wear, failing to provide Jack a white male fantasy of controlled identity. The garb reveals Jack, and he again adheres to his audience’s demand to get “roaring drunk” (Kerouac Sur 3). Kerouac renders Jack captive to these failed disguises, suggesting his loss of improvisational control and any chance at sobriety.

Kerouac constructs Jack’s attempt at disguise to mark his contentious response to recognition by an audience. These episodes often use the language of clothing to address the performative quality of appearances. For instance, while getting ready for a reading in Burbank, Jack is asked to attend to a “dress rehearsal,” which he finds contemptible (Kerouac Sur 24). So he sits “on the dunce’s stool and refuse[s] to read a word or open [his] mouth” (Kerouac Sur 24). Interested only in the “tone of [his] voice,” the dress rehearsal treats Jack and his creative work as an act, a verbal role to be switched on and off with immediacy. Kerouac’s reference to this scene as a ‘dress rehearsal,’ despite its performative call for bodily presence, calls attention to the way that an audience that once validated his identity now forecloses his ability for improvisational and authentic creation. Wanting to hear his voice but not his words, the audience makes Jack reluctant to read a word or open his mouth, quieting his self-fashioning ability.
Once a performing self and a ‘hobo of sorts,’ Kerouac’s *Big Sur* commands a retrospective look on his career-long fantasy of white masculinity as a challenge to individualized opportunity, rather than creative proliferation through the hobo narrative. Kerouac’s novels suggest that working-class drag, an embodied technique of hobohemian practice, cannot earn narrative credibility in composition because of the impossibility of representation. Kerouac’s use of the sartorial initiates a distinct shift in his pre-and-post *Road* identity, his narrators once using the verbal appeals of class performativity as a productive technique, only later to find it a limited and rigid prescription of fame. Kerouac’s hobohemian novels suggest that cross-class affiliation and appropriation can become a dangerous strategy of capitalist consumption, a concerning realization for the Beat generation. In this way, class performativity is not only the resourcing of already subordinated groups for power, but also stages countercultural affiliations for mass cultural appeal to an audience. These strategies market the hobo and the bohemian self so well that they become a narrative product rather than a form of subjective expression. Commodification of the hobohemian self is clear in the remaining chapters on Hunter S. Thompson and Charles Bukowski, who offer ways that hobohemian practice can be a productive manipulation of the hobo narrative while also substantiating the self-destructive risks Kerouac presents in his novels.
Chapter Three: The Cultural Work of Hunter S. Thompson’s Strange and Terrible Sagas

Hunter S. Thompson’s iterations of the hobo narrative rely on depictions of work and working-class people through hybrid-genres of American fiction, non-fiction and journalism. Like Kerouac, Thompson’s written work flaunts the cultural power and flexibility of the hobo mystique, which offers him a focused but fluid ability to dislocate hierarchies of subjectivity in both content and compositional technique. In similar ways, Thompson’s subversive political commentary, cultural critique, and countercultural perspectives require the working class—including Gasoline Tramps, frontier settlers, and the Hell’s Angels—for outlaw associations. But unlike Kerouac, Thompson subordinates a diverse working-class culture from the safety and security of a professional working persona, allowing him to avoid an autobiographical crisis like *Big Sur*. This results in a working persona, which as defined by P. David Marshall’s “Persona Studies: Mapping the Proliferation of the Public Self” (2014), is a persona “designed to circulate publicly in some way; it is designed to brand the person so that others who control capital will find their portfolio the exact element they need to add to their company” (Marshall 159). Thompson’s working persona and journalistic career uses the hobo mystique to brand himself a professional writer with literary capability, which can add to the portfolio of American literature and culture.

Thompson’s “increasingly widespread publicising of the self,” not only advances New Journalism's belief that the writer is as important than the story, but
draws on the resourceful hobo-as-artist logistics of Jack London (Marshall 165; 159). Thompson’s reflexive working persona draws on the autobiographical impulse of the hobo narrative, while self-consciously performing and self-impersonating the journalist. He asserts the resiliency of his working persona through a semi-autobiographical and highly subjective sensationalist style of Gonzo journalism he made notorious. Unlike the previous chapter that traced how hobohemian practice exerted pressures on Kerouac to adhere to a fictionalized narrative persona, Thompson thrives on the narrative ambiguity and fluid voice he publicizes through hobohemian practice. In this way, Thompson constructs a highly public working persona that dictates the resourcefulness of the hobo mystique into creative pursuits of American cultural control, rendering him “a monster reincarnation of Horatio Alger ... a Man on the Move, and just sick enough to be totally confident” (Thompson Fear 204). Unlike the reflective self-destruction of Kerouac, Thompson’s hobohemian working persona functions through privileged assertions of active participation which allow him to immerses himself in the hobo mystique for the creative possibility of American literary recognition. This new, radical mode of narration reinstitutes resiliency to white masculinity duped by postwar prosperity, calling attention to both the nostalgic draw of the pre-war hobo mystique and the more contemporary renditions of it entering the Sixties and Seventies. This treatment suggests that Thompson’s handling of the hobo narrative approaches overtly postmodern technique, his ability to wield a working persona to access a “new cultural technolog[y] of expression,” granting him an ontology built on the
hobo mystique rather than an epistemology of the hobo’s economic condition (Marshall 165).50

Thompson’s overt manipulation of social and symbolic class identity displays a direct interest in stressing the calculated and constructed aspect of the hobo mystique. These strategic manipulations map developments of postmodern concern in literature as well as in the cultural shifts of the Sixties. As Marianne DeKoven’s Utopia Limited (2004) articulates, the radical “Civil Rights and Black Power movements, the New Left, antiwar and student movements, second-wave feminism and gay liberation” were “primarily, dominantly, in some ways quintessentially modern [...] and] moved into the postmodern” (DeKoven 3-4). Thompson’s use of the hobo mystique is indicative of this shift, providing the “full realization and extension of popular, egalitarian, subjectivist trajectories of the modern,” while at the same time challenging “the totalizing, utopian master narratives” of modernity (DeKoven 8-9). I envision the hobo mystique as a utopian master narrative since it is built upon the white, male fantasy of the hobo as an ever-mobile and independent figure in the greater Western landscape of the United States. Like in Steinbeck, this fantasy may take on popular and egalitarian tones. And though these tones break down in Kerouac and expose an inability for master narrative coherence, they continue to appear as a distinct ordering principal in twentieth-century male experience.

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50 In “From Modernist to Postmodernist Fiction” (1987) Brian McHale argues that the move from Modernism to Postmodernism is defined by the shift from epistemological modes of knowing to ontological modes of being. I consider hobo-hemian practice a crystallization of this phenomenon, and class performativity a technique for developing ontological claims in twentieth century American literature and culture.
Thompson’s white, male fantasy calls on the working class to call attention to the above pressures and exhibit hostility toward the totalizing scope of utopian images to institute challenges to the political reality of the mid-century.

DeKoven’s postmodern perspective articulates that the hobo narrative can be read as a master narrative because it approximates highly hegemonic rags-to-riches or upwardly mobile narrative of progress for white masculinity in twentieth-century America. This is ironic, because though the hobo narrative may include episodes of upward mobility, that mobility is rarely earned through painstaking work as in the Alger-form. Thompson recognizes this generational difference, and suggests:

If Horatio Alger had been born near a field of locoweed his story might have been a lot different. He would have gone on unemployment and spent most of his time just standing around smiling at things, brushing off the protests of his friends and benefactors, saying ‘Don’t bug me, baby—you’ll never know.’ (Thompson Angels 211).

Thompson’s drugged out retelling of the Alger-driven American ideology suggests that the postwar hobo narrative serves as a postmodern subversion of rags-to-riches tropes and benefits from the cultural unconscious of productive upward mobility. Therefore, by enlisting the countercultural associations of hobohemia, Thompson draws on working-class figures like the tramp, hobo, migrant or bum who are defined by their laboring practices or refusals to work, to challenge American master narratives of productivity. In this way, postwar iterations of the hobo narrative can be seen as taking on subversive potential, such as in the embodied class performativity of Kerouac. But this subversiveness is most culturally
disruptive in Thompson’s hobo narrative, which objectifies and exploits the working class and the hobo mystique. In Thompson, the class performativity of hoboheian practice moves from a technique for populist epics like those of Steinbeck to near-anarchistic and self-serving social assertiveness in the Sixties that questions the cultural meaning and impact of the Old and the New Left.

DeKoven’s work identifies Thompson’s “author-as-narrator-as-journalist-as-character” as styled through “postmodernity’s ironic, located subjective performativity” (DeKoven 91; 95). As a postmodern performer, Thompson’s working persona uses hoboheian practice as a method to achieve subjective performativity across class lines, advancing a “highly complex, multiple, self-reflexive, self-conscious literary construct” based on the hobo mystique (DeKoven 91). Thompson’s use of a working persona to distribute meaning to a postmodern hobo narrative form highlights a method for securing status through literary construct. This signals Thompson’s investment in a narrative of white masculine resiliency while reinstituting a highly bourgeois subjective performativity through a critique of the hobo mystique. In this way, Thompson draws on pre-circulating master narratives familiar to American culture and transforms them for radical self-making as a professional writer. Therefore, in line with DeKoven’s identification of emergent postmodernism, I argue that Thompson uses the located, subjective performativity of class through hoboheian practice to accomplish a reflexive author-narrator position that advances the radical potential of New Journalism
within American literary markets, while evading the autobiographical complications of the hobo narrative of earlier decades.

The emergent postmodernism of Thompson’s working persona is clear in the biker-gang exposé, *Hell’s Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga* (1966), as well as in his critique of the hobo mystique in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (1971). In both texts, Thompson’s work persona gains social prominence by manipulating working-class identities and stories from a historically specific position of white masculinity that claims cultural relevance. Thompson’s hobohemian practice becomes a radical method of composition that creates opportunities for self-glorification through New Journalism’s subjective participation. In these texts, working-class identity, represented through a pre-circulating hobo mystique, becomes a resource of creative expression, an entrepreneurial strategy, and a subversive aesthetic that asserts Thompson’s professional status and cultural prowess.

**Hell’s Angels and the Work of Representation**

American journalism has demonstrated long-standing interest in the under- or working class. As critic Thomas Newhouse points out, many of the predecessors of New Journalism can be traced to respected turn-of-the-century progressive texts, which emphasized the practice of “slumming” in the literary modes of realism and naturalism in order to stimulate social change (121). These episodes often featured upper-to-middle class characters that visited or lived in lower-class locations in
order to gather knowledge and provide authentic representations of marginal worlds. The productiveness of class-crossing literary performances such as slumming becomes foundational in Tom Wolfe’s call for New Journalists to disrupt the literary class hierarchy that ranks journalists as hardly noticeable members of the lower class, only above the “so-called free-lance writers,” or “lumpenproles” (“American Novel” 153). Unwilling to be subordinate to novelists, Wolfe calls on New Journalists to “take[e] on all of these [class] roles at the same time [...] ignoring literary class lines that have been almost a century in the making” (“American Novel” 153).51

As a journalist, cultural critic, and novelist, Wolfe locates flexible creative positions like Jack London’s hobo-as-artist. These positions are able to manipulate socially stratified situations to express their capacity for creativity. Wolfe calls on a capitalist hierarchy to interrogate the publishing practices of his time, envisioning class crossing as an opening of cultural access and wealth redistribution. However, this democratization of the literary market is not about increasing the visibility of subordinated voices. Rather, it serves to allow the words of certain people, specifically the white, male counterculture,52 to earn validation as new cultural players on the scene.

51 (Forsberg 89)
52 Such as the Merry Pranksters whom Wolfe writes about in The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test (1968). The Merry Pranksters were a rag-tag team of countercultural personalities that challenged the status-quo during their psychedelic road trip in a school bus across America. Membership of the group varies, but significantly includes novelist Ken Kesey and Neal Cassady (Dean Moriarty from Kerouac’s On the Road). Wolfe’s depiction of the Merry Pranksters also includes interactions with the Hell’s Angels, which according to Alex Gibney’s documentary Gonzo: The Life and Work of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson (2008), were drawn from Hunter S. Thompson’s notes and audio recordings.
The fluid positionality of writers who engage with slumming and class crossing suggests a privileged position within the culture industry. An examination of these privileged positions benefits from Richard A. Peterson and Roger M. Kern’s formulation of the “cultural omnivore,” a postmodern figure who does not consume “everything indiscriminately” in culture, but “[r]ather ... signifies an openness to appreciating everything” (904). A cultural omnivore is able to accumulate the kind of cultural capital that Pierre Bourdieu establishes in Distinction (1986): to identify and participate in cultural practices that have value. Thompson’s work shows the ability to appreciate and participate in a variety of cultural institutions. However, this access requires him to construct an effective working persona dependent on a multitude of marketable narratives, especially those that elicit tension between middle-class and working-class identities.53

Hell’s Angels is the text that secures Thompson’s writing career and his working persona as cultural critic. First published in 1965 as “The Motorcycle Gangs: Losers and Outsiders” for Carey McWilliams at The Nation, the commissioned project documents Thompson’s year-long association with the northern California motorcycle gang in photographs and writing.54 Thompson emphasizes the working-class nature of the gang in order to capture the Angels’ menacing reputation and to mobilize the cultural value of that reputation by marketing it to the mainstream. He fully inhabits his role as a cultural omnivore able

53 (Forsberg 89)
54 The Nation is an American magazine known for its liberal-minded politics and critique. During his time as editor, McWilliams is credited with bringing the countercultural politics of the mid-twentieth century to a mainstream audience.
to turn fraught debates of representation into self-serving capital. By transforming cultural capital into symbolic capital in legitimized, highly circulated books and articles, Thompson and other New Journalists provide evidence that omnivory is, as Beverly Skeggs suggests, not only a “privilege restricted to the middle-classes” (Formations 125), but a method for the middle classes to “re-fashion and re-tool themselves” (Formations 144). Although he is perceived as a low-level practitioner of non-fiction and a creative transgressor of the class hierarchy, Thompson’s narrative production and public performance as a New Journalist establishes a work persona that uses class identity to “re-tool” his status. And while his cultural omnivory may fashion a sense of control as a professional, it also reveals Thompson to be "an asset-acquiring self, obsessed with increasing the volume of [his] cultural capital" (Skeggs Self 75).55

This constructs the cultural omnivore not as a postmodern hobo, but rather an advanced form of hoboheian practice that readily accumulates capital from cross-class affiliations in service of the product of the self, not just the narrative. At this stage of hoboheian practice, the self becomes a product as readily circulated as the narrative. Though Kerouac’s compositions similarly make cross-class associations a resource for self-making, Thompson benefits from a publicized working persona that does more than perform for an audience. This process is a dangerous feat for someone like Kerouac, while Thompson and the hoboheian practitioners who follow him in this dissertation learn to control the impact of this

55 (Forsberg 89-90)
marketization. This requires Thompson to use his omnoruavity to locate value in a pre-circulating hobo mystique and strategically manipulate its subjective performativity to express mid-to-late twentieth century status. Thus, Thompson’s omnoruavity allows him to enter new cultural territory through a commodification of the old, western, masculine mode of control based on the cultural capital of a hobo mystique.

The politics of representation and reputation are a central focus in the critical treatment of Thompson’s early work. Best encapsulated by the *International Journal of Motorcycle Studies*’ commemoration of the 40th anniversary of *Hell’s Angels* in 2005, the issue includes essays that overwhelmingly claim that Thompson lacked the authority to represent the bike gang and to influence cultural opinion. Ultimately concerned with an accurate representation of motorcycle culture and with the laws that stemmed from field reports about the motorcycle clubs, the *IJMS* critics find Thompson an ill-equipped sensationalist more interested in promoting his writing than providing a truthful impression of the club. For instance, Gary L. Kieffner’s “Myth, Reality, and Revenge in Hunter S. Thompson’s *Hell’s Angels*” concerns itself not only with Thompson’s skewed, outsider representations of the Angels, but also with his clear bias against them. Similarly, Barbara Joans’ “GLIB WITH GUTS AND GORE: I Come to Bury HT, Not Praise Him: The Legend of Hunter Thompson,” details the masculine command Thompson enacts in his depiction of the motorcycle club, which results in the development of cultural currency and celebrity despite his inadequate methods and perspectives. Both Kieffner and Jones
suggest that Thompson’s relationship to the Hell’s Angels was troubled but productive, and that this tenuous connection “made” him as a writing professional and public persona.\textsuperscript{56}

Thompson is emblematic of the powerful command of class performance that New Journalists needed to enact to strengthen their own worker-writer personas. By staging social transgressions, Thompson is able to secure productive countercultural access through associations with the Hell’s Angels. As a working-class community, the Hell’s Angels provide Thompson the content that asserts his position as a “pro.” The Angels also provide Thompson cultural material that secures his culturally omnivorous position. In order to turn these elements into creative New Journalism, Thompson strategically stresses three things: the gang’s working-class history and frontier connections, his outsider status and non-membership to the gang, and the capriciousness of celebrity.\textsuperscript{57}

As a cultural omnivore, Thompson is able to connect the working-class identity of the Angels with a frontier mythos of mobile communities (e.g. hobos, gypsies). This pairing provides Thompson with a grand historical trajectory that corroborates the authority of his chosen profession, and the command of his cultural position. Since mobility is significant both to the Hell’s Angels and to Thompson’s ability to capture the story, his description of the Angels’ “gypsy style of life” (\textit{Angels} 150) suggests the cultural value of a mobile, outlaw community. Thompson stresses the group mythos more than the individual members of the gang.

\textsuperscript{56} (Forsberg 90)
\textsuperscript{57} (Forsberg 90)
in order to connect disenfranchised working-class men to a collective reassertion of turn-of-the-century masculinity rooted in railroads and the frontier.\textsuperscript{58} In doing so, Thompson controls a familiar cultural narrative, providing validation and legitimacy to his choice of subject matter. For Thompson, this pairing ultimately demonstrates that despite the Hell’s Angels low social standing, they possess a highly mobile mystique that he can put in service of his own career.\textsuperscript{59}

To make this mystique appeal to his readers, Thompson connects the Angels to the visible iconography of the Westward promise of expansion, and to populist-era settlements in California. He explains: “It is easy enough to trace the Hell’s Angel’s mystique—and even their name and their emblems—back to World War II and Hollywood. But their genes and real history go back a lot further” (Thompson Angels 153). Thompson provides a historical evolution of working-class identity throughout the twentieth century, but one that stresses a nostalgic fascination with familiar and marketable emblems and names, rather than the material reality of nineteenth century frontier-era settlements in California. Thompson connects the Angels to the “rebirth” of California—strategically drawing on the iconic and popularized image of the Dust Bowl and its dispossessed migrant population—in order to stress the almost-mythical (re)settlement of nomadic laborers. Connecting the working-class past to the conditions of labor reform heroes and rail-riding troubadours like Woody Guthrie, who, in “1937 [...] expressed the frustrated

\textsuperscript{58} For a more comprehensive discussion of the frontier, see Richard Slotkin’s influential Gunfighter Nation, which suggests that the frontier myths and myths of masculinity are concomitant in American cultural development.

\textsuperscript{59} (Forsberg 90)
sentiments of more than a million Okies, Arkies and hillbillies who made a long trek to the Golden State," Thompson links the Angels to an idealized working-class sentimentality in order to assert his command over certain cultural and political aspects of the historical American landscape (Angels 153).  

By approaching the Angels as “a kind of half-breed anachronism, a human hangover from the era of the Wild West” but “in other ways [...] as new as television,” Thompson establishes the gang as a group of exploited American workers displaced by history (Angels 66-7). This allows Thompson to use his working persona to appeal to his audience, but also redistribute the cultural currency and productivity of historically outsider and underdog positions. These roots allow Thompson to connect the Angels to a mobile group of working men in the West called the Linkhorns, whose interactions with mainstream society compromised their masculine character and become symbolic of the decline of the West. As a group made notable in the novels of Nelson Algren, Thompson defines Linkhorns as men who made “[d]rifting [...] a habit [...]. They kept driving west, chasing jobs, rumors, homestead grabs or the luck of some front-running kin” (Angels 154). Importantly, Linkhorns were buying into the American Dream by the middle of the twentieth century: “participating in the money economy; they owned decent car, and even houses” (Angels 154-5). But Thompson points out that other Linkhorns expressed discomfort with middle-class ideologies of upward mobility, and “broke down under the strain of respectability and answered the call of their

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60 (Forsberg 91)
genes” to remain mobile and outside the status quo (Angels 154-5). This abbreviated twentieth-century genealogy marks a developing class divide spanning from the Depression to postwar prosperity, especially in California. In this context, Thompson selects a variety of working-class positions in history and acts as a bricoleur to establish a central thread of dispossession and rebellion against the emasculating and exploitative effects of middle-class or bourgeois life. These associations emphasize the mythos of the Angels as quintessential outsiders who attempt to assert, maintain, and stabilize their masculinity under capitalist domination, an appeal that struck close to home for Thompson and other New Journalists.61 This reflexive working persona suggests the postmodern performativity of hoboheian practices as it evades classification in order to produce status gains between social groups.

Despite staging a sense of the Angels’ commonality with the working class’s historically outsider position, Thompson also shows the Angels in contrast to these nostalgic and romantic versions of Americana in order to offer the Angels as a perversion of Western idealism. Indicating the Angel’s strategic difference from Steinbeck’s “Okie epic,” Thompson distinguishes himself from the working-class history he describes, and from the Angels, allowing him to assert a dominant position for his bourgeois individuality and his working persona. Although Thompson stresses his concern at “being slowly absorbed” by the Hell’s Angels, his treatment of them as those working-class men, as we shall see, indicates a strict

61 (Forsberg 91)
division between his investments and theirs (Angels 46). The success of this separation is indebted to Thompson’s ability to construe the members of the Angels as working-class Others who are an unsophisticated group in need a mediating force like Thompson to achieve meaning. Thompson’s boundary-crossing authorial position allows him to occupy a precarious, but productive position as both a part of and apart from the group. 62

Thompson often explores the nuances of the Angels community by translating their wild actions and behaviors for his readers. Taking on the mediating role of a subculture-translator, Thompson establishes symbolic control over working-class culture in order to make visible his own authoritative status. For instance, he explains that the Angels’ “swastika fetish is no more than an antisocial joke, a guaranteed gimmick to bug the squares, the taxpayers—all those they spitefully refer to as ‘citizens’” (Thompson Angels 245). Thompson stresses both the naivety of the viewpoint and the difference between the Angels and citizens as a method of distinction. This distinction continues when Thompson explains that by citizen, “[w]hat they really mean is the Middle Class, the Bourgeoisie, the Burghers—but the Angels don’t know these terms and they’re suspicious of anyone who tries to explain them” (Angels 245). Thompson’s translation of “citizen” to the political discourse of “the Middle Class, the Bourgeoisie, the Burghers” announces his own intellectualism and his position as a privileged insider to his audience. By focusing on the Angels’ limited vocabulary and hostility toward nuanced meaning,

62 (Forsberg 91)
Thompson asserts his control as writer and master of language. These translations point to the Angels’ lack of cultural capital and allow Thompson to place himself in an esteemed position as cultural arbiter. In this way, Thompson stresses his middle-class or bourgeois privilege to control not only the meaning of language, but also to legitimate working-class representations of the Angels.63

Thompson’s description of the Angels’ initiation rites corroborates his privilege to translate the nuanced meaning of the gang to an audience. Offering depictions of the Angels’ abjectness, Thompson offers hygiene as evidence of their Otherness:

Every Angel recruit comes to his initiation wearing a new pair of Levis and a matching jacket with the sleeves cut off and a spotless emblem on the back. The ceremony varies from one chapter to another but the main feature is always the defiling of the initiate’s new uniform. A bucket of dung and urine will be collected during the meeting, then poured on the newcomer’s head in a solemn baptismal. [...] These are his “originals,” to be worn every day until they rot. (Angels 45)

Stressing their filth and depravity, Thompson uses the Angels’ working-class bodies as ceremonial sites of a limited and ritualistic culture. Gesturing toward both sacrilege and the Angels as the unwashed masses, Thompson’s Othering invokes his audience’s fear of working-class “contamination.”64 Thompson’s translation of the subculture, however, provides a mediating force that evades contamination despite his proximity to report it. For Thompson, contamination would result in a subordinated status that would inhibit his ability to recognize and distribute

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63 (Forsberg 92)
64 Beverly Skeggs’s Class, Self, Culture offers a provocative discussion of how working-class bodies become part of a symbolic economy. She argues specifically “[d]irt and waste, sexuality and contagion, danger and disorder, degeneracy and pathology, became the moral evaluations by which the working-class were coded and became known and are still reproduced today” (4).
cultural capital; therefore, strictly distinguishing working-class bodies from his own becomes an important focus in his writing.65

Thompson’s desire to distinguish himself from the working class bodies of the Hell’s Angels can be understood through the work of Michael Kimmel, which suggests that masculinity is not “a drive for domination” but rather an expression of the “fear of others dominating” the male body (4). Since Thompson separates himself from the Angels to indicate his control over the situation, it is clear that working-class contamination is a threat of potential of domination. Thompson’s attention to the abject male body not only pathologizes the working class, but also suggests his own homophobic fear of domination. Thompson’s working persona must maintain authorial control to dominate men through representation. But at the same time, Thompson’s mode of reporting also places him at risk of domination as a participating subject. This relationship suggests that Thompson’s masculine control is constructed by the figures that necessarily endanger it. This offers a reading of Thompson that defines homophobia as a circular and cyclical process between the drive for domination and the fear of domination. This important aspect of masculine identification is what cultural omnivores like Thompson attempt to negotiate through hoboheian practice, using class as a substitute for gender.

Thompson’s fear of contamination also motivates his physical interactions with the Angels and his desire to emphasize his own individuality. This is particularly apparent in the second half of his text which focuses on the Angel’s

65 (Forsberg 92)
Independence Day ride to Bass Lake, just south of Yosemite National Park.

Beginning his journey at the Bay Bridge, Thompson emphasizes that he drives to the lake in a car instead of riding his own motorcycle with the Angels. Expressing himself through this iconic symbol of middle-class American life, Thompson’s observation of the gang from his isolated and self-contained car at the toll plaza is indicative of the physical separation required to maintain a cultural and class distinction from the Angels:

[W]hen I got to the toll plaza at the Oakland end of the bridge I asked the gatekeeper if any Hell’s Angels had passed through before me. ‘The dirty sonsabitches are right over there,’ he said with a wave of his hand. I didn’t know what he was talking about until some two hundred yards past the gate, when I suddenly passed a large cluster of people and motorcycles grouped around a gray pickup truck with a swastika painted on the side. They seemed to materialize out of the fog, and the sight was having a bad effect on traffic. [...] This stretch is hazardous on a clear afternoon, but in the fog of a holiday morning and with a Dread Spectacle suddenly looming beside the road the scramble was worse than usual. (Angels 111)

Aligning himself with the perspective of other drivers and the gatekeeper,

Thompson becomes a middle-class “citizen” with a wary critical view of the Angels and their “Dread Spectacle.” Thompson connects his working persona to a concerned and affected driving public who have been alerted and warned of the Angels’ ride by radio bulletins, further stressing the Angel’s menacing impact on the social and cultural geography of California. This scene, in turn, establishes Thompson as an important mediating force between the “looming” danger of the Angels and the orderly plaza and technological advancement of the bridge.66

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66 (Forsberg 92-3)
Thompson’s vehicular position en route to Bass Lake similarly reiterates his separation from the “human zoo on wheels” (Angels 113). The car provides not only a degree of security, but additional mobility for Thompson because he can more easily take alternative routes to avoid the roadblocks put up by law enforcement to control the Angels’ access to small towns. Thompson flaunts his all-terrain and omnivorous access as a car-going member of the middle-class: “According to the map, the last twenty miles appeared to be a gravel goat track [...] I swung left at Merced and floored it for a long roller-coaster-run throughout the foothills. Only two of the outlaws, both strays, made the mistake of taking the same route” (Angels 121). Thompson’s leisurely “roller-coaster-run” on the “goat track” becomes a dangerous route for the “stray” motorcyclists, who are dehumanized in the face of Thompson’s middle-class privilege. Moments like these emphasize Thompson’s ongoing negotiation of a work persona that allows him to be close enough to capitalize on cultural events, but also distant enough so as not to lose the privilege of a cultural omnivore’s accumulative potential.67

Thompson’s arrival at Bass Lake is integral to the success of the Angel’s weekend event. As the driver of the car, Thompson’s middle-class privilege becomes the Angels’ lifeline against the police-dictated recreation area designated for them. This rural campsite has no supplies and, most importantly, no beer. As a car-going non-Angel, Thompson stresses his mediating capability and civic duty, able to code-switch between the Angel’s camp, and the fearful but curious townspeople. Outside

67 (Forsberg 93)
of the gaze of the law by disaffiliation, Thompson is permitted to head into town twice for beer runs. Thompson is secured and celebrated by his choice to drive to Bass Lake and is, simultaneously, able to assert and perform his separate status. Thompson’s car reinforces the superiority of middle-class Americana, serving as both a symbolic “peace offering” purchasing his entry into the camp, and a secure sleeping place and ground-level observation deck for ensuing late-night rough-and-tumble behavior.68

THOMPSON AND TRANSPARENCY

Thompson’s reports of parties like those at Bass Lake become part of the Angels’ reputation in popular culture. Thompson is comfortable with the developing celebrity status of the Angels when it is credited to his New Journalistic work, but when other magazines and newspapers begin to take interest in the Angels—and more importantly, when the Angels themselves begin to see the potential of being paid for their appearances—Thompson is quick to discredit the gang. Speaking of this shift, Thompson describes the Angels at first as “something original,” only to become a “mystique [...] stretched so thin that it finally became transparent” (Angels 254). No longer an original story, Thompson has to put a new spin on the working-class roughness he had been reporting. Thompson self-servingly begins to discuss how the Angels’ celebrity—in part created by Thompson himself—has made the Angels media-hungry and attention-starved individuals who now had

68 (Forsberg 93)
confirmation that “they were rare, fascinating creatures” (Angels 57). As the Angels “become a factor to be reckoned with in the social, intellectual and political life of Northern California,” their independent visibility and popularity at “half-bohemian parties” and within the media triggers Thompson’s need to shift focus to maintain his own credibility (Angels 226). Thompson claims, “the Angels were far more impressed with the quantity of such coverage than the quality. Its total effect on them was considerable [...] They were bona-fide celebrities, with no worlds left to conquer. Their only gripe was that they weren’t getting rich” (Angels 42). For Thompson, like most cultural omnivores, celebrity is a by-product of bourgeois individuality, and is as such sanctioned only for those who have accumulated multiple avenues of cultural access and acclaim. Pitching the media-hungry acts of the Angels and their “giant masquerade” for attention, Thompson begins to depict the Angels as a spectacle, as dark outlines in the fog of the Bay Bridge, never fully detailed or truly valuable without his keen perspective (Angels 114).

A conversation at Bass Lake exemplifies the tensions over representation, when Oakland chapter founder, Sonny Barger, inquires about Thompson's work. Suddenly held accountable for his previous article about the Angels in The Nation, Thompson claims: “I had written the piece with the idea that I would never again have any contact with the motorcycle outlaws, whom I’d referred to as ‘losers,’ ‘ignorant thugs’ and ‘mean hoodlums’” (Angels 139). Growing self-conscious in his precarious status as cultural arbiter, Thompson calls attention to the dread and

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69 (Forsberg 93-4)
volatility of having to “explain [ ...himself] while surrounded by a remote Sierra campsite by two hundred boozing outlaws (Angels 139). Forced to account for his past representations of the Angels and his current book project on them, Thompson’s interaction with Barger focuses on the gang’s sensationalist treatment by the press. Barger tells Thompson, “Well, we don’t ask for nothin but the truth. Like I said, there’s not much good you can write about us, but I don’t see where that gives people the right to just make up stuff...all this bullshit, hell, ain’t the truth bad enough for em?” (Angels 139). This exchange indicates not only the Angels’ growing dissatisfaction with journalists like Thompson, but also the inherent danger for Thompson to be held accountable for his representations. Rather than serve as a reminder of his ethical obligations as a journalist, Barger’s mild-mannered conversation is depicted as a moment for Thompson to consider his safety.

Offering a moment that is self-aware of his manipulation of the Angels, Thompson’s interactions with Barger indicate that the Angels—and by proxy the working class—have the ability to fight back against their exploitation. Because he is interested in controlling his own representation, Barger threatens Thompson’s use the gang for his own self-serving projects. Within this dissertation, Barger offers the only indication of working-class reproach, eager to throw off the yoke that Thompson has placed on them. This alters Thompson’s ability to resource the working class for his own professional aspirations. This results in Thompson recalibrating his position in a postscript that renders Barger’s confrontation as a creative possibility for Thompson to reinstitute dominance by getting the last word.
Thompson uses this conversation with Barger to set up the scene of his infamous stomping by the Angels. In a footnote, Thompson addresses his conversation with Barger, interjecting that the Angels later “decided that truth was not enough. There would have to be money too. This created tension, which blossomed into resentment and finally violence” (Angels 139). To prove this development, Thompson ends his book with a postscript that details that he was beaten within an inch of his life: “On Labor Day 1966, I pushed my luck a little too far and got badly stomped by four or five Angels who seemed to feel I was taking advantage of them. A minor disagreement suddenly became very serious” (Angels 272). Thompson acknowledges his advantageous position as one of “luck,” best defined by his ability to access the gang’s inner circle despite his outsider status.

With the violent “truth” of the Hell’s Angels imprinted upon his body, Thompson is able to offer himself as evidence in conjunction with the report. This stomping not only authenticates his insider-outsider work persona, but also garners interest and sympathy for the man who lived to tell the tale. Thompson establishes

70 William McKeen’s Outlaw Journalist: The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson provides a comprehensive series of events regarding Thompson’s violent attack by the Hell’s Angels. In his chapter “Among the Angels,” McKeen stresses that Thompson’s postscript describing the Bay Area stomping on Labor Day in 1966 becomes an immediate marketing technique for both Thompson’s reputation and professional writing. McKeen highlights the way interviewers and book reviewers clamored over the stomping, generating excitement that made Hell’s Angels a best seller in 1967. This turned Thompson into a well-known name featured on news shows, game shows, and in large-circulation periodicals.

71 (Forsberg 94)

72 In 1967, a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) talk show set Thompson up to be confronted by Hell’s Angel, Skip Workman, who participated in the stomping. Workman rides his motorcycle into the studio and confronts Thompson in front of an audience. Thompson is visibly fearful as the Workman retells what really happened when Thompson got stomped, indicating he was “mouthing off” and inserting himself unnecessarily into a situation of domestic violence. Workman points out: “he’s sitting here and making a million dollars and he made it off of us” (CBC Archive). In terms of
himself not only as rogue journalist and professional writer, but also as celebrity in
the literary marketplace and a cultural figure of notoriety and acclaim. When
Thompson tells the tale of his stomping, he draws on the New Journalist’s—and the
cultural omnivore’s—ability to transgress class-based space and power relations,
advancing the self even against brute bodily force:

> It had been a bad trip [...] fast and wild in some moments, slow and dirty in
others, but on balance it looked like a bummer. On my way back to San
Francisco, I tried to compose a fitting epitaph. I wanted something original, but
there was no escaping the echo of Mistah Kurtz’ final words from the heart of
darkness: ‘The horror! The horror! [...] Exterminate all the brutes!’ (Angels
273)

Thompson calls attention to his position as cultural arbiter, invoking not only a
neutral-like ability to avoid “going native,” but also the acclaim of narrating a tale of
survival.73 Despite his desire for “something original” to say, Thompson’s cultural
expertise invites alternative forms of representation in the Conradian allusion, and
offers it as an emblematic, complex cultural “echo” that secures the position of
cultural omnivore.74

Yet, while instituting an allusion for his cultural prowess, Thompson also
exposes his exploitative relationship with the Angels. For example, Thompson’s use
of Heart of Darkness (1902) purposely references Kurtz as “Mistah Kurtz” to

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73 In many ways, Thompson exemplifies the kind of strategic victimization Sally Robinson maps in
Marked Men. Robinson argues that “Middle American” white men in the mid-century must respond
to a social lack of control due to the multiple liberationist projects which side-line their identity.
White masculinity, in turn, learns to mark itself as victim in order to reassert and realign patriarchal
practices that reward male domination. The Hell’s Angels can also be seen as taking part in this
practice in the above claim of Thompson’s exploitation.

74 (Forsberg 94-5)
ventriloquize the vernacular of native men who have been colonized by men like Kurtz. This calls attention to Thompson’s privilege as a culturally omnivorous narrator, whose representation of victimhood indicts him, as Barger did, as a figure that places colonial pressures onto the Angels. Thus, when Thompson mis-cites Kurtz’s “final words” with his private journal entry of “Exterminate all the brutes,” he calls attention to the social accountability of writing as he escapes from the jungle of the Angels’ Oakland back to civilized San Francisco. Thompson emphasizes Kurtz rather than the narrator Marlow to echo the final words as a participant, rather than a reporter. Marlow’s invisibility in Thompson’s rendition of Heart of Darkness removes the original role of the narrator and allows only the story to circulate, giving opportunity to Thompson himself to present certain truths, manipulated stories and strategic versions.

In this final moment, Thompson uses both highbrow literature and brute violence to productively and profitably resource the underclass.\textsuperscript{75} As a pivot point in DeKoven’s theorization of emergent postmodernism, Thompson’s omnivorous working persona draws on the working-class base of the hobo mystique as comparable to the brute colonial violence of a high-literary allusion. This hoboheinian move allows Thompson to exhibit his capacity for both class performativity and cultural omniorvacity, both of which rely on the power of master narratives to stage subjective and subversive performative opportunities for New Journalist work in literary markets.

\textsuperscript{75} (Forsberg 95)
LOATHING THE PROFESSION

This performative tendency is clear in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, where Thompson puts pressure on road-centric American writing that utilizes the hobo mystique. Thompson’s depiction of working persona and narrator Raoul Duke expresses the power of a New Journalist persona to construct the new authorized space of cultural omnornacity on the road, critiquing and reinvigorating literary tendencies that use spatial mobility as a compositional practice. Yet, like in *Hell’s Angels*, Thompson’s novel relies on the white masculine modes of the hobo mystique for access despite a self-aware and critical attitude toward it. Published in two-parts by *Rolling Stone Magazine* in 1971, *Fear and Loathing* becomes a popular platform for Thompson, the motorcycle-savvy Gonzo journalist, who has already garnered associations with the nostalgic road narrative, the hobo mystique and working-class gangs. The cover image of part one on November 11, 1971 depicts narrator Duke on a red, white, and blue motorcycle wearing a gas mask that both hides and calls attention to his national identity. This image implies Thompson’s reputation with the *Hell’s Angels*, and capitalizes on Hollywood’s fascination with male, countercultural rebellion in films like *The Wild One* (1953) and *Easy Rider* (1969). Thompson exposes and reconstructs these productive outsider roles of the hobo mystique to solidify opportunities for white, masculine self-making on the

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76 The second cover and conclusion was released on November 25, 1971. Ralph Steadman’s cover is a grotesque caricature of Duke injecting drugs in painful agony, and his Samoan lawyer consuming a woman in the throes of both passion and hunger. The dualities of the covers show the ongoing split in readership to date, some seeing Thompson as the documentarian of a crumbling American dream on the road, and others emphasizing the drug-riddled freedoms of the sixties. The novel, ultimately, argues that both attempts to explain the mid-century are lost by the fast-changes in politics and economy by the start of the seventies.
road but with a difference that attends to the historical and political climate of the time.

Thompson equates the hobo mystique to “A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream,” a subtitle that issues Duke’s ability to mobilize romantic forms of working-class identity at the core of the novel. By emphasizing the journeys of tramps, hobos, migrants and bums ranging from John Steinbeck to Jack Kerouac, Duke commands presence and centrality in his drive from Las Angeles to Las Vegas and deploys self-making tropes related to hoboing and rail-riding. Thompson allocates these tropes as productive means for literary work, depicting Duke’s working persona and journalistic reportage as conquering the American landscape and redistributing the value of the hobo mystique in the cultural marketplace.

Thompson’s relationship with the mystique is less straightforward than others in this dissertation, issuing a distinct attempt to designate his road novel as an expression of his omnivoracity. To do so, Thompson must play with the conventions of the hobo narrative and recirculate the hobo mystique as another institution that has been devoid of its power, “burned out and long gone from the brutish realities of this foul year of Our Lord, 1971” (Thompson Fear 23). Drawing on the political realities of both Nixon and the Vietnam war, Thompson reissues the promise of the hobo mystique and frontier-era mobility by turning Duke’s journey from West (Los Angeles) to East (Las Vegas). This subverts the cultural expectation and the cultural (un)conscious of Westward expansion captured in Steinbeck and Kerouac, turning American exceptionalism inward. Duke leaves California for
Nevada’s “womb of the desert sun,” issuing productive possibility in the displacement of the western mental geography that informs the hobo mystique (Fear 12). In this travel Duke is portrayed as a passenger in “the Caddy,” which rides “across the desert [...] like rolling through midnight on the old California Zephyr” (Thompson Fear 105). Indicating his nostalgia for the Zephyr and its rail-rooted existence in the American West, Duke’s passenger position is a journey of “pure, smooth hell” that intimates and refocuses the romance of the road as a series of clichéd conventions popularly established by Kerouac (Thompson Fear 105).

Attentive to direction and transportation, Thompson’s rendition of the hobo narrative calls attention to the lack of subjective participation in American road novels, a series of authors merely documenting their personal development according to mile markers. This is readily avoided by Duke’s drug-fuelled trip, an alternative narrative and plotted trajectory from Alger—unless he had been born near that field of locoweed. Within this context, Thompson captures Duke’s general intoxication on the road, including a heroin-induced road-rage episode with a Ford from Oklahoma. Duke refers to the drivers as “Okies” to express their popularized and political history of vehicular resilience, then recklessly runs them off the road feeling in danger (152-3). Thompson uses these spectral figures and clichéd conventions to explore how the American Dream has transformed on the roads in the West. But these roads also institute Duke’s difference from the novels that travel east to west by rail or “huge cars” with which “old Americans go out to the highway and drive themselves to death ” (Thompson Fear 18). By investing in a different
genre and method, Thompson uses Duke's road-journey—a recognizable participation in the hobo mystique—to advance his ambiguous position of journalist-made-fiction writer as socially, materially and politically different than the hobo narratives of the previous era.

Thompson celebrates the novel's conflation of fictional author, autobiographical journalist narrator and working persona to explore Las Vegas as a new site for the hobo narrative. Thompson's initiation within the hobo mystique grants a participatory performance on the road, specifically one that refuses journalism's "classical unobtrusive reporter," to celebrate New Journalism's aim "to be as visible as possible in the event [...] and to participate in it spectacularly rather than merely to observe it" (DeKoven 94). Thompson's postmodern subjective performativity uses the road as a catalyst for explaining his resilient working persona, his spatial mobility evidence of his cultural accumulation. Thompson overtly fictionalizes his working persona to call attention to the construction of his narrative voice, granting him the privilege to take part in the hobo mystique while critiquing it from an omnivorous position. Unlike Kerouac who travels for his own creative exploration, Duke drives to Las Vegas because is hired for work as a reporter. But Duke is unclear what he will report, asking, "what was the story? Nobody had bothered to say. So we would have to drum it up on our own. Free Enterprise. The American Dream. Horatio Alger gone mad on drugs in Las Vegas" (Thompson Fear 12). These highly participatory professional obligations allocate the drive as an opportunity to get high and challenge the traditional road pursuits as
an artful product of masculine self-making. Needing to make the story up like fiction, Duke becomes a performative hobo-as-artist, reproducing the buzzwords of American self-making for his own countercultural aims. This results in *Fear and Loathing* envisioning the road not a location of self-making, but a site for self-affirming an omnivorous status that can misrepresent the hobo mystique and still gain entry into the literary marketplace.

This subversive and misrepresentative edge allows Thompson to acknowledge that Duke's trip is different from those depicted by Jack London, John Steinbeck or Jack Kerouac. By reallocating the cultural capital that the hobo narrative and the hobo mystique carry, Duke challenges road experience by stressing that his trip “was a classic affirmation of everything right and true and decent in the national character. It was a gross, physical salute to the fantastic possibilities of life in this country—but only for those with true grit. And we were chock full of that” (Thompson *Fear* 18). Drawing on the hard-boiled grit of the hobo mystique, Thompson incorporates the clichéd elements of the hobo narrative from London to Kerouac whom invest their citizen masculinities in the “truth” telling road. But rather than reproduce the grit of railroads and hitchhikers by drawing on working-class configurations that grant movement and mobility to white masculinity, Thompson consolidates the mystique and caricatures its centrality in the making of American identity. This “gross, physical salute” acknowledges not the material conditions of American life, but the debasement of potential in American writing that has grown predictable and trite.
Thus, Thompson utilizes the hobo mystique to warrant criticism of American writing, most specifically the pseudo-journalistic impulses of London and Steinbeck in their fictions. This includes Kerouac, too, who employs methods that document life through observations on the road rather than constructing and experiencing the fiction of the road. Thompson uses Duke to pursue free-enterprising American experiences that can self-consciously articulate the romanticism wrapped up in the hobo mystique, the road narrative and the American writer. As a vehicle for his composition, the mystique serves as a cultural resource from which Thompson can garner power. Unlike Steinbeck or Kerouac, Thompson refuses to be caught in the trap of his own hobohemian game and offers little to no anxiety over his middle-class masculine posturing that manipulates working-class stories and the hobo mystique for cultural value.

Where Thompson does indicate anxiety is in the professional balance of observation and participation that must take part in the hobo mystique while still offering critique. For example, hobo mobility allows Duke to roam across the expanse of desert landscape, but also represents him as pinned under the legal watch of the law. Thompson’s internal contradictions include devaluing the road while valuing it, as well as it stressing omnivorous control of the self while Duke shows none. For example, Duke reveals:

The possibility of physical and mental collapse is very real now...
...but collapse is out of the question; as a solution or even a cheap alternative, it is unacceptable. Indeed. This is the moment of truth, that fine and fateful line between control and disaster—which is also the difference between staying loose and weird on the streets, or spending the next five years of summer mornings playing basketball in the yard at Carson City. (Thompson
Duke’s mental state relies on control as a way of feeling whole. Having control of oneself—whether through legal transgressions or the balancing act of late-twentieth century masculinity—is to attain bourgeois individuality and freedom. Thompson’s omnivorous investment in the narrative has Duke to maintain wholeness and control “on the streets.” This gestures toward not only the openness of the road, but an economic reference to homelessness that contrasts with the escapism of the hobo mystique and its homeless tramps, hobos and bums. Like the hobo fantasy of evading work and citizen responsibilities, Duke uses the streets to provide himself participatory mobility that draws on the hobo narrative. This hobo mobility is represented at odds with state imprisonment in “the yard at Carson City,” which limits movement and would collapse Duke’s productive reporting persona. Moments like this suggests that Thompson’s participation in the hobo mystique—whether romantic or subversive—is a necessary part of the critique because it allows the kind of mobility required of an omnivorous status.

While the hobo mystique is deemed a failed vehicle for Thompson’s professional aspirations, it is also a wholly influential cultural unconscious that directs even subversive representations. These recalibrations of the hobo mystique instate Thompson’s low-class journalist transition to an upper-class novelist. By indicating the pressure on a working persona that must mobilize performativity to survive, Thompson uses Duke as a tool for branding his public persona as New Journalist while channeling elements of American fiction. In this publicization of the
self, Thompson advances his New Journalist career through the free enterprise and Alger-like techniques of a consolidated hobo mystique. *Fear and Loathing* expresses an awareness of being apart from or different than American fiction, while at the same time, claiming a journalistic identity that also refuses to be labeled as a journalist because of its low status and limited cultural access. This productive evasion of classification provides Duke the opportunity to exercise new methods and models of cultural production through New Journalism. This also lets Duke exhibit boundary-crossing access that defines itself by compartmentalizing others:

> Journalism is not a profession or a trade. It is a cheap catch-all for fuckoffs and misfits—a false doorway to the backside of life, a filthy piss-ridden little hole nailed off by the building inspector, but just deep enough for a wino to curl up from the sidewalk and masturbate like a chimp in a zoo-cage. *(Fear 200)*

Fearful of becoming a member of the press like those he aimed to show-up in *Hell’s Angels*, Duke provides a moment of clarity about his position—and role—in the culture industry. By depicting journalism as a low-class “catch-all” for outsiders, Duke claims the profession to have “false” access to the seedy underbelly of life. Critiques like this allow Thompson to be both inside and outside of the journalist group, adhering to the job and undermining the profession all at once. Through Duke, Thompson defines journalism as limited and policed by male domination, self-stimulation, and excessive restriction. In this way, journalism is not a “profession or trade” for a man, but an institutionalized career that designates New Journalism and literary fiction as higher-status creative options. Branding, but refusing to be branded, New Journalism is depicted as motivated by an ability to evade
classification and transgress boundaries. Thompson uses Duke to claim the same privilege, taking on the roles of both omnivorous New Journalist and American novelist as a self-aware and purposeful hobohearian practitioner manipulating the literary marketplace through clichéd reworkings of the hobo mystique.

By circulating his roles as social critic and purveyor of fiction and non-fiction, Thompson gains the class access that Wolfe observes, and upon which cultural omnivores depend. By publicizing the self, Thompson produces and consumes culture to confirm his creative capacity. In addition, he reinstitutes class boundaries to provide himself an entitled status reserved for upper-class novelist. This heightened hobohearian privilege crosses conceptions of genre, style and author-status to indicate America’s profuse interest in class performativity.

As Tom Wolfe has noted, American literature has a tendency to invoke working-class associations in “terrific” biographical notes:

The author, you would be assured, was previously employed as a hod carrier (Steinbeck), a truck dispatcher (Cain), a bellboy (Wright), a Western Union boy (Saroyan), a dishwasher in a Greek restaurant in New York (Faulkner), a truck driver, logger, berry picker, spindle cleaner, crop duster, pilot [...]. There was no end to it [...]. Some novelists had whole strings of these credentials [...]. That way you knew you were getting the real goods [...]. (“Birth” 4-5)

In a cultural climate where working-class credentials make art “the real goods,” it is no surprise that figures like Hunter S. Thompson work to maintain associations with working-class identities. In challenging the profession of journalism by crossing literary class boundaries, Thompson’s professional personas are omnivorous and aim to exist at all levels at once. Yet, to cross class boundaries, Thompson’s work
must use practices that garner working-class sympathies and turn them into the
“real goods” for the literary marketplace. These practices suggest that the
subversive creative vision of New Journalism is rooted in the mobilization of class,
which allows figures like Thompson to enact a working persona that professionally
markets Others’ class position as an advantage for the construction of his own
access and creative output.77

By actively commodifying the working class—whether the Hell’s Angels, low-
level journalists, or hobo figures—Thompson’s work relies on the reproduction of a
social hierarchy to secure his own professional status and working persona.
Thompson does not use representations of the working class to create strategic
alliances that represent the material conditions for working class exploitation,
dispossessed populations, or labor disputes. Instead, he uses these representations
to perpetuate the cultural material of self-made, frontier-laden, autobiographical
narratives that have been central to American literature and its marketplace since
its inception. Incorporating journalism into a higher-status level literary market,
and distinguishing himself against the working class, Hunter S. Thompson’s work
suggests a predilection for American literature to capitalize on underclass positions
through culturally omnivorous practices. This professional status allows for the
construction of strategic personas that engage in creative and intellectual work, but
requires an association with those that physically labor to do it.78 Thompson’s use of
working-class identity marks a stage of the postwar hobo narrative that circulates

77 (Forsberg 95)
78 (Forsberg 95-6)
the hobo mystique as a self-conscious commodification of creative capacity.

Thompson is attentive to the material foundations of the hobo mystique, but cannot deny its public and popular appeal as a vehicle for postwar, countercultural critique. This specifically postwar association with the hobo mystique can also be seen in the work of Charles Bukowski in the next chapter. Like Thompson, Bukowski indicates that hobohemian practice can institute strategic literary transgressions that prove the productiveness of class co-option in a highly regimented literary market.
Chapter Four: Commodifying Skid Row: Selling Charles Bukowski and Henry Chinaski

In a 2015 article entitled “Skid Row Land Rush: Now It’s One of the Pricier Sections of L.A.,” KQED Public Media reporter Steven Cuevas asserts that measures taken by the Skid Row Housing Trust in Los Angeles have had dual impacts, both helping and hurting the homeless. Cuevas’s article makes visible the cultural and economic stakes of poverty, suggesting that the Trust has spurred a land-grab that has lured not only the Skid Row population but also gentrifying and entrepreneurial young people. The Trust’s measures aim to allocate resources for affordable housing and remedy the homeless problem of Los Angeles. However, their housing complexes like New Genesis have turned the Skid Row district into a beacon for hoboheinian practitioners because they reserve low-income housing while simultaneously “cater[ing] to the area’s more affluent newcomers” (Cuevas). These class-based tensions corroborate the dirty details of a decades-long practice of for-profit-not-for-people commercial development, what Cuevas remarks is a “shameful” practice that “stresses the system” (Cuevas). Regardless, “new denizens” of young professionals, families, and businesses are moving to downtown Los Angeles, lured by the class-based “edge” that Skid Row can provide (Cuevas).

Cuevas supports the claim of this cultural attraction by including with his report an image of an alleyway mural near the New Genesis complex. In the image, centered above a trash bin, are the celebrated likenesses of the “patron saints” of Skid Row: Tom Waits, Charles Bukowski and John Fante. This image draws on the
socioeconomic pressures of housing practices, offering Skid Row as both dire and
dangerous while at the same time productive and romantic. The cultural successes
of the ‘patron saints’ are mapped onto the revisionary potential of the blighted
neighborhood. Their working-class credentials, represented through the creative
realms of American literature and popular music, are grafted onto the promised
experience for “new denizens” of Skid Row. The mural demonstrates an ongoing
tension of class identity in American life, where poverty is rendered a creative
enterprise marking it a valuable—as in profitable—inheritance.

Like London’s hobo-as-artist, Steinbeck’s Gasoline Tramp, Kerouac’s
working-class drag, and Thompson’s omnivorous working persona, the patron
saints mural performs working-class histories and stories to construe the cultural
power of white, male creative production. This chapter explores the work of one
patron saint, Charles Bukowski, as a culmination of the opportunistic techniques
that use the tramp, hobo, migrant and bum for literary acclaim. Bukowski proves
that artists gain autonomy through the material conditions of exceptional poverty in
late-twentieth century contexts of homelessness and dispossession. His use of the
Skid Row bum enacts a working-class persona, which presents an “edge” by
distributing working-class cultural value in American literature. Bukowski’s bum
reveals a late-stage of the hobo narrative that uses hobohemian practice to
represent, claim and perform class to disrupt notions of normativity and prosperity
at the close of the American century. Bukowski’s ability to commodify Skid Row is
not unlike the young people moving to New Genesis in contemporary Skid Row: finding a home in homelessness, and an entrepreneurial opportunity within poverty.

The dynamism of Los Angeles is well articulated in *City Of Quartz* (1990), where Mike Davis examines “the contradictory impact of economic globalization upon different segments of Los Angeles society” (vi). As one of the largest and most diverse cities in the United States, Los Angeles encapsulates the narrative development of the twentieth century traced in previous chapters, identifying California as a productive location for generating the hobo narrative. Bukowski’s association with Los Angeles is well established; it is where he grew up, fostered his writing career, and with small exception set his prose and poetry. 

Bukowski’s California is a modern metropolis attentive to the socio-economic developments from the postwar to the Reagan era. Bukowski employs hobohemian practice from the context of overwhelming statistics, including that his surrounding “LA-Riverside-Orange County area has the highest percentage of families in poverty [...] of the nation’s fourteen largest metropolitan areas” (Davis xv). Despite the obvious influence on his work, Bukowski’s interest in the poverty of Los Angeles is not altruistic; it refuses to commit to political action, and even overtly claims an apolitical status in his poetry and prose.

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79 Mike Davis includes Bukowski in the ‘wino writing’ of 1940s Los Angeles (41) as well as a writer who moves toward the new ‘social realism’ of the 1970s and 1980s (87). Bukowski’s presence in Los Angeles is the topic of many fan-guides and literary tours, including: Weitzman’s *Drinking with Bukowski: Recollections of the Poet Laureate of Skid Row* (2001), Pleasants’s *Visceral Bukowski: Inside the Sniper Landscape of L.A. Writers* (2004) and Jordan’s *Bukowski’s L.A.* (2008), which locate his childhood home, adult dwellings and favorite liquor stores.
I equate Bukowski’s hoboheinian practice to what Mike Davis calls the “[m]ental geographies [that] betray class prejudice” (Davis 375). As a resident of Los Angeles, Bukowski uses the city terrain and cultural geography of the state as a primary point of creative inspiration. Yet, by issuing his bum aesthetic, he also uses poverty as a creative resource rather than a material condition. This results in Los Angeles and Skid Row as no longer defined by the economic and spatial urban boundaries like city or region, but rather by social classifications that celebrate the pop cultural success of figures like Waits, Bukowski and Fante—the creative men who ascended the class ladder. These patron saint artists stand for the romantic possibility of the dirty, devastating streets, and make it possible to ignore the reality of class for the myth it circulates about working-class histories, stories and images.

The patron saints of Skid Row are iconic for their ability to represent the area in a way that softens the realities of class prejudice, poverty and homelessness. Davis’s concept explores Bukowski’s mental geography as it redefines the value of Skid Row as a locus of creative and personal control. For Bukowski, Skid Row is a real place and a mental fiction that constitutes working-class culture and the culture of stylish poverty through hoboheinian practice. Bukowski appropriates working-class identity and homelessness for its ability to construct a self-serving bum aesthetic for his writing.80

80 Friend and biographer Neeli Cherkovski suggests the politics behind Bukowski’s stint in Skid Row are less about economics and more about creative production and the development of a “common style” (13-20).

Bukowski’s use of various working-class and/or homeless figures communicates his own rebellion and anti-authoritarian refusals of late-twentieth
century American society. By issuing a bum aesthetic, Bukowski manipulates the form of the hobo narrative within American literature. He, like the authors in previous chapters, unabashedly blends fiction and autobiography, which collapses authority and institutes little to no separation between author and his life-long narrative bum-persona Henry Chinaski. This celebration of the tramp, hobo, migrant, and Skid Row bum leaves Bukowski with a privileged position that, like Thompson’s omnivorousity, can look across contested cultural terrain and vast social stratifications. Bukowski’s hobo-hemian practice proves that working-class images can be claimed as a valuable inheritance and sold to the marketplace of ideas. For critics like Janet Zandy, this is evidence of the bourgeois use of working-class identity, not the construction of a working-class literature. Yet, Bukowski’s inclusion on lists of working-class authors persists, and is suggestive of the need for further theorization in the classification and circulation of working-class identity, to which my study aspires.

Part of Bukowski’s appeal within working-class literature is the use of a sparse writing style that Bill Buford has labeled ‘dirty realism.’ Interested in representing the “belly-side of contemporary life,” dirty realism captures quotidian existence through a minimalist ethic in the “plainest of plain styles” that revises both realist and naturalist modes (Buford). Dirty realism’s ironic “unadorned, unfurnished, low-rent tragedies” include Bukowski’s focus on working-class life as

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81 Buford establishes this definition in *Granta Magazine* (Summer 1983). See also Michael Hemmingson’s *The Dirty Realism Duo: Charles Bukowski & Raymond Carver* (2008), which does little to define the practice but uses Bukowski’s aesthetics as a foundation to judge other writers he claims are dirty realists.
caught within the dull monotony of late-capitalism (Buford). Unlike Buford’s articulation of a new fictional style in American literature, Russell Harrison connects Bukowski’s “critique of late capitalist society from a working-class point of view” as suggestive of “the kind of change that many on the left were demanding in the 1960s and 1970s” (Harrison 17). Harrison’s foundational study Against the American Dream (1994) invites Bukowski into larger conversations of the historical period in terms of content and aesthetics. Yet, by reading Bukowski as “left-ish,” Harrison tends toward an activist stance that quiets the concerns of working-class appropriation in a bum aesthetic. Though Harrison does highlight the central concern of purposeful or strategic exercises of agency in Bukowski’s work, they often approximate the same simple classifications as Working-Class Studies.

These “left-ish” readings grow more productive in later critics like Tomas Dobozy, who explores the active challenge Bukowski issues to late-capitalism. In “In the Country of Contradiction the Hypocrite is King: Defining Dirty Realism in Charles Bukowski’s Factotum” (2001), Dobozy argues that Bukowski’s relationship to capitalism is fraught, “self-consciously displaying his subjection to capital’s indeterminacy” in order to “replicate and co-opt that indeterminacy to empower himself” (Dobozy 44). Dobozy’s articulation provides a framework for my argument about the commodification of Skid Row in Bukowski’s work. However, by expanding upon Dobozy’s argument in early novels, I emphasize that Bukowski’s late-career novels Ham on Rye (1982) and Hollywood (1989) offer specific techniques of class performativity that command attention in the American literary tradition. Like his
contemporaries Kerouac and Thompson, Bukowski engages the performative possibility of the working class. His aesthetic reproduction of class identity warrants special attention because it commodifies working-class speakers and locations to attain cultural visibility as an outsider. Though this becomes a source of empowerment as Dobozy theorizes, Bukowski’s working class appropriation exceeds the subversion of a proletarian project and constructs instead a revolutionary hobo-as-artist method for self-marketing literary transgressions across class lines.

My understanding of Bukowski’s relationship with hobo co-option or working-class appropriation draws on David E. James’ “Poetry/Punk/Production: Some Postmodern Writing in L.A.” (1996) which argues that Bukowski actively self-commodifies from a specific historical and cultural moment in Los Angeles. This moment is defined by a proto-punk assertiveness that self-glorifies, engages in self-spectacle, and publically ingratiates itself for creative survival and command of the culture industry. James finds subversive potential and progressive possibility of self-cooption, indicating a source of productive play in the Bukowski/Chinaski narrative split. Not unlike Thompson’s omnivorousness in the previous chapter, Bukowski’s use of Skid Row lays claim to a late-twentieth century hobo narrative that depicts the fluid mobility of the tramp-hobo-bum for assertions of creative masculine resiliency. James’s connection of Bukowski to L.A. punk contextualizes the evolution of the hobo narrative as moving from the early twentieth-century concept of hobo-as-artist to a commodifying hobo-heimian practice of the late-twentieth century. This
exposes that working-class identity has become a refined technique that can market the freedoms of hobo identity to a new generation and cultural audience. By allocating the underclass space as his own, Bukowski exposes new urban frontiers that celebrate self-making as the open American road once did. But this hobo homelessness is more than a nostalgic deployment of hobo mystique; it serves as an overt claim of unaccountable white masculinity in the Skid Row bum.

**RAGS, RICHES AND RYE**

*Ham on Rye* (1982) is the self-aggrandizing coming-of-age of Hank Chinaski, Bukowski’s career-long narrative persona. Then novel opens in 1922 when Chinaski is two years old, but covers childhood, adolescence and young adulthood into late thirties and forties, making distinct references to World War II as well as the pressures of postwar life. Though traditional sounding, the novel manipulates the autobiographical genre through the tensions of author and narrator. This is the only literary text within my study of the hobo narrative that does not take place in the year of composition. This chronological distance makes the separation of author and narrator stressed through a forced retrospection that calls attention to narrative strategy. Using the hobo narrative’s exploration of personal freedom like Kerouac and Thompson, Bukowski shows little to no concern with public exposure. Instead, the overt narrative tone of *Ham on Rye* presents tensions between Chinaski’s

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82 By traditional I refer to the distinct literary forms of the Bildungsroman, or development novel and the Künstlerroman, or artist development novel. *Ham on Rye* collapses these forms while complicating them further by incorporating elements of a roman à clef, or fictional account of real people or events, which challenges the overall narrative structure.
humble beginnings and Bukowski’s ability to exhibit representational control of his life story. This development in hobohe­mian practice can handle the pressures of fame in addition to adolescent development, offering new forms of masculine resilience. Drawing on the poverty of the Depression like Steinbeck, Bukowski’s choice to produce Ham on Rye late in his career gestures toward a need to authenticate creative status. This move toward authentication is what Tom Wolfe would consider “the real goods” of American literary production. This stages not only Bukowski’s ability to enact a rags-to-riches trajectory through his art, but for Chinaski to provide testimony to an audience that can witness the importance of this development.

Bukowski’s bum aesthetic constructs Ham on Rye as an exploration of the generational class rupture between Chinaski’s father and himself. These depictions take on the domestic concerns of national identity and the “normative” American experience more than previous texts. Bukowski uses the flexibility of the hobo-as-artist trope to advance working-class associations that stage the dramatic effects of class performativity. Specifically, Bukowski advances a perspective of the hyper-constructedness of mid-to-late twentieth century American identity, including but not limited to pressures of class, race and gender on the American family. To these means, Chinaski’s development is often structured around the masculine influence of his father. Bukowski depicts Chinaski’s father as an abusive and volatile man who is overly concerned with social expectation and public opinion, which leaves young Chinaski belittled and beaten. This prioritization of patriarchal practices leaves
Chinaski to be defined through negation: he is not his father, he is not the kind of man his father is, and he therefore has no familial or social value. Yet, from this subordinated position, Chinaski is able to observe his father’s own powerlessness in the socio-economic situation of first quarter of the twentieth century. When Chinaski’s father enacts class performativity to communicate an image of wealth, reputation and status, Chinaski’s uses it to direct his own development.

Chinaski’s narration of self-conscious survival and social development is predicated on his family’s preoccupation with appearing middle class. These appearances are the foundation of Chinaski’s disenchantment with his father, and Bukowski’s construction of the narrative suggests that this façade is the impetus for the father’s abusive demeanor. Chinaski explains: “I was not allowed to play with other children. ‘They are bad children,’ said my father, ‘their parents are poor.’ ‘Yes,’ agreed my mother. My parents wanted to be rich so they imagined themselves rich” (Bukowski Rye 27). Envisioning poverty as a contagion, Chinaski’s parents hinder his social opportunities by perpetuating a world of class fantasy and class prejudice. Chinaski’s parents are invested in appearances to the point that they refuse physical proximity with the poor to distinguish their own separate and higher status. These appearances are most important to Chinaski’s father who feels socially obligated to perform his status role to the community at large, both at the playground and within his neighborhood. Bukowski’s parallel between the playground and the neighborhood suggests the father’s arrested development, enacting child-like games
of class fantasy. Within this context, Chinaski calls attention to his father's fantasy commitment to performing a high-class status:

My mother went to her low-paying job each morning and my father, who didn’t have a job, left each morning too. Although most of the neighbors were unemployed he didn’t want them to think he was jobless. So he got into his car each morning at the same time and drove off as if he were going to work. Then in the evening he would return at exactly the same time. (Bukowski Rye 113)

By connecting the act of work to his mother, Chinaski suggests that his father’s class-performance results in a regimented emasculation. Whereas Chinaski’s mother contributes to the financial state of the household despite less-than profitable work, Chinaski’s father communicates only the social anxiety and non-productive fantasy of American masculinity. Bukowski’s construction of the scene offers that the father’s need to advance a specific working identity impacts the father’s ability to be a part of the community as well as the family. He exists only superficially in the expression of an appearance that ignores the economic difficulty of his family for the claim of a status position. In this way, Chinaski is able to envision his father as a class-performative fool, but one more like a willing Organization Man than a comic tramp.

Chinaski’s observation of his father’s malicious fantasy is in tune with the failure of masculinity more than the actual threat of poverty. For example, he explains: “My mother lost her job. My father kept leaving in his car every morning as if he were going to work. ‘I’m an engineer,’ he told people. He had always wanted to be an engineer” (Bukowski Rye 127). Chinaski’s attentiveness to his father’s actions critiques his pantomime of head of household male breadwinner duties. Though this
has material consequences that limit the amount of income into the household, Chinaski stresses the emasculating class act of his father rather than the economic impact. Unlike Kerouac’s episode of working-class drag in the cotton field, Bukowski constructs Chinaski’s father through a kind of middle-class drag that gives the illusion of a specialized profession for which he had aspired for but never achieved. In these ways, Chinaski’s father wants middle-class identity for the social status and recognition it carries, not necessarily the monetary benefit. This can be seen in the chosen profession of engineering, which not only secures a middle-class identity, but also the empirical knowledge to design and/or build technological and social solutions for the father’s twentieth century world. Despite these goals, Chinaski’s father is seen only to eliminate his ability to have any control. His reliance on a working façade forecloses his ability to be a self-controlled or rational man.83

Evaluating the class performativity of Chinaski’s father is a productive method for seeing Chinaski’s own class performance. While Bukowski depicts the father as a figure that adheres to the fiction of class fantasy, he constructs Chinaski’s interest in emphasizing poverty and refusing middle-class dictates as a blueprint for survival. Young Chinaski aims to subvert—and pervert—the impulses of a productive laboring male body that his father attempts to uphold. Thus, while his

83 Robert Seguin’s Around Quitting Time: Work and Middle-Class Fantasy in American Fiction (2001) argues that middle-class space becomes a space of classlessness as articulated through utopian imaginaries. Though Chinaski’s father does not aim for a classless space, he creates one by envisioning middle class identity in a “literal sort of way, tying its intended states of fantasy precisely to the affective dynamics of such everyday yearning and anticipation” (Seguin 22). By wishing to eviscerate his working-class connections and highlight the fiction of a higher status, Chinaski’s father enacts class performativity that results in a position that does not have to concern itself with class, which indicates status. I use Seguin to show that middle-class status evades the material dangers of class altogether, advancing a fantasy-driven promotion of an elevated status.
father engages in middle-class performances for the neighborhood, Bukowski clearly stresses how Chinaski spends non-productive and self-indulgent time at home, whether spying on the neighborhood women and masturbating, or reading and writing (Bukowski *Rye* 114; 148). In doing so, Bukowski juxtaposes the father's middle-class façade that pretends to go to work with the lowly and impoverished life of Chinaski. Instead of constructing superficial appearances like his father, Chinaski is advanced by the reality of the body and a creative mind, removing him from the prescriptions of American masculinity that have destroyed men like his father.

**Embodying Poverty**

Bukowski’s investment in showing Chinaski’s vulnerability relates to the raw psychological consequences of abuse on Chinaski’s physical body. Since the father’s physical abusiveness is equated to his class aspirations, Chinaski’s beaten body is rendered a site of recalibration for masculine notions of work through the labor of survival. To this extent, Bukowski pathologizes Chinaski’s body to make his gruesome treatments for acne vulgaris a vulnerable contrast to his father’s superficial performances. Chinaski’s body becomes a productive method for establishing a Kerouac-like need for stripping down a middle-class façade. Even though an adolescent Chinaski would sometimes like to hide his body, Bukowski uses it to pose an inevitable reality that must be dealt with at the level of exposure. For instance, Chinaski joins the R.O.T.C. in school: “because then I didn’t have to
wear a gym suit and nobody could see the boils on my body” (Bukowski *Rye* 126). But in the same breath, Chinaski is made to express, “[b]ut I hated the uniform. The shirt was made of wool and it irritated my boils” (Bukowski *Rye* 126). Like Kerouac’s “special” policeman, Bukowski stresses that Chinaski’s uniform existence does not fit: its very composition irritates his skin, and literally rubs him the wrong way, providing him no protection. Chinaski’s refusal of uniformity and nationalist conscription become a testament to self-preservation. While the uniform provides his boils and skin raw protection from embarrassment, he is pained by the normalcy of a uniform existence. Bukowski’s choice to make visible the medical dressings, sores, and scars as well as the pain of bodily exposure becomes the foundation of his development and a base concern of the narrative (Bukowski *Rye* 149; 193).

Bukowski renders the body vulnerable to provide a physically “naked” authenticity that advances the development of dirty realist writing. This permits Bukowski to mark Chinaski’s body as virile and resilient throughout the episodes of his childhood in *Ham on Rye*. In contrast, Chinaski’s father’s body is rendered ineffective, the “folds of flesh under his chin and around his neck [...], sad wrinkles and crevices,” an effect of futile class desires (Bukowski *Rye* 121). This representation of virile masculinity through the spermatic economy suggests that bodily discipline and control issues social power. Thus, when Chinaski observes that his father’s “face was tired and pink putty. He was in his undershirt, and his belly sagged, wrinkling his undershirt” he communicates that “[t]he eyes were no longer fierce” to offer the destruction of a man weighed down by artifice, his body
and spirit under the fantasy of middle-class masculinity (Bukowski Rye 121). Next to Chinaski’s suffering but surviving physical body, his father is depicted as beat down by social fictions. In this way, Bukowski stresses that the exposure of one’s suffering body can become an alternative to the inevitable destruction of man through middle-class fantasy. Chinaski’s productive survival renders his father’s body impotent, while Chinaski’s “naked” body, full of boils and raw, becomes a perfect metaphor for addressing his father’s flaccid and futile social aspirations. Bukowski’s construction of the two characters suggests that a vulnerable body rendered through working-class suffering can counteract middle-class fantasy. Chinaski’s body becomes not only proof of middle-class destructiveness, but also the grotesque masculine potential in poverty.

Bukowski’s subversive development novel uses poverty, social misfits and non-productive labor as the undoing of America’s ideological inscription for young men in the twentieth century. Interested in avoiding his father’s mistakes, Chinaski institutes his aspirations for downward mobility. This enables Chinaski to reinscribe class performativity as a method for marking full separation from his abusive father. This hoboheian practice draws on the hobo-as-artist and entitles Chinaski to claim a new masculine identity that benefits from poverty. Young Chinaski asserts: “I made practice runs down to skid row to get ready for my future. I didn’t like what I saw down there. Those men and women had no special daring or brilliance. They wanted what everybody else wanted” (Bukowski Rye 274). Chinaski envisions Skid Row as a location that offers an essentialized form of poverty that
challenges his father’s middle-class fantasy. Yet, by designating Chinaski’s movement as “practice runs,” Bukowski announces a kind of poverty tourism that finds Skid Row a location that can destabilize and de-volve social position for the acquisition of a cultural capital seen in the hobo narrative of London, Steinbeck, Kerouac and Thompson.

In his desire to align himself with Skid Row, Chinaski is challenged by the non-“special” inhabitants who “want what everybody else wanted,” issuing the pervasiveness of upward mobility that Chinaski wants to refuse (Bukowski Rye 274). In recognizing the proliferation of upwardly mobile aspirations, Chinaski must enact his own mental geography over Skid Row, envisioning it as an opportunity to value poverty in service of his own social identity. To do this, Chinaski must first challenge the inhabitants’ dreams of class mobility. By stressing their criminal and undesirable state, Chinaski works to turn them into productive outsiders he can relate to. By labeling the surrounding population, he creates a space for himself:

I felt as if I were destined to be a murderer, a bank robber, a saint, a rapist, a monk, a hermit. I needed an isolated place to hide. Skid row was disgusting. The life of the sane, average man was dull, worse than death. There seemed to be no possible alternative. (Bukowski Rye 274)

Murderers and robbers as well as saints and monks offer a range of outcast types that Chinaski can claim. Chinaski challenges his father’s crippling adherence to productive and breadwinning masculinity with a part-criminal and part-sanctified list of types that mimics Kerouac’s Big Sur baptism. This issues violation of social law while also indicating a spiritual deliverance in Skid Row. Aiming to refuse the middle-class aspirations of his father, Chinaski claims Skid Row as a productive
center for achieving his downward mobility. His choice to live there becomes a
direct affront to the mid-century middle-class man and the aspiration-filled
professional classes. He explains, “What were doctors, lawyers, scientists? They
were just men who allowed themselves to be deprived of their freedom to think and
act as individuals. I went back to my shack and drank…” (Bukowski *Rye* 274). Like
the freedom of movement in tramp tropes throughout the century, Chinaski
evisions Skid Row as an opportunity to live as an individual beholden to none.
Chinaski critiques the era’s normative masculinity, represented through the
professions of doctor, lawyer and scientist, as dedicated to upwardly mobile
promises of social status through the sacrifice of the individuality through work.84

Chinaski embraces the freedoms of Skid Row for his writing, making
Bukowski’s coming of age novel one of becoming not only an artist, but also a bum.
Bukowski’s bum is creative much like the hobo-as-artist, but commands a singular
position as a destitute figure who allows stories to come to him. Whereas DePastino
argues that the bum is the late-century version of the same man: tramp to hobo to
bum, it is imperative to stress that a settled location defines the bum as a kind of
home guard. The bum expresses alternative mobilities as a homeless figure tied to a
location. Since he “seldom wanders and seldom works,” he is therefore granted the
time to indulge in leisurely activity, most notably drinking or writing (Anderson 63).
Bukowski’s investment in Skid Row approximates this social position for Chinaski,
issuing a late-century rendition of London’s hobo-as-artist con-game. Chinaski

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84 Contrary to Chinaski’s claim, these professions do use individual and creative thinking through
systematic and specialized training. However, they do so in service of patients, clients and causes, not
themselves.
envisions the trek back to his shack to drink the ultimate affront to his father’s foolish upwardly mobile aspirations, as well as an opportunity to foster artistic talent.

Chinaski’s dedication to downward mobility becomes its own class performative routine, specifically one that authorizes Bukowski’s bum aesthetic within literary production. Bukowski’s use of a bum persona generates Skid Row associations by making image based value judgments over individuals in poverty. Chinaski is able to emphasize the poverty of his beginnings by selecting Skid Row as a home base. This permits him to generate appearances that violate the class aspirations of his father. Yet, in order to challenge the social practices of upward mobility, Chinaski—and Bukowski—must maintain poverty as highly visible and self-conscious choice of identity and performative technique. Bukowski’s autobiographical persona, hybrid fictions and bum aesthetic become class performative methods for keeping up appearances and to satisfy audience expectations for his work.85

These appearances take precedence in Beaten, Fagged and Fucked (2008), where Martha Mary Evans suggests that “opting out” is predicated by Bukowski’s reliance on masculine posturing, which aims to dramatize control in male arenas including the workplace. Though Evans’ assertion explains the motivations of Chinaski’s downwardly mobile performances, I want consider that a continued opting out eventually becomes a form of opting in. For instance, DePastino argues

85 Tax records show that Bukowski collected $90,000 in foreign-royalties in 1982. This makes the writing of his Depression-era hardships and the poverty of his beginnings a strategic appeal that evades middle-class identifications (Bukowski.net).
that hobo affiliation can be read a form of social disaffiliation from breadwinning or other white, masculine entitlements (xxiii). Following this thought process, the dramatization of the intellectual labor that occurs at Chinaski’s Skid Row “workplace” becomes a model for Bukowski opting-in the literary market and the limelight. Through this perspective, Skid Row becomes a suggestive location for exploring the refusal of an upwardly mobile inheritance that opts out, but also a valued culture for sale to the marketplace of ideas that opts in.

**CAMPAIGNING FOR OUTSIDER OF THE YEAR**

Bukowski’s interest in Skid Row is related to the position of the productive outsider, a figure popularly celebrated across periods of American literature. This figure is most iconic when connected to male-dominated countercultural movements in the postwar. As Morris Dickstein’s *Leopards in the Temple* (2002) explains, an outsider position permits men to respond directly to America’s conservative postwar values with “a radical edge, [and] a mood of brooding alienation to work” with no “clear public agenda” (Dickstein 84). Having no clear public agenda echoes Nels Anderson’s description of hobos having no program, and locates the potential benefits of selectively outsider, marginal and mobile positions in American culture. Dickstein’s generationally specific “outsider[s], misfit[s], [and] madman[,]” develop in conjunction with and parallel to the hobo narrative as featured in previous chapters (Dickstein 84). Hobohemian practice, for instance, is one method for making an outsider position one of productive gains across the twentieth century. For instance, *Ham on Rye* charges the hobo figure with minority
status while also exposing his cultural value, allowing Bukowski to enact white, masculine challenges to what counts as literature. Therefore, the study of Bukowski as a strategic and productive outsider raises questions regarding American literature—both canonical and non-canonical—and its reliance on Wolfe’s “real goods” of American fiction. Like the hobo narrative authors before him, Bukowski's class-performative compositions allow separations of insider and outsider to blur alongside distinctions between majority and minority, and elite and popular.

Bukowski’s maverick\(^\text{86}\) compositional techniques draw on hoboheian practice as the technique of outsiders that need to negotiate a position for their creative work. Evidenced by his early career award of Outsider of the Year by Loujon Press in 1963, Bukowski’s work represents the ongoing popularity of outsider positions in American literature in terms of both radical technique and marginalized style. But as a writer who gains entrance into certain literary circles as an outsider and Skid Row bum, Bukowski’s also work exposes the struggle of balancing the role of successful author with a larger-than-life working-class persona like Chinaski.\(^\text{87}\) Like Kerouac before him, Bukowski’s late work displays the consequences of successful class performativity and its real life consequences. For instance, Hollywood (1989) depicts Chinaski’s outsider status fearful of over-

\(^{86}\) The apt label of ‘maverick’ is credited to Bill Mohr’s comprehensive investigation of Los Angeles poetry and art movements in Hold-Outs: The Los Angeles Poetry Renaissance, 1948-1992 (2011), where he explains that Los Angeles poets were not only marginally recognized in contrast to those in San Francisco, but often conducted themselves in different social circles or none at all.

\(^{87}\) Biographically, Bukowski was in his forties when he gained attention as a writer. Post Office (1971) is noted as being the start of Bukowski’s professional writing career, wherein he was able to write full time through advances from Jack Martin (Black Sparrow Press) and not have supplementary work like his decade at the Los Angeles Post Office.
exposure while he earns accolades that make him a Hollywood insider. This renders hobo- 


hobohemian practice not only attentive to the technique of class performativity, but also to the fantastic and mythological proportions of performing an outsider role. In Bukowski’s case, this tension is clearly depicted in his construction of a Skid Row persona and bum aesthetic.

Bukowski’s late work equates the tensions of insider and outsider positions to the concerns of middle-class and working-class identifications. As a cultural insider, Chinaski’s fictionalized career has expressed discomfort with fame, especially in being flown out and paid for his poetry readings. For example, Chinaski cannot understand that one could “work like a mule until you were fifty at meaningless, low jobs, and then suddenly to be flitting about the country, a gadfly with drink in hand” (Bukowski Women 231). Bukowski expresses concern with Chinaski’s reading not through the fear of public exposure or garnering attention (both of which he thrived on), but rather the inherent disjunction between his well-known Skid Row aesthetics and the spectacle of his a class position as a famous writer. Bukowski’s late-work asserts the importance of these class associations by equating Chinaski’s poetry reading to a meditation on the laboring body, drawing similarities to a stubborn and strong animal to maintain a stark contrast with the


88 Bukowski’s poem “I don’t need a Cleopatra” (1979) opens with the statement: “I am always exposing myself.” In the case of the poem, it is the failure of Chinaski’s shorts to cover his genitals while outside in eyeshot of his neighbors. But the confessional, raw exposure of the self appears as a central theme throughout Bukowski’s poetry and prose, both in decent literary treatment and indecent.

89 This is a common theme in Bukowski’s poetry, where the workingman is deemed a herded animal. In particular, his poem “the blade” (1986) equates going to work each day as heading into the slaughterhouse (So Alone 179-180).
leisurely “flitting” and consumptive “drinking” of the middle-class and elite status. These techniques carry into Hollywood, where Chinaski is asked to write a screenplay of his notorious bar-going life. Adapted from Bukowski’s own Hollywood run-in with Sean Penn, Madonna and Mickey Rourke, Chinaski articulates the pressures of a new life with marked success, celebrity and economic security which promise a middle-class fantasy that Skid Row has staved off.90

As part satire of the class system and part crisis of identity, Hollywood questions the notion of class appearance by drawing on a locus of tension that Robert Seguin identifies as the “middle-class, and white inhabitants of the Hollywood/New Deal fantasy space” (132). As a follow-up chapter in Chinaski’s Depression-era autobiography, Hollywood (1989) maps the aging fantasy of white masculinity in the late-twentieth century. In Hollywood meetings with directors and creative personalities, the novel shifts Chinaski’s mental geography of Los Angeles, his Skid Row foundation in danger of being traded in for elite parties and suburban homes. Bukowski uses these class associative tensions to open the novel, describing Chinaski’s drive to a meet with a movie producer for the first time:

Then we were down at the harbor, driving past the boats. Most of them were sailboats and people were fiddling about on deck. They were dressed in their special sailing clothes, caps, dark shades. Somehow, most of them had apparently escaped the daily grind of living. They had never been caught up in that grind and never would be. Such were the rewards of the Chosen in the land of the free. After a fashion, those people looked silly to me. (Bukowski Hollywood 9)

90 Bukowski is hired to write the semi-autobiographical screenplay for Barfly (1987), which is made into a feature film by director Barbet Schroeder. Hollywood is the fictional re-telling of this process, where Chinaski is hired to write a screenplay of his life titled The Dance of Jim Beam.
Exhibiting anxiety over his solicitation by a Hollywood producer, Chinaski is presented as making pains to establish himself against an upper-class life like those lived by the “people fiddling on deck.” By stressing ‘how the other half live,’ Chinaski constructs himself in distinct separation from those who wear the “special sailing clothes.” This allows him to code the upper classes as non-working, while defining himself as a lower-class worker who is driving himself to a work meeting. Acutely maintaining his associations with the “daily grind of living” through wage labor and economic struggle, Chinaski uses the clothing of the men on the boat to establish an us-vs.-them dynamic that spans the length of the novel. Bukowski crafts the opening drive as a metaphor for Chinaski’s transitional status, eagerly stressing working-class associations against his invitation into bourgeois Hollywood life. But as a narrator that is neither working class nor Hollywood elite, Chinaski’s drive commands meaning through class-performativity, both organizing space like Steinbeck’s passenger while securing a safe, ambiguous position like Thompson’s in Bass Lake. In this way, Bukowski has Chinaski promote oversimplified and over-regimented class appearances to indicate his refusal of middle-class associations, which by default define himself as an outsider.

The class-performative nature of the scene recognizes the importance of hoboehemian practice in Chinaski’s self-identification. The in-between position in the car lets Chinaski capitalize on the value of working-class associations. Chinaski’s observation of the harbor signals the value of a working identity for Bukowski’s composition despite two-decades of narration that had previously argued that hard
work was a foolish investment of time and energy. Chinaski, who has worked hard at not working hard, sees his acceptance into Hollywood’s inner-circle as based on his identity as a notorious working-class writer with Skid Row credentials. Bukowski’s hobo-heimian practice stages working-class identity as a recognizable aesthetic and requires Chinaski to construct his appearances similarly.\(^{91}\) By positioning himself as the underdog of the story, a rogue outsider, and man out of place, Chinaski is constructed in a position of cultural access that permits both hobo and bohemian associations. This provides Bukowski a sense of control over the system and the narrative, self-commodifying a Skid Row persona for persona gain. To do so, Bukowski stresses Chinaski’s rough appearances in the hope that they will serve as the means from which others judge him. Chinaski explains, “I was hungover and I needed a shave and I always wore clothing that somehow didn’t seem to fit me quite right” (Bukowski Hollywood 47). Bukowski attempts to assure his readers that this Hollywood venture has not changed Chinaski’s status as a productive outsider, while at the same time certifying that the Skid Row persona will meet audience expectation. In this way, Chinaski’s descriptions of his appearance are not complaints of unfair treatment, but rather Bukowski’s authorial reminder that Chinaski should be judged “from the outside” for his “years of poverty” and “certain look” (Bukowski Hollywood 47).

\(^{91}\) In Hollywood, the Bukowski/Chinaski persona split is near non-existent. Chinaski’s interactions with actors and directors throughout the novel are thinly veiled reproductions of Bukowski’s own interactions. Though the story is from Bukowski’s real life, he uses the freedom of a persona like Chinaski to construct and control it, exposing real life anxieties through the formality of narrative expectations.
But in Hollywood, cultural value is complex and being a successful outsider can make you an insider. As such, Chinaski is granted access to the elite parties of Hollywood despite his declarations of being an outsider. Bukowski works to craft Chinaski as an outsider to uphold working-class credentials and a Skid Row aesthetic even while he is an identifiable star in show business. Bukowski holds fast to working-class associations as a method of staving off the threat of middle-class ones, giving his narrator the ability to navigate the limits of a new status. These strained points of class access and class associations are clear at the screening of The Dance of Jim Beam, where Chinaski and his wife Sarah are ushered into the lower-level of the party when they are mistaken as general attendees, not the honored guests. Chinaski observes the general crowd around him and projects his class-credentials upon them:

> These were the survivors, the scramblers, the sharks, the cheapies. The lost souls chatted away and it was hot, hot, hot. Then a man in an expensive suit came up. “Aren’t you Mr. and Mrs. Chinaski?” “Yes,” I said. “You don’t belong down here. You belong upstairs. Follow me.” [...] “Hank, what does all this mean?” “Accept it. It will never happen again.” (Bukowski Hollywood 226)

From within the party, even at the lower level, Chinaski and Sarah have earned entrance into the Hollywood elite. Chinaski’s interest in associating himself with the “cheapies” proves a continued need to assert a working-class persona in the new social scene. Despite privileged entry, Chinaski is seen placing himself in the position of the outside through these stressed self-associations and self-identifications. Regardless of his “certain look” that equates to poverty, Chinaski is
still recognized by others as separate from the “cheapie” crowd and immediately ushered to the social circle in which he belongs. His statement of disbelief equates this social access to luck, much like Sal Paradise’s swank hotel entry in Denver. But rather than stress the class-fluidity Kerouac impresses on the scene, Chinaski is desperate to shut down the potential for fluidity. Despite gaining access to the inside and being recognized as an insider, Chinaski must assert his discomfort and distrust of the inside in order to maintain an outsider position. Bukowski’s continued depiction of Chinaski’s outsider position wards off middle-class associations and ultimately secures both men ability to define themselves as creative, virile writers.

Despite being a novel of old age and success, Hollywood reissues the fear of middle-class fantasy from Chinaski’s youth in Ham on Rye. Chinaski is seen repeatedly asserting that he is still a struggling writer from Skid Row to avoid being rendered foolish or ineffectual by upward mobility. Since Bukowski wants Chinaski to be identified for his Skid Row persona and rough look, he relies on class-based appearances to promote distinction for himself and others. Chinaski’s consistent unpresentability among the Hollywood elite serves as a strict reminder of his difference from them, his stained and ill-fitting clothes communicating working-class lack. Meanwhile, the well fashioned rich and famous communicate fantastic abundance. Bukowski foregrounds the anxiety over appearances, marking Chinaski’s time in Hollywood an uneasy transition between classes. For example, even from the privacy of his own home Chinaski feels the need to perform his working-class associations by challenging what television—an entertainment staple
of Hollywood—presents to him on the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson. Chinaski watches Carson, describing him as “perfectly clothed” (Bukowski *Hollywood* 239). Chinaski observes that Carson’s “hand kept darting to the knot of his necktie,” explaining how the motion indicates that Carson is “subconsciously worried about his appearance” (Bukowski *Hollywood* 239). This preoccupation with Carson’s necktie and perfect appearance contrasts with Chinaski’s improper appearance, Bukowski constructing a perverse mirror-image scene of Chinaski and the television.

Carson’s perfect appearance and necktie shows Bukowski’s uneasy obsession with presentation and appearance. Carson’s necktie defines his dress as proper, but also becomes the tell-tale sign he has anxiety over his appearance. As equally anxious, Chinaski’s constant unpresentability issues the same concerns from within working-class associations. In this parallel, I locate a connection between Bukowski and Carson, the necktie of public presentation connected to the narrative persona of Chinaski. Chinaski completes a productive literary impulse but also reveals Bukowski’s own anxiety over presentation and appearance. In addition, Carson’s necktie appears to present larger-pressures of middle-class status as represented in the mid-to-late century by the suit, whether grey flannel or otherwise. Chinaski views Carson’s perfect clothing and subconscious concern as a meditation on middle-class roles and expectations, pressures he envisions as a noose.
The Surplus Value of Working-Class Identity

The fear of appearing middle-class while among the Hollywood elite is also represented through evading status markers of upward mobility through the American Dream. Chinaski not only gets married to Sarah (after decades of celebrated womanizing), but for the first time in his life, owns property. Bukowski is unable to deny that his success as a writer has earned a certain level of status and stability, so he uses Chinaski to justify a continued hostility toward middle-class life. Desperate not to lose control like his father did in his youth, Chinaski’s is depicted as viewing middle-class malaise as a threat to not only creative virility as well as masculine power. In Ragged Dicks, James Catano articulates these pressures of working to middle-class masculinity as they pertain to self-making. He argues, “[s]elf-creativity is necessarily tied to job creativity, or at least to personal control of the means of production” (Catano 12). By exhibiting control over himself and his image, Chinaski can control the means of production: he can articulate his appearance, construct narratives for the market, and assert what Tony Kearon calls bourgeois individuality.\footnote{Sociologist and Criminologist Tony Kearon describes that a “manifestation of the desire to express identity through demonstrating control,” allows individuals to “manage and synthesize multiple competing versions of self as expressed through cultural practices” (383: 396). Bukowski’s compositional reliance on hoboheian practice reveals that cross-class performativity possesses the kind of cultural access seen in cultural omnivores. Drawing on working-class identity and hobo narratives allows Bukowski to establish control over his own “bourgeois individualism” (Kearon 396).} But to do this, Chinaski must continue to draw on Skid Row as a foundation of his identity, utilizing the poverty of Los Angeles as a center of creative productivity.
Hollywood works to balance the creative impulse of production while constructing a bum aesthetic that refuses to work in a traditional sense. Bukowski does this by exploring Chinaski’s usual creative writing against the hired work of the screenplay. Chinaski explains, “I was really only interested in the poem and the short story. Writing a screenplay seemed to me an ultimately stupid thing to do. But better men than I had been trapped into such a ridiculous act” (Bukowski Hollywood 12). Caught between the tensions of creative output and financial gain, Chinaski qualifies his task and its literary associations by recognizing the paid screenwriting of great American novelists like F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck and William Faulkner.93 As a figure who has not only crossed class lines, but literary lines with the writing of his screenplay, Chinaski can reimagine his craft as work, the production of labor for contracted wages. But since writing “was never work,” but an organic scene of leisure where Chinaski “turn[ed] on the radio to a classical music station, [lit] a cigarette or a cigar, open[ed] the bottle,” he has to relocate his creative interests. In describing his written work, Chinaski stresses, “[t]he typer did the rest. All I had to do was be there” (Bukowski Hollywood 88). By defining the screenplay as mindless work, Chinaski loses a kind of creative control—he is not actively writing short stories or poems, but putting in hours for someone else. Hollywood becomes a demanding employer that requires thoughtless labor, and ironically, threatens to pay him well. But this construction lets Chinaski maintain a productive and creative edge that stresses his working status: “[u]nlike the novel or

93 Notably, Fitzgerald’s Three Comrades (1938), Faulkner’s The Big Sleep (1946), Steinbeck’s Life Boat (1944) (Obias).
short story or poem where I would take a night or two off from time to time, I
worked on the screenplay each night” (Bukowski Hollywood 88). By working daily
hours for others, Chinaski enters a recognizable market where wages are paid for
labor put in. Writing becomes work, an exertion of labor, which entitles Chinaski to
claim a working status and maintain his working-class outsider position.

Selling labor for wages results in income, which becomes a source Chinaski’s
anxiety for its consumerist signs of upward mobility. Bukowski expressly includes
scenes that show that Chinaski has no idea what to do with the money he has
earned. This, in part, shows Chinaski's comfort with poverty. It expresses his
position “against the American Dream” as a disinterested and non-greedy consumer.
But these scenes also impart a subversive class-move on Bukowski’s behalf. For
instance, during an interview a reporter provides Chinaski and wife Sarah economic
advice:

“You know, that here in America, if you don’t spend money they are going to
take it away.”
“Yeah? What you want me to do?”
“Put a payment down on a house.”
“Huh?”
“Mortgage payments are tax deductible.”
“Yeah, what else?”
“Buy a car. Tax deductible.” (Bukowski Hollywood 41)

A few pages later, the same reporter suggests that Chinaski also upgrade to an
electric typewriter, which is also tax deductible (Bukowski Hollywood 43). The
concept of “tax deductible” is tied to writing being work: in order for Chinaski to

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94 Bukowski’s poetry in the late Eighties and early Nineties reflects a shift in technology, not from a
manual to an electric typewriter, but from typewriter to computer. The computer would also be tax
deductible based on the reporter’s financial advice.
truly benefit from writing for others he must envision it as labor; this makes his work and the profits that arise from the narrative product a kind of surplus value. This includes Bukowski’s own double-profit from the story of his life, first writing the *Barfly* screenplay and then fictionalizing the experience in *Hollywood*. Though he is unsure what to do with the money, Chinaski envisions the process as easy accumulation, and does not want to see any of his earnings disappear to taxes. For anti-authoritarian Chinaski, taxes serve only to oppress the workingman who has earned his wage. Thus, Bukowski flips a conversation that ultimately declares Chinaski’s upward mobility and wealth as a problem of necessary spending to challenge the government. This issues an institutional critique that uses the system to cheat the system, a notable and radical outsider mentality of Bukowski’s creative control and Chinaski’s notorious persona.

Despite seeing home ownership as a tax shelter, Bukowski continues to represent Chinaski as struggling with the concept of owning property. As the highest and most symbolic of all class status markers, Chinaski’s fear of home ownership uncovers his fears of middle-class emasculation, which would undo his masculine working-class associations. Catano aptly explains: “It is a grim irony that home ownership […] emphasizes the anxieties of nonagency and ‘feminizing’ dependency. Being laid off or let go nastily underscores the worker’s actual dependent position” (Catano 138). By asserting an individuality that is equated to a youthful rebellion against his father, Chinaski uses hobo-hemian practice to capitalize on the creative position of hobo-as-artist, refusing to be dependent to a bank, a mortgage or an
employer. By not owning property, Chinaski can assert the independence acclaimed by his Skid Row bum persona. Furthermore, it provides Chinaski with a continued defiance of his father since his father had hoped that each man in his time would work to leave a house to the next generation. This practice is something Chinaski finds slow and futile, “house by house, death by death” (Bukowski Hollywood 46).

For Chinaski, private property becomes not only the ownership of land and a middle-class identity, but also a step in becoming a fantasy-driven cruel man like his father. Bukowski crafts Chinaski as unable to let go of his creative position as an outsider on Skid Row to avoid becoming his father and to maintain a sense of control:

So, there I was over 65 years old, looking for my first house. I remembered how my father had virtually mortgaged his whole life to buy a house. [...] Now I was looking for a house I really didn’t want and I was going to write a screenplay I really didn’t want to write. I was beginning to lose control and I realized it but I seemed unable to reverse the process. (Bukowski Hollywood 46)

Though Chinaski has the money for home ownership, the ideological cost of the mortgage is rooted in the loss of a self-made masculine rhetoric that finds creative potential in the streets of Skid Row. Living anywhere else would limit Chinaski’s creative output. Skid Row is the basis for Chinaski’s well-known anti-father, anti-middle-class, anti-establishment characteristics. Therefore, providing the Skid Row bum a home would limit the productive performance of a working-class aesthetic that can prioritize poverty as a condition for creative expression.

For Chinaski (and Bukowski), the danger of becoming identifiably middle class results in the loss of class performativity. Claiming home ownership would
interrupt the creative flexibility of hobo-hermanian practice. Without Skid Row associations, Chinaski loses the edge, the grit and the candor he is hired for. This also reveals that Bukowski would be impacted, for Chinaski’s loss of Skid Row associations institutes the risk of Bukowski being overlooked as an author-creator. The importance of working-class credentials becomes clear when Chinaski muses over author James Thurber, saying “[i]t’s just a shame he had such an upper-middle-class viewpoint. He would have made one hell of a bad-assed coal miner” (Bukowski Hollywood 213). Wanting to stress the “real goods” of American authors, Chinaski locates the value of a working-class perspective in general literary terms to remind readers of the creative enterprise of Chinaski/Bukowski. Chinaski stresses the shamefulness of middle class to celebrate the working-class credentials that maintain his access to multiple levels of society, including the literary marketplace and Hollywood. This designates class performative hobo-hermanian practice as relying on productive working-class associations to allow for self-making, self-building and self-glorification from early-era hobos in London to proto-punk bums in Bukowski. These often frontier-laden associations become key to combating artistic anxieties about being outside the normative or regulatory concepts of gender and labor, Chinaski’s ‘coal miner’ one such instance of iconic, hard-working masculinity that surpasses a genteel middle-class viewpoint.

In addition to including Thurber, Bukowski uses Jack Kerouac to exemplify class performative tensions. Chinaski is astounded to find out that the film’s production crew has started work on a screenplay called The Heart’s Song about
“Mack Derouac...a writer who couldn’t write but who got famous because he looked like a rodeo rider” (Bukowski Hollywood 26). By identifying the performance of a Kerouac-type figure known more for his appearances than his writing, Bukowski initiates commentary about the hobohemian practice that has served him, Kerouac, and American literature throughout the century. Derouac/Kerouac’s “rodeo rider” appearance of western trampdom is not unlike Chinaski “Skid Row” appearance of Los Angeles bumdom. Both recognizable for the way their narrative personas overwhelm their authorial self, Bukowski calls attention to the ways that a similar decades-long commodification of Skid Row has served his own creative identity and reputation in Chinaski. These confessional moments of process and strategy render the constant references to Chinaski’s abject appearance a reminder of the constructedness of the persona and the control of the author. In this way, Hollywood suggests a critique of Chinaski's twenty-year narrative presence, allowing Bukowski to reveal his own anxieties over age, wealth and creative virility. As an autobiographical persona, Chinaski’s dedication to the same rebellious assertions of his youth projects a similar quality of life for Bukowski. But at the same time, the thin-line between author and narrator also draws a level of distinction between Chinaski’s expected outsider-suffering and Bukowski’s late-life successes and happiness.95 Like Kerouac’s Big Sur or Thompson’s Fear and Loathing, Bukowski’s Hollywood contains a level of awareness that though hobohemian practices have

95 Though there is significant anger, cynicism and spite in Bukowski's poetry and prose into the seventies, the eighties and nineties have more nostalgic and heart-felt compositions that prioritize beauty, simplicity, and love. As one of Bukowski's last living publications, Hollywood appears to emphasize these career-bookends.
achieved great creative feats, there is a potentiality of losing oneself when conflating author and persona.

But Bukowski remains in control, issuing a commanding creative presence in the final scene of Hollywood, which produces the inverse of the novel’s opening drive. After the screenplay Chinaski has written is filmed, Chinaski and Sarah attend a screening party. Upon their departure, they climb into a limousine expressing their exhaustion by the scene:

Frank placed us in the back of and we found a new bottle of wine in the limo. We uncorked it as our trusty man found the Harbor Freeway south.
“Hey, Frank, want a drink?”
“Sure as shit, man!”
He hit a button and the little glass partition dropped. I slipped the bottle through. As Frank drove the limo along he took a hit from the wine bottle. I don’t know but somehow it all looked very strange and funny and Sarah and I started laughing.
At last, the night was alive. (Bukowski Hollywood 234)

Though the scene shows that Chinaski and Sarah have escaped the superficiality of Hollywood life in their limo, it stresses the privileges granted Chinaski as both a writer and celebrity. In contrast to the opening scene of Chinaski driving himself to the producer’s house and observing the boaters in the harbor, Bukowski ends the novel with Chinaski well-off and chauffeured in the limousine. For all intensive purposes, Chinaski has become exactly what he feared in the opening scene. This image of success undoes the constant unpresentability Chinaski forces throughout the novel. At the surface level Chinaski can be seen asserting his status as a guest at the screening and as a passenger in the limousine who elects to drink with his hired driver, Frank. But in a representative way, the scene calls attention to the same
strained class-crossing behaviors that Chinaski has struggled with throughout. The limousine, a status based symbol, is separated by the glass partition, placing Chinaski securely as a passenger and not a driver. This fugitive position allows him to lower the divide and invite Good Old Frank into his scene. In doing so, Chinaski re-calibrates his working-class status away from the Hollywood elite, sharing wine across the partition as a communal return to the normalcy of everyday working people. This final moment of control allows Bukowski and Chinaski to continue productive associations with the working-class from within a hired limousine.

Bukowski asserts his level of success while using Chinaski to express his interest in class-based associations that can communicate a bum aesthetic.

Bukowski’s relationship with the hobo narrative expresses an active dismantling of literary elitism through the Skid Row bum. Rather than gentrifying the literary marketplace or poor neighborhoods of Los Angeles, Bukowski chooses to povertize them as an ultimate gesture of white, male control through the use of working-class identity. More than the other authors in this study, Bukowski violates the literary logic between author and persona, truth and fiction, and life and art.

This results in a development of the hobo narrative that can commodify Skid Row or working-class identity as a method of navigating the complexities of creative labor in late-capitalist times through not the economic conditions of the hobo, but rather the countercultural promise of the bum in American culture.
Conclusion: “Cross-Country Drives: Mad Men and the Hobo Mystique of Don Draper/Dick Whitman”

The critically acclaimed television drama Mad Men (2007-2015) ended its seventh and final season in May 2015. The series covered the cultural and historical period of March 1960 to November 1970, and followed advertising executive Don Draper and his colleagues on Madison Avenue in New York City. As a text that shows the political dynamism of the mid-century to a twenty-first century audience, Mad Men has wide-ranging interpretations across critical camps. For example, Deborah Tudor’s "Selling Nostalgia: Mad Men, Postmodernism and Neoliberalism" (2012) suggests that the show offers commitments to individualism through a “neoliberal discourse of style” which stages constructions of reality (333). One of these stylistic discourses renders poorly behaved masculinity and unapologetic misogyny a privileged aspect of mid-century white, male cultural power. This display is Jeremy Varon’s primary interest in “History Gets in Your Eyes: Mad Men, Misrecognition and the Masculine Mystique” (2013), which argues that Draper enactment of mid-century vices “collapses the sense of historical distance” and leaves audiences to “glamorize” and “condemn” the behavior from their contemporary time (262; 270). Both Tudor and Varon suggest that Draper’s enigmatic masculine appeals preoccupy critics and audiences, his character defined by the self-presentation of masculinity, forged by the resilient work of a self-made man.

This preoccupation replicates the appeal of the hobo narrative, which foregrounds its hard-earned masculine circulation and celebration of anti-hero or
outsider figures. *Mad Men* often uses the verbal resilience of the hobo-as-artist to depict Draper as a man able to manipulate class-fluid situations and assert mid-century masculine modes creative (self-)control. *Mad Men* suggests that the hobo narrative and hobo mystique, refined throughout the twentieth century, is not only emblematic of mid-century American narratives but has earned wide-acceptance as a cultural narrative of American experience in the twenty-first century. While Varon argues that *Mad Men* creates a “spectacle of masculinity in crisis at once so elegant, alluring and instructive,” I find this performative mystique endemic to the hobo narrative and the cultural appeal of hobohemian practice (269). The popular hobo narrative often places the cultural value of masculinity-in-crisis alongside hopeful class performative self-making to appeal to contemporary audiences.\(^\text{96}\) In addition, by circulating dominant and dominating forms of white masculinity, *Mad Men* highlights the central importance of class identity in the cultural valuation of masculinity. Like London, Steinbeck, Kerouac, Thompson, and Bukowski, Draper’s hobohemian practice uses tensions between working-class and middle-class identity for the creation of a resilient self that appeals across centuries.

\(^{96}\) Though this conclusion draws on the television series *Mad Men* (2007-2015) to show contemporary interest in the mid-century hobohemian, it can also be seen in the explosion of films regarding the writers in previous chapters. Film reclamation of Kerouac and Beat culture explore the hobo mystique in *One Fast Move Or I’m Gone* (2008) *Howl* (2010), *On the Road* (2012), *Big Sur* (2013), and *Kill Your Darlings* (2013). After Thompson’s suicide in 2005, documentaries about his life and career have explored his working persona in *Buy the Ticket, Take the Ride: Hunter S. Thompson on Film* (2006), *Blasted!!! The Gonzo Patriots of Hunter S. Thompson* (2006), *Gonzo: The Life and Work of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson* (2008), and the feature film of his first novel, *The Rum Diary* (2011). Bukowski, too, has experienced a resurgence of popularity with *Bukowski: Born Into This* (2003), and the recent lawsuit against Actor James Franco. Franco was sued for copyright infringement for starting production on his film *Bukowski* (2013/6), which was considered an adaptation of *Ham on Rye*, for which he owned no rights. The case, which had to be settled outside of court, staged difficult discussions of what is biography and what is autobiography within Bukowski’s work.
Draper’s mid-century appeal to a post-liberationist audience is akin to spectacle, pressuring viewers to be both astounded by the past and amazed by its appeal in the present. Even Jon Hamm, the actor who played Draper, stated in a 2016 Golden Globes acceptance speech that his character was a “horrible person,” expressing his disbelief at the audience’s attachment to Draper throughout the series. By the end of season seven, audiences were particularly invested in what would happen to Draper at the end of the series, seeking consequences for his womanizing, heavy drinking, and dense web of lies. Viewers wanted to know what would happen if Draper stopped living the lie of his assumed identity and was faced with his born identity of Dick Whitman again. Draper’s catastrophic love affairs, abused childhood and Korean-war flashbacks had taken their toll on his mental health, constructing a spectacle of white masculine crisis. True to the discourse of poorly behaved masculinity that surrounded him, many predicted that Draper would crack under the pressure of his double life and end up like the ad man tumbling down from the top of the building in the opening credits.

But despite Mad Men’s skyscraper settings that institute a hierarchy of white male privilege and investments in upward mobility with risks of downward spiral, Draper’s trajectory is never really vertical or latitudinal. The series development is overwhelming longitudinal, emphasizing panoramic strides across space and time in distinctly horizontal ways articulated in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s A

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97 To be clear, Dick Whitman and Don Draper are the same person; but Draper is an assumed identity. For this reason, I will often refer to Draper/Whitman when the distinction becomes unclear, but will use the names separately to indicate tensions between the identities as represented on the show.
Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (1987). These horizontal and rhizomatic movements account not only for Draper’s temporal flashbacks throughout the series, but his frequent improvisations as the driver of a car, both to his home in Long Island in early seasons, and in his mad-dash westward in the final episodes of the series. *Mad Men* uses the tensions of hobohemian practice to not only provide Draper with a visible duality of class-associations, but to appeal to a new century that can identify the cultural value of the hobo on the wide, open road. By placing masculinity in crisis on the road like the hobo narrative, Draper’s cross-country road trip in the last three episodes of the final season conclude a long-standing hobo mystique that is rooted in season one.

**Flashback to the Hobo Mystique**

The hobohemian practice underlying *Mad Men* is established in the season one episode “The Hobo Code” (1.8). This early episode stages Whitman’s Depression-era struggles in conflict with the bohemians of Draper’s bourgeois life. These tensions expose Draper/Whitman’s double life that enacts class performativity as a method of social and professional survival. The episode

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98 As a response to the verticality of a hierarchized knowledge, Deleuze and Guattari’s introduction envisions a horizontal alternative that advances the potential for rhizomatic forms of knowledge. In addition to *Mad Men*’s diachronic improvisation, the hobo can benefit from the concept of horizontal knowledge based on his geographic mobility. The distinctions between vertical and horizontal forms extend the discussion of the epistemological and ontological, as represented by the modern and postmodern in Chapter 3.

99 Michael Bérubé’s article “A Change Is Gonna Come, Same as It Ever Was” (2013) argues that *Mad Men*’s appeal in the contemporary era is structured on envisioning the changes of the Sixties “filtered through the present” (347). As a period piece, the show enacts a “back to the future” temporality that celebrates the cultural possibilities of the present by envisioning the past (347). These highly subjective interpretations allow audiences to claim self-serving value against a historical façade.
establishes Draper/Whitman as both a high-class ad man and a low-class farm boy, and exposes the difficulty of exhibiting self-control under class pressures. The episode effectively constructs a conversation between hobo and bohemian identities to provide a provocative way of reading Draper/Whitman’s narrative trajectory. “The Hobo Code” initiates a performative explanation for the ways the hobo mystique continues to fuel cultural narratives of mid-century, both representing and proving that white masculinity has always exhibited crisis.

Draper/Whitman’s hobohemian construction becomes clear in a series of flashbacks at beatnik girlfriend Midge Daniels’ Village apartment. Draper intends to take Midge on an impromptu trip to Paris with a recent bonus, but is overruled by her bohemian friends who plan to “get high and listen to Miles” (“Hobo Code”). Unwilling to give up on his plan, Draper gives into the bohemian vibe, smokes marijuana with Daniels, and claims: “I feel like Dorothy” (“Hobo Code”).

Draper/Whitman is the humble rural youth who has been transported to the big city and is amazed by its extravagance. By taking part in the bohemian scene, Draper is depicted as lost in Oz, suggesting that his alternate reality/realities are ambiguously misplaced in the bohemian apartment and the modern metropolis of New York City. Draper’s dis-locatedness in the physical space initiates his first flashback as he washes his face and looks into the bathroom mirror. In the flashback, Draper is young Dick Whitman on the family farm as a hobo approaches looking for work. As

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100 Draper’s reference to L. Frank Baum’s The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (1900) is also indicative of mid-century readings of the novel as Populist critique, including but not limited to the march to Oz drawing on Coxey’s march on Washington. The mass circulation of the film in 1939 emphasizes the genre as children’s literature and quiets these political undertones.
an outsider on the family farm, the hobo is greeted with hostility and suspicion. The family entertains the hobo’s verbal appeals for work, but does not satisfy his request.\footnote{101} Throughout the negotiations for work, young Dick Whitman is portrayed as particularly interested in the hobo and the two are tied to one another through a series of hidden glances. This connection goes as far as the hobo articulating that Whitman “reminds me of myself,” to secure the important link between the two characters (“Hobo Code”).

When Draper awakens from his flashback, he recognizes that he is an outsider in the bohemian apartment just as the hobo was on the family farm. The shabbily-dressed bohemian group has disdain for Draper’s well-dressed appearance and upper-class status that connects him to the system. Draper attempts to appeal to them on a personal level to secure Midge’s affection. But this results in further teasing and mocking as they feign surprise that “the ad man has a heart,” only to claim that “love is bourgeois” (“Hobo Code”).\footnote{102} The bohemians distrust Draper as a system insider and class-climber, expressing their overt concern with the pressures they feel to take part in consumerist projects that erase their individuality. Draper, however, is aware that he is not an insider, but a complex performative figure that can work from the inside. Draper is faced with class duality: he is both the poor farm

\footnote{101} The hobo is given a meal and promised work the next day. After performing his duties, Whitman’s family refuses to pay him wages. This exchange provides Dick Whitman with the ability to see dishonest men, what the hobo writes on the fencepost in hobo code to warn others from the farm.

\footnote{102} Love is manufactured in Mad Men. In “Smoke Gets In Your Eyes” (1.1) Draper claims that he has created the concept of love and sold it through the products he advertizes. He tells potential client Rachel Menken she has never felt love because “it doesn’t exist. What you call love is invented by guys like me. To sell nylons.” She responds by indicating that Draper’s bravado attempts to hide a larger disconnection with life, observing that it “must be difficult to be a man, too.”
boy as well as the Organization Man, neither of which fit him wholly, and both of
which are met with hostility in the bohemian apartment. Feeling physically and
emotionally dislocated, Draper’s debates with the “know-nothing” bohemians yields
another flashback to young Whitman talking privately with the hobo. Whitman is
perplexed by the hobo’s identity, which appears at odds with what he has been told
about them:

    Whitman: "You don’t talk like a bum."
    Hobo: "I’m not. I’m a gentleman of the rails. For me, everyday is brand new.
    Everyday’s a brand new place, people, what have you." ("Hobo Code")

The enigmatic status of the hobo, both gentleman and bum, is confusing for
Whitman’s young mind. But as a flashback from the bohemian apartment, this
conversation provides Draper/Whitman an alternative mode of being that exists, for
many as a paradoxical state, as “a gentleman of the rails.” Just as Draper feels like an
outsider but is seen as an insider, Young Whitman learns through the hobo that
image and substance do not always correspond. For Whitman, a self-proclaimed
“whore boy” who has been taught to hate himself by his cruel caretakers, the hobo
provides the potentiality of starting each day in a new way, issuing the option to
self-make. Vaguely aware of the abusive living situation of young Whitman, the hobo
understands the hope a different life can give the boy and offers Whitman a
universal truth: “We all wish we were from someplace else” (“Hobo Code”). This
truth does not provide solace to Whitman, but rather the option of an alternative
lifestyle in the hobo who is able to be from someplace else interminably. This instills
the very impulse with which Whitman becomes Draper, the hobo initiating an
alternative future early in his formative life. The hobo promise of mobility and renewal changes Whitman, who is now able to envision the hobo as a valid alternative to his hopeless life.

Before leaving, the hobo teaches young Whitman a final lesson: the hobo code. These codes, written with chalk, communicate to other hobos what to expect at a given location. These codes are well documented in tramping autobiographies as well as in London’s *The Road*, issuing a special language for an alternative identity. After drawing a few symbols, the hobo gives Whitman the chalk. The passing of the chalk is highly symbolic of the hobo’s ability to self-make through language. The hobo teaches Whitman not only a hopeful new vocabulary, but provides him with an instrument that can literally re-write his life. Language—even in coded symbols—becomes a key part of Whitman’s survival. Like London’s hobo-as-artist, the hobo must rely on the ability to tell a story to earn handouts that sustain his mobility and perpetual reinvention.

The passing of the chalk directly affects Whitman/Draper by providing him with not only an alternative life, but also the power of language. The benefits of language include his ability to spin a story that secures a new identity after the Korean War, as well as his job as an ad man which uses language to appeal to a consumer public. The chalk is the site on which the confluence of hobo and bohemian class performativity is established for Draper/Whitman. Whitman’s impoverished beginnings are changed by the hobo, who brings him opportunity through language. This language, in turn, enables Draper/Whitman to become a
hobo-as-artist who is aware of the benefits of being a gentleman on the road, including the presentation of strategic stories and appearances in pursuit of new beginnings.

The episode ends with Draper coming to terms with his class performativity. He appears to understand that based on his hobo beginnings, his bohemian performance with Midge is just as artificial as his executive one. Realizing his rejection by the bohemian group and feeling even more like an outcast, Draper prepares to leave the apartment. Police lights shine against the window from outside, and the bohemians express fears of being busted. Draper, who stands out against the shabby bohemians in his well-fitted suit, takes his hat in hand and walks toward the door. The bohemians excitedly tell him he cannot leave because of the police in the building. Draper points at one outspoken young man with a spiteful smile tells him “you can’t,” and walks out the door, passing unnoticed by the officers in the hallway (“Hobo Code”). Hidden by the appearances of a well-dressed ad man, the episode crafts Draper as aware of the benefits of passing between the groups, the flashbacks completing a circuit between hobo and bohemian, as well as bohemian and bourgeois.103

Though Draper judges the bohemians for their superficial class appearances, “buying some Tokaj wine, leaning up against a wall in Grand Central and pretending

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103 David Brooks's *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (2000) argues that the late twentieth century experienced a class shift as it learned to utilize cultural capital to advance identity politics. This included the middle class, or bourgeois, co-opting qualities of bohemian identity for the advancement of more than economic or social capital. In the example of Draper/Whitman, hobohemian practice appears to acknowledge movement in the direction of the bobo, while continuing to place cultural value in the hobo for historical effect.
you're a vagrant," the episode offers Whitman/Draper’s aptitude for class performativity as authentically rooted in the hobo ("Hobo Code"). Unlike the bohemians, who hold fast to (un)fashionable political causes to identify themselves as privileged outsiders, Draper’s fluid class performativity is earned through a hobohebian practice that turns being an actual outsider into a method for survival and a privileged omnivorous game. Whitman/Draper’s class multiplicities exercise the physical and social mobility of the hobo mystique. This permits him to write and re-write an identity throughout time, while providing him a sense of control through his ability to accumulate cultural capital as a fluid sort of being.

**Finding the Great American Hobo**

The final season of *Mad Men* reinstates Draper/Whitman’s hobo beginnings as he travels westward in a desperate attempt to find himself. As a successful figure of class performativity, Draper’s ability to construct his life as an elite ad executive and be the everyman hobo initiates the appeal of class fluidity to American audiences. As a contemporary hobo narrative in American literature and culture, the last episodes of the season and series, “Lost Horizons” (7.12), “The Milk & Honey Route” (7.13), and “Person to Person” (7.14) serve as highly identifiable circulations of the hobo mystique. Draper/Whitman’s re-hobo-fication makes visible a well-plotted hobohemian tension throughout the series. These final installments of *Mad Men* focus on big-city Don Draper as he gradually strips off his constructed identity and returns to being mid-west Dick Whitman. To show this transition, Draper draws
on the hobo roots of his youth and learns to synthesize his double, class-performed life.

In “Lost Horizons,” Draper’s class-chameleon act is seen under strain. He refuses to be troubled by his secretary’s insistence to choose furnishings for his new apartment, and can be seen slowly pulling out of the life he has constructed. This includes not only avoiding domestic decorations, but also refusing to be impacted when he is handed divorce papers. These events occur in his professional office to suggest that Draper’s status at work is deteriorating, too, marking him as professionally and personally dispossessed. After his office’s recent merger Draper has become merely a presence, not an active agent. Draper’s boss calls him his “white whale,” establishing Draper as a spectral pursuit of mythological proportions.104 As this spectral figure, Draper attends a meeting for his new account with Miller beer unnoticed, and watches a young man deliver a pitch that is verbatim Draper’s style and using appeals toward the everyman. Draper leaves the room in middle of the pitch, gets in his car and drives away. After a brief exchange with his ex-wife Betty about the children—who no longer need him to drive them to school—Draper turns off onto the Pennsylvania/New Jersey Turnpike and begins to drive west. These events mark the beginning of Draper’s final journey as he takes

104 This reference to Melville’s Moby Dick is a provocative one for my study overall. First, the relationship between Ahab and Ishmael participates in a certain kind of hobohehman practice, middle-class Ishmael documenting the workingmen for his own social gain. Second, Thompson’s Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas depicts Duke driving “the White Whale” Cadillac, envisioning men drawn to the road in search of the American Dream as a similar, spectral journey of futile masculine assertion. That the reference appears in the twenty-first century television show maintains not only Melville’s creative power, but also the cultural circulation of masculine mythologies as they rely on class in American literature and culture more generally.
part in the flight from middle-class masculine pressures when his personal and professional life blends and blurs. But unlike previous disappearances on the show, Draper’s solitary drive westward signals a more complex cultural unconscious related to the hobo mystique, and a reclaiming of Whitman’s hobo beginnings from season one.

After seven hours of late-night driving, Draper hears his former boss, Bert Cooper, on the radio. Cooper then appears as a passenger in the car and asks Draper, “You've been driving for seven hours in the wrong direction. Where are you going?” ("Lost Horizons"). Cooper's gesture that westward is the wrong direction reveals the geographic direction of east as what maintains the secure guise of Don Draper, ad man. This, by default, offers that the mid-west, like the Illinois of his youth, and the far west of California serves as an undoing of that identity. Cooper discourages Draper’s westward movement because it threatens his self-made persona. Cooper then discloses Draper’s psychological need to “play the stranger” in his life of failed relationships and deceitful interactions ("Lost Horizons"). Yet, Draper’s current role of the stranger is suggestive of moving toward Draper’s born identity as Whitman, strange only in its narrative trajectory backward in time and westward across the country. The late-night drive and conversation with Cooper codes Draper’s escape on the road as a rediscovery of this lost identity, the “Lost Horizon” of the title referring to both navigational dislocatedness and foreclosed opportunity. Unable to come to terms with his constructed life, Draper takes to the road to generate self-affirming experience and self-searching opportunities. Draper asks Cooper:
Draper: "Remember On the Road?"
Cooper: "I've never read that book. You know that."
Draper: "I'm riding the rails."
Cooper: "Wither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?" ("Lost Horizons")

By invoking Kerouac’s famous journey across the American landscape to find himself, Draper claims the hobo mystique as his method of self-making. Kerouac’s inclusion in the scene allows Draper to conflate hobo methods of transportation, offering that riding the rails is a more romantic version of hoboing than Kerouac’s passengered status as a Gasoline Tramp. Cooper’s final words in this dream sequence quote On the Road, a book he has not read but knows word for word at his core. Despite the hallucinatory nature of Cooper’s presence, his recitation of the lines instills a cultural unconscious regarding the hobo. This romance of the hobo on the road or rails can be seen propelling Draper’s movement, making Kerouac’s words a catalyst for self-discovery on the roads westward. These configurations continue to further the appeal of the hobo mystique when the episode ends with Draper picking up a hitchhiker outside in Wisconsin. Eager to re-discover himself, Draper embarks upon his own Kerouac inspired journey, heading toward the rider’s destination of St. Paul, Minnesota, saying only “I can go that way” to express his willingness to roam ("Lost Horizons").

105 Literature is one way that Mad Men incorporated mid-century specific culture. Two of several noted titles include Ayn Rand’s Atlas Shrugged (1957) which Cooper recommends to Draper claiming that he understands Draper’s philosophy of life ("Hobo Code"), and Frank O’Hara’s Meditations in an Emergency (1957) which Draper sends to California as confessional missive of his identity crisis ("For Those Who Think Young").
106 Kerouac’s evokes another poet of the road, Walt Whitman. The western movement of men in “Pioneers! O Pioneers!” (Leaves of Grass, 1855) provides Kerouac a starting place for the self-aggrandizing and self-making romance of moving across the American landscape. It is no coincidence that Whitman is Draper’s birth name and equates his hobo beginnings.
“Lost Horizons” marks Draper’s slow hobo reveal, each western movement bringing him closer to un-making himself, leaving his self-protective devices on the roadside to achieve a Kerouac-like realization in California. By associating himself with the western promise of the hobo mystique, Draper’s continued movement along “The Milk & Honey Route,” to California exposes more and more of Dick Whitman. Though it is Don Draper who left New York City and drove west, Dick Whitman begins to inhabit the driver’s seat in Kansas and Oklahoma. These competing identifications provide difficult for Draper/Whitman when his car breaks down in Oklahoma and he is stranded at a small motel. The locals see Draper/Whitman as both a leisure-driven wealthy traveler as well as a tinkering workingman that fixes the motel’s typewriter, cash register and Coke machine. This class-duality becomes especially intense when Draper/Whitman interacts with the local post of the American Legion, which forces him to foreground his service in Korea as Dick Whitman. At the fundraiser, which aims to earn a large donation from him, Draper/Whitman listens to vets tell their stories to survive. After hearing their struggles, hobo as artist Draper/Whitman tells his own, explaining to the table: “I killed my CO. We were under fire. Fuel was everywhere. And I dropped my lighter. And I blew him apart. And I got to go home.” (“Milk & Honey Route”).

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107 Frank Capra’s 1937 film *Lost Horizon* is an adaptation of the 1933 best-selling novel by James Hilton. As a pop cultural allusion, the title evokes questions of being hijacked on the way to your destination, the inhabitants of a plane delivered to and held in the idyllic Shangri-La. In Draper’s narrative arch, the seemingly glamorous life of Don Draper in New York City is put in question, his journey westward and toward Dick Whitman a return on the proper course.

108 The title also refers to Nels Anderson’s hobo handbook, *The Milk and Honey Route* published under the pseudonym Dean Stiff in 1930.
The series had previously indicated that CO Don Draper was killed in battle and that Dick Whitman took his name, returning home under a different identity.\textsuperscript{109} However, this episode marks the first time the audience is given the details of the wartime event not through flashback, but Whitman's actual retelling of the event. Draper/Whitman's testimony to the table of veterans as Whitman is a moment of honesty, his westward movement stripping down the construction of Draper's assumed identity and finally telling a story that is true. Rather than judge Whitman for his actions, the vets commiserate with him and reassure him that as a general rule, "you just do what you have to do to come home" ("Milk & Honey Route"). Draper/Whitman's return from Korea are marked by fictions of the self that never feel at home, making home elusive. As a hobo-as-artist, Draper/Whitman feels at home in homelessness and his westward movement aims to find this feeling by rambling across the United States. Draper/Whitman's movements also suggest that home is not necessarily a place, but the ability to reconcile his beginnings as Dick Whitman.

Draper/Whitman's experience at the Legion signals the beginning of his ability to understand his competing identities, but also requires him to take part in the hobo mystique even further. The hobo mystique permits Draper/Whitman to discover himself, but at the same time it provides an uncanny realism, what Erin Mercer refers to as unhomeliness that avoids addressing traumatic beginnings (190). Each mile along "The Milk & Honey Route" promises not only self-

\textsuperscript{109} In Season 3, Episode 11 “The Gypsy and the Hobo,” Don Draper’s wife Betty confronts him about his stolen identity. The details of Draper’s Korean War death are not divulged, only that Whitman had taken the name.
actualization, but also dissolution through white male fantasy. Feeling propelled to continue taking part in the freedoms of this fiction, Draper impulsively gives his car to a young man desperate to escape the town. Instead of driving, Draper/Whitman sits at a rural bus stop between fields, a single plastic bag of his belongings in hand. Eliminating the car leaves Draper without the privileges of New York City, allowing Whitman and his hobo beginnings to take precedence. The final scene shows Draper/Whitman smiling in the sunshine, suggesting that he is one step closer to accomplishing a rail-riding identity headed westward.

In the series’ final episode, “Person to Person,” Draper completes his transformation to hobo Dick Whitman.\textsuperscript{110} After catching a ride to Los Angeles from Salt Lake City—where he worked as the most iconic of working-class figures, the mechanic—Draper knocks at the door of a family friend, Stephanie, and is greeted as Dick.\textsuperscript{111} He is haggard, dirty and tired; he has not shaved and still only has a single bag of possessions. He appears desperate, asking for liquor in an almost delusional state. Stephanie invites him in, but expresses her concern for him as he collapses on the couch. In this scene, Draper has accomplished becoming Dick Whitman begging at the door for a drink and a shower, a California-bound hobo like Kerouac.

Draper/Whitman has covered the geographic ground of the hobo and has now been

\textsuperscript{110} Andy Samberg, host of the 67th Primetime Emmy Awards, very aptly referred to \textit{Mad Men} as the story of “Dick Whitman Horny Hobo.” Heather Tapley argues that correlations between hobos and sexuality were created by medical discourse which “produced the (white) hobo/tramp as lazy (labour) and, therefore, licentious (sexuality)” (35). Ironically, the licentious aspect of Draper/Whitman’s character is Draper, not the hobo Whitman.

\textsuperscript{111} Stephanie is the niece of Anna Draper, the widow of the Korean War CO Don Draper, whose identity was stolen by Dick Whitman. Upon his return from war, Anna tracks Draper/Whitman down and the two forge a close friendship based on the secret identity. Stephanie has only ever known Draper/Whitman as Dick Whitman.
identified by others as Dick Whitman, completing his hobo fantasy of westward travel. But when Stephanie invites him back onto the road to a New Age retreat up the coast he begrudgingly attends to support her, despite his big-city Draper-like skepticism. After they arrive at the retreat, Stephanie grows over-emotional in a session and she leaves in the middle of the night. This leaves Draper/Whitman stranded on the coast.

For the first time in seven seasons, Draper/Whitman is forced to stop moving. He is on the bluffs of the ocean and can go no further west. He is surrounded by strangers in a rural and natural environment, marking the final scenes as antithetical to his New York City high-rise life. He has no method of transportation and cannot leave the retreat until a car—which takes a few days to request—comes for him. He breaks down from the strain of being stationary, and collapses on the ground, trembling as he asserts, “I can’t move” (“Person to Person”). Fashioned as a mirror-image of Jack Kerouac, Draper/Whitman is dressed in plaid with bearded scruff, broken and exposed at the Big Sur retreat.\(^{112}\) Like Kerouac’s Big Sur cabin dwelling, Draper/Whitman hits rock bottom, and has been stripped to the core of his being. He has embraced his hobo beginnings, while still connected “Person to Person” by a phone call to co-worker Peggy and his life as Draper in New York City. No longer able to participate in the unhomeliness of the hobo mystique, Draper finds himself at the end of the road. His social, physical and geographic inability to

\(^{112}\) The associations between Draper/Whitman and Kerouac are profuse. Draper/Whitman is roughly the same age as Kerouac, both born in the early-1920s. At this point of Mad Men’s narrative it is 1970 and Kerouac had drunk himself to death the year before. This makes Kerouac’s likeness in the final scenes of Draper/Whitman a not only a provocative cultural symbol of the hobo mystique, but a frightening alternative for Draper/Whitman’s journey.
move suggests that the hobo mystique was a self-destructive resolution to his conflict with the Dick Whitman of his hobo beginnings, and the Don Draper of his New York life. An instructor at the retreat fears for Draper/Whitman’s well-being, helps him off the ground, and ushers him into a session. In this session, what Sally Robinson calls a “Middle American” man—middle-aged and middle-class—reveals the unfulfilling nature of his corporate life and expresses that he feels transparent and unimportant. This narration of a vulnerable and invisible masculinity prompts Draper to get up in the middle of the man’s ramble. But rather than leave the room like he does the Miller beer pitch that starts his hobo journey, Draper/Whitman walks across the room and hugs the man with trembling intensity. This embrace marks that hobo Dick Whitman on the Big Sur cliffs has learned to reconcile his life as the ad man Don Draper. Draper/Whitman realizes his necessary duality and finds that it is not the hobo mystique that is destructive, but rather the social expectation for masculine singularity. His road-pursuit for self-discovery complete, the final scene of the series shows Draper/Whitman meditating on the cliffs of Big Sur in a white-collared dress shirt and khakis. He is finally happy and internally whole as a self-realizing hobo and bohemian.

HoboHemian California

Mad Men calls attention to the correlation between the uncanny realism of the hobo mystique and the “early post-war period’s concern with the reintegration of disenfranchised veterans to American civilian life,” what Erin Mercer points out is at
the heart of texts like Draper’s beloved On the Road (169). Draper/Whitman’s reconciliation with his alternate realities after serving in the Korean War requires him to utilize the hobo narrative for masculine direction. In this way, the hobo narrative becomes a method for pursuing cultural class-values in world made strange by not only the wars of the twentieth century, but also the prosperity of an expanding of the middle class that creates “an ambiguous space in which peace and plenty were constantly haunted by a sense of anxiety” (Mercer 190). As a marker of prosperity, the American dream and the comforts of modern life are challenged by the hobo’s homelessness, suggesting that the anxiety of masculine life precludes feeling at home. The hobo narrative addresses white masculinity as perpetually homeless in the twentieth century. To this effect, Mercer argues that, “[t]o be ‘at home’ in postwar America always involved the threat of estrangement,” to which I offer the hobo narrative as an emblematic example (190).

California is able to relay both the “peace and plenty” of Mercer’s uncanny realism, as well as Pizer’s “[s]ocially and morally suspect” naturalism that focuses on the “concrete immediacies of experience” seen in texts like The Grapes of Wrath (3). Men like Draper/Whitman, as well as London, Steinbeck, Kerouac, Thompson, and Bukowski benefit from a flexible narrative practice like the hobo-as-artist in California, a regional site for localized American masculine self-making in a modern era where only the frontier is settled. Draper/Whitman’s journey to California calls attention to the geographic space of the West as permitting class performative possibility. Like the settings discussed in previous chapters, California continues to
serve *Mad Men* as a location of promise, one that Robert Seguin argues is:

bound up with one of the primal building blocks American classlessness, which is the notion of a generalized and available sociospatial mobility (wherein spatial mobility, and indeed individual motion itself, can figure forth fantasies of social mobility). The overdetermination of simple geography is thus crucial: as the terminal point of migration in America, as the place where the frontier comes to a halt on the sun-drenched beaches... California naturally became amenable to a host of fantasy investments and projections concerning the success or imminent failure of the American Dream. (94)

As a class performative figure, Draper/Whitman utilizes California as a space of re writability. His social mobility is generated by concepts of spatial mobility rooted in frontier-era migrations and early twentieth century hobo travels. Draper becomes Whitman at Stephanie’s door not because she can identify him, but because he has called-up an American unconscious of self-making that is tied to the promise of California. The milk and honey route provides a westward direction that offers instruction for his complex and competing class identities.\(^{113}\) Arriving in California only to be faced with where the “frontier comes to a halt,” Draper/Whitman’s fantasy of the hobo mystique provides him an opportunity to reclaim a hobo-as-artist mentality that provides the verbal experience with which to re-write life.

In this way, it is not only movement through geographic space that engenders class performativity, but also the aptitude for language, storytelling and narrative technique. As Mark Seltzer makes clear with the mechanical typewriter,

\(^{113}\) Draper’s middle-class escape from the pressures of masculine expectation are also similar to John Updike’s *Rabbit Run* (1960), where main character Harry runs away from his problems by hitting the road, the hobo draw of freedom resounding against his middle-class male pressures. Harry’s departure from outside of Philadelphia places him in the car, driving in any direction but east toward home: “He wants to go south [...] down the map [...] It seems simple enough, drive all night through the dawn through the morning through the noon park on a beach take off your shoes and fall asleep by the Gulf of Mexico” (Updike 23–4).
the intellectual labor of masculine self-making often uses naturalist forms to advance:

[a] fundamentally different understanding of the work process. What this involves is part is the incorporation of the representation of the work process into the work process itself. But beyond that, it involves the incorporation of the work process as the work process itself. (Seltzer 14)

Like Bukowski’s tax deductible writing tool, or Draper/Whitman’s ability to fix the motel’s typewriter and exhibit his typing skills, the hobo narrative emphasizes an ability to write and re-write one’s identity in light of what Nigel Thrift considers a new technology of the self. Unlike the chalk of the folkloric hobo code, the typewriter is a machine that permits both personal self-expression and professional work in Draper’s advertising life. Seltzer’s attention to work process reinstitutes my early concern with differentiating hobos and tramps based on what counts as work. The hobo narrative meditates on these concerns, issuing self-reflexive life and art in modern and postmodern hobo narratives that redefine labor through highly mobile narrations of intellectual capacity.

To conclude, I want to suggest that hobohemian practice is generated from an anxiety over working-class and middle-class identifications that aim to express differences between physical and intellectual labor. Amid the mid-century increase in white-collar jobs, the hobo narrative becomes a literary form that engages articulations of social hierarchy for social command. Drawing on capital, whether economic, cultural, social or symbolic, hobohemian practitioners are able to address the hollowness of postwar realism as Erin Mercer sees it. By engaging in strange fictional realities, the hobo narrative engages proto-naturalist modes that allow
white, masculine self-making through the class-fantasies of hobos, tramps and bums that serve to consolidate privileges of race, class and gender rather than challenge them.

The proliferation of the hobo narrative into the twentieth century offers a specific, historical consciousness that circulates with multiplicities in its uncanny representations, whether realist or naturalist. The early-incorporation of the hobo into Whitman/Draper’s character development highlights this profuse cultural circulation. It also makes visible the flexibility of the hobo narrative, which relies on a combination of literary styles and genres, including the autobiography, non-fiction, fiction and memoir, to suggest that “unhomeliness guarantees estrangement from any genre” including even the “genre itself to become estranged from its own conventions” (Mercer 32-33). By envisioning hobohemian practice as an example of estranged conventions, Mad Men’s hobo narrative edge articulates pop cultural circulations beyond the literary, gesturing toward the hobo’s presence in not only television, but also film and music. By claiming the valuable inheritance of the hobo narrative and selling it to twenty-first century audiences, Mad Men articulates an ongoing cultural fascination with self-made masculinity and the dynamic practice of class performativity on the road earned through early tramp autobiographies and hobo narratives.

These appeals are also spectacles of white masculinity in crisis, and suggest that an estrangement from convention can communicate the stark realities of rampant alcoholism and self-destructiveness as integral challenges to masculinity
that are met by the writer's mythological freedom on the road in social and symbolic ways. These challenges also map onto the reflexive shifts of author and narrator, made most visible in Kerouac and Bukowski's difficult recalibration of the self after their narrators became famous. While the hobo narrative provides a productive estrangement from convention, it also provides hohemian practitioners a dangerous estrangement from themselves. While the hobo-as-artist exhibits resiliency that allows him to maintain safe social calculations, the hohemian's writerly occupation is endangered by changing cultural marketplaces and socio-economic pressures. This kind of spectacle-of-the-self is a curious intersection of twentieth century thought that suggests that the uncanny realism, mechanical naturalism or dirty realism of the hobo narrative is itself a popularized and commodified circulation of white, masculine anxiety.

My examination of the hobo narrative in American literature and culture highlights a tendency to establish authentic and agential identity through working-class representations. In doing so, it traces a generationally-specific and class-privileged ability to self-make masculine identity. I import discussions of class through the terms of gendered privilege to articulate that the hobo narrative instates hohemian practice, which utilizes the highly masculine hobo mystique for advancement of white, middle-class control. The hobo narrative claims working-class identity and sells it to the American cultural marketplace to exhibit that social status can be manipulated for generational and countercultural gains. Hobohemian practice allows white masculinity to re-write itself in minority positions based on
the multiplicity and democratic use value of working-class identity. In doing so, these minority positions solidify a majority position which can gains cultural control by stressing a status able to claim multiple identifications for self-serving narrative projects into the twenty-first century.

The hobo narrative also highlights a nuanced class-based challenge to the upwardly mobile pressures of Alger-like rags-to-riches tropes. The hobo narrative recalibrates notions of work and social status alongside a horizontal axis for a highly regional masculine self-making. As a radical lifestyle and romantic form of self-exploration, the hobo narrative provides its practitioners resilient class performative techniques to navigate late-capitalist times. The contemporary hobo narrative transgresses class-distinctions to collapse socio-economic debates of poverty in favor of issuing radical and rebellious self-control. The hobo, once a political figure in the Industrial Army, is now a highly constructed nostalgic reference to mid-century masculinity. The hobo narrative locates ways the reciprocal and dialogic character of working-class culture becomes a method for commodifying the poverty in the marketplace of ideas. The strategic use of hoboheian practice makes the social and material pressures of contemporary American identity abstract and stylized in art, turning them into symbolic sites for popular culture and politics.
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