

The Cross-Country/Cross-Class Drives of Don Draper/Dick Whitman: Examining *Mad Men's* Hobo Narrative

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Abstract

This article examines how the critically acclaimed television show *Mad Men* (2007-2015) sells romanticized working-class representations to middle-class audiences, including contemporary cable subscribers. The television drama's lead protagonist, Don Draper, exhibits class performatively in his assumed identity as a Madison Avenue ad executive, which is in constant conflict with his hobo-driven born identity of Dick Whitman. To fully examine Draper/Whitman's cross-class tensions, I draw on the American literary form of the hobo narrative, which issues agency to the hobo figure but overlooks the material conditions of homelessness. I argue that the hobo narrative becomes a predominant but overlooked aspect of *Mad Men's* period presentation, specifically one that is used as a technique for self-making and self-marketing white masculinity in twenty-first century U.S. cultural productions.

Keywords

Cross-class tensions; television; working-class representations

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, in 'Selling Nostalgia: *Mad Men*, Postmodernism and Neoliberalism,' Deborah Tudor suggests that the show offers commitments to individualism through a 'neoliberal discourse of style' which stages provocative constructions of reality (2012, p. 333). One of these stylistic discourses renders the well-dressed but poorly behaved masculinity of the show as an iconic facet 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,' which argues that Draper's enactment of mid-century vices 'collapses the sense of historical distance' and leaves audiences to 'glamorize' and 'condemn' his behavior from their contemporary time (2013; p. 262; p. 270). Both Tudor and Varon suggest that Draper's enigmatic masculine displays preoccupy critics and audiences, his character emblematic of a highly individualized but self-conscious presentation of gender. But to understand how Draper's masculinity works, it is crucial to also consider its racial identifications, and even more importantly, its class affiliations.

Throughout the *Mad Men* series, Draper's characterization offers a compelling case study for how mid-century masculinity authorizes its behavior through self-making, and participates in a century-long spectacle concerned with self-presentation and self-preservation. Draper's mid-century appeal to a post-liberationist audience pressures viewers to be both astounded by the misogynistic and racist perspectives of the time, and amazed by their reception in the present.¹ Week after week, viewers rubbernecked the wreckage of Draper's catastrophic love affairs, habitual infidelity, abused childhood and Korean-war flashbacks. In particular, viewers wanted to know when and if Draper would stop living the lie of his assumed identity and return to his born identity as Dick Whitman.² 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 of the show. Yet, as a testament of Draper's period-specific status, no risk generated from his lifestyle ever truly interfered with his success. Audiences were drawn into watching Draper come close to losing everything, but never realized that his position precluded ever actually losing anything.

In this respect *Mad Men* both represents and participates in a discourse that locates the crisis of masculinity in the mid-century (Penner 2011). Theorists and critics who contribute to this discourse often draw on popular culture to provide a provocative frame for studying representations of American masculinity and to envision the collision of gender, race and class identities.³ Additionally, literary texts can help to deconstruct the monolithic privilege of white masculinity seen in cultural narratives. Pursuing study of *Mad Men* through the frame of American literature, which plays prominently within the series, allows Draper's character to be connected to the concept of the self-made man. Draper's character depicts American self-making as unlimited by social systems of inequality, and perpetuates a mid-century status quo of white, masculine centrality. To do so, *Mad Men* draws on a long-standing practice in literary culture that emphasizes social status by placing value on working-class representations. These representations obscure the socio-economic realities of class in an effort to reinforce hierarchical understandings of gender and race.⁴ When these representations are circulated in literature, television, film or the media, they overlook the material circumstances of their time in order to sell stylized reputations, lifestyles and appearances of working-class identity. Examining *Mad Men* in this way helps to reveal how class representations function within American narratives not only within

¹ Michael Bérubé (2013) argues that *Mad Men's* appeal in the contemporary era is structured on envisioning the changes of the Sixties 'filtered through the present' (p. 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 (Bérubé 2013, p. 347). These highly subjective interpretations allow audiences to claim self-serving value against a historical façade.

² 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.

³ In particular, Sally Robinson (2000), David Savran (1998) and Susan Jeffords (1989) provide an instructive model for pursuing the study of masculinity through a variety of textual types.

⁴ *Mad Men* often used literature to incorporate mid-century specific culture. Two of several noted titles of the era include Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), which Cooper recommends to Draper, claiming that he understands Draper's philosophy of life (*Mad Men* 2007); and Frank O'Hara's *Meditations in an Emergency* (1957), which Draper sends to California as confessional missive of his identity crisis (*Mad Men* 2008).

the dramatized mid-century era of prosperity, but to audiences in a post-recession moment, which like the postwar, understand that American classlessness has proven to be fiction.

I trace *Mad Men*'s mid-century preoccupation with class representations to early-twentieth century hobo narratives, which foreground a hard-earned masculine identity alongside the celebration of anti-hero or outsider figures. The hobo narrative is a confluence of road and travel narratives that celebrate mobility based on technological innovations in transportation in fraught economic periods spanning from the Progressive era to the Depression. These cultural narratives range in their political activism, some depicting the hobo as a marginalized working-class figure in search of work, while most highlight the freedom from domestic responsibility earned by hitting the road.⁵ The latter of these depicts the hobo through a romantic wanderlust, overlooking national and municipal pressures on the hobo to be a productive laborer in place of authorizing self-serving individualism. This heroic agency and romanticized itinerancy complicates how we view the hobo's material situation, the hobo narrative removing or disguising economic pressures to maximize masculine agency.

The highly gendered American labor tradition of the hobo narrative is practiced by what Todd DePastino calls a 'white male counterculture' (2003, p. xx). This renders the hobo narrative an alternative system of class representation, one that prioritizes work for the self or in service of the self, and stresses social agency and cultural command over economic vulnerability or volatility. Since the hobo narrative prioritizes adventure, whether for work or for play, it is a traditionally masculine form that champions the mobility of white, masculine access historically foreclosed to women and people of color.

The hobo narrative is inaugurated by Jack London's hobo handbook *The Road* (1907), which features a protagonist able to manipulate social situations from town to town in order to meet his material needs.⁶ This practice is revealed in London's first chapter 'Confession' (paragraph 40), where he explains:

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.

Though a transient and underclass figure that must rely on the handouts of others, London offers that 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' (paragraph 40). London's text

⁵ The hobo narrative may offer an autobiographical voice of resilient social experience, such as in Jack Black's *You Can't Win* (1926), or feature hobo or vagabond characters for political commentary, such as in John Dos Passos's *U.S.A. Trilogy* (1937).

⁶ The hobo narrative's reliance on working-class figures for resiliency relates to what Thomas Newhouse (2000) calls the 'hobo mystique.' 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.

emphasizes that a persuasive hobo figure is able to manipulate the severity of his material conditions through storytelling, relying on a verbal capacity to perform his social situation and guarantee survival. Predicated on the ability to identify an audience and produce an appropriate story, London's hobo-as-artist is celebrated for his verbal resourcefulness, rendering him a creative institution rather than a man economically dispossessed.

In *Labor's Text*, Working-Class Studies scholar and literary critic Laura Hapke explains a similar phenomenon throughout American fiction when she argues that a 'new sureness of tone [is] born of the authority of the vagabond,' who makes 'language...the experience itself' (2001, p. 191). Hapke's observation sheds light on London's presentation of the hobo, acknowledging the ability to command a sense of cultural control through narratives that gain authenticity based on underclass associations. As a refined storyteller, this representation of the hobo uses the economic reputation to stress a privileged creative capacity to render hobo symbols and assert himself as a 'proletarian troubadour who [can] always get by' (p. 191).

In the hobo narrative, this resilient ability to 'get by' can be seen exhibiting a part-hobo and part-bohemian identity. This *hobohemian* character seeks to reinforce status-driven masculinity by creatively and strategically displaying his working-class affiliations.⁷ The continued presence of the hobo narrative in the postwar becomes suggestive of a creative method for earning masculine credibility in an era of containment. In the context of *Mad Men*, this concept helps to expose the mid-century interest in the hobo figure as a nostalgic fantasy by writers such as beatnik Jack Kerouac, whose depiction of class speaks to new social classifications within post-war economies that are growing increasingly white-collar.⁸

Mad Men's skyscraper may also represent that shift in social hierarchy, but it is crucial to note how Draper's story does not aspire for upward mobility because there is no legitimate risk of moving downward.⁹ Unlike the upward mobility promised by Horatio Alger's nineteenth-century rags-to-riches narratives that stress progress and

⁷ Hobohemia has historically been represented a geographic space. In *On Hobos and Homelessness*, Nels Anderson defines hobohemia as an early twentieth century 'mainline' of temporary settlement (1923, p. 28) at a crossroads with Bughouse Square, the bohemian Village of Chicago (1923, p. 36). By indicating hobohemia's capacity for cultural and economic exchange, I adapt this term to describe a subject who possesses hobo and bohemian affiliations.

⁸ In addition to *Mad Men* (2007-2015), there have been an increasing number of films about literary figures that utilize conventions of the hobo narrative. The most apparent of these are the film reclamations of Jack Kerouac and Beat culture in *One Fast Move Or I'm Gone* (2008), *Howl* (2010), *On the Road* (2012), *Big Sur* (2013), and *Kill Your Darlings* (2013). This trend can also be seen in other countercultural figures that entertain the cross-class appeal of the hobo, including work on Hunter S. Thompson's career 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 work of Charles Bukowski, in *Bukowski: Born Into This* (2003), and the legal battle over James Franco's production of *Bukowski* (2013).

⁹ One possible exception may be the episode "Hands and Knees" (*Mad Men* 2010), where Draper's firm must get security clearance through the Federal Bureau of Investigation and he is in danger of being arrested for desertion. Interestingly enough, this fear results in Draper's ability to persuade and mobilize a network of support—personally and professionally--and eliminate the risk. I read potential imprisonment as a characteristic of downward mobility because it would restrict Draper's personal agency, not because of its criminal status.

hard work to earn social mobility, the hobo narrative uses physical mobility to depict twentieth-century lateral moves across geographic space. Draper's hobo narrative is overwhelming longitudinal, emphasizing panoramic strides across space and time in distinctly horizontal ways (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). These narrative facets help to decipher the gravity of the storylines within *Mad Men* wherein power is relegated the men of Madison Avenue, who go from office to office—and woman to woman—in order to maintain their status, virility and wealth. Characters like Don Draper show that there is no need to move up the hierarchy when one is already at the top, making the lateral an explicit indicator of male status in the show.

And though female characters like Joan Harris and Peggy Olson are able to move up significantly within the company, their movement is limited and tied to largely to domestic sacrifices and bodily vulnerability. This mirrors the gender dynamic of the hobo narrative, too, where a man's itinerancy is deemed as freedom and self-fulfilment as compared to women, who are left behind or relegated to stationary domestic concerns and maternal ties. Thus, when contemporary audiences consume *Mad Men* as a unique presentation of mid-century gender and race, they overlook the intense class positions woven into those identities. This stealthy use of the hobo narrative proves that twenty-first century viewers have been trained to see class as a stylish institution and lifestyle, rather than know what kinds of inequality are perpetuated by romanticized working-class representations. By calling attention to the popular form of the hobo narrative, this examination of *Mad Men* hopes to address a long-standing cultural practice that cashes in on such representations of the working class. This initiates an overdue conversation that acknowledges how contemporary politics and media continually use working-class representations to define and justify access to the American dream and the privileges of the middle class without seeing the complex interplay between gender, race and class.

Thus, while critics have argued that *Mad Men* creates a 'spectacle of masculinity in crisis at once so elegant, alluring and instructive,' this gendered performance also proves the cultural resonance of the hobo narrative and often problematic class representations (Varon 2013, p. 269). This regards *Mad Men* not as a text that depicts crisis, but rather as a text that captures the entrepreneurial strategies that white masculinity employs to handle the economic pressures of the twenty and twenty-first centuries. By resolving Draper's story line through a cross-country road trip, the last three episodes of the final season conclude the hobo narrative that had been integral to the series since season one. This ending suggests that by reclaiming the class identity of his past, Draper's—and the audience's—closure must participate in the cultural geography of a hobo counterculture. *Mad Men* envisions the appeal of this story line by focusing on its persuasive and creative protagonist, a man who can always 'get by.'

Flashbacks to Hobo Foundations

The hobo narrative underlying *Mad Men* is established in the season one episode 'The Hobo Code' (*Mad Men* 2007). This early episode presents Whitman's Depression-era struggles in conflict with the bohemians of Draper's current bourgeois life. By establishing Draper as both an upper-class ad man and an impoverished farm boy, *Mad Men* uses the hobo narrative to gesture toward tensions of masculine self-control

by making class identity highly visible.

Draper's dual-class 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' (*Mad Men* 2007). Unwilling to give up on his plan and return home to his wife and children, Draper gives into the bohemian vibe, smokes marijuana with Daniels, and claims: 'I feel like Dorothy' (*Mad Men* 2007).¹⁰ Draper becomes 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, and his 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 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.¹¹ 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 (*Mad Men* 2007).

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' (*Mad Men* 2007).¹² 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 boy as well as the Organization Man (Whyte 1956), neither of which fit him wholly, and both of which are met with hostility in the bohemian apartment. Feeling physically, emotionally and socially dislocated, Draper's debate with what Norman Podhoretz (1958) calls 'Know-Nothing Bohemians,' becomes the catalyst for another flashback to young Whitman talking privately with the hobo. Whitman is perplexed by the hobo's

¹⁰ 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 as representative of General Kelly and General Coxy's march on Washington with the Tramp Army in the late nineteenth-century. Jack London travelled with General Kelly in 1894 and captured his observations in *The Tramp Diary* before parting ways to seek better food and board (1979).

¹¹ 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.

¹² Love is manufactured in *Mad Men*. In 'Smoke Gets In Your Eyes' (2007) Draper claims that he has created the concept of love and sold it through the products he advertises. 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' (*Mad Men* 2007). 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.'

identity, which appears at odds with what he has been told about them (*Mad Men* 2007):

Whitman: 'You don't talk like a bum.'

Hobo: 'I'm not. I'm a gentleman of the rails. For me, every day is brand new. Every day's a brand new place, people, what have you.'

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 the hobo represents the potential 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' (*Mad Men* 2007). This truth does not provide solace to Whitman, but rather decrees an alternative lifestyle in which someone can be from someplace else interminably. This instils the very impulse with which Whitman becomes Draper.¹³

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 use the power of communication to sustain and secure a hobo identity. After drawing a few symbols, the hobo gives Whitman the chalk. The passing of the chalk transfers to Whitman the hobo's ability to survive through language. The hobo teaches Whitman not only a hopeful new vocabulary, but provides him with an instrument that allows him to literally and figuratively re-write his life. Like London's hobo-as-artist, Whitman learns that the hobo can rely on his ability to tell a story to earn handouts, the codes securing his mobility and perpetual reinvention. The passing of the chalk directly affects Whitman/Draper by providing him a highly mobile life that can be secured by wielding language effectively. The benefits of this include his ability to spin a story that secures a new identity after the Korean War, as well as securing his professional reputation as an ad man who uses language to persuade a consumer public. The hobo, who brings Whitman opportunity through language, changes his impoverished beginnings but also Draper's well-to-do future by presenting the option for new stories and appearances in pursuit of new beginnings.

The episode ends with Draper appearing to understand that based on his hobo flashbacks, his bohemian life with Midge is just as artificial as his executive one. Realizing his rejection by the bohemian group, 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

¹³ The hobo in this episode provides an example of what Erin Royston Battat (2014) calls a 'volitional hobo' rather than a 'vulnerable hobo' (p. 23). The hobo connects his satisfaction to mobility, and notes his status as a choice that escapes the confining pressures of a mortgage, job and wife. This circulates a distinctly cultural version of the hobo that stresses agency and individualism over the need for work during tense economic times.

excitedly tell him he cannot leave because of the police in the building. Draper points at one outspoken young man with a spiteful smile and tells him ‘you can’t,’ and walks out the door, passing unnoticed by the officers in the hallway (*Mad Men* 2007). Draper’s action not only stresses the option to leave, forever mobile, but his retort acknowledges an understanding that he will be hidden by the appearances of a well-dressed ad man. In doing so, this episode crafts Draper as a hobohemian figure who is aware of the benefits of passing between the groups depending on his need for affiliation. This portion of his hobo narrative completes a class-crossing circuit between hobo and bohemian, as well as bohemian and bourgeois.¹⁴

Though Draper judges the bohemians for their superficial class appearances, ‘buying some Tokaj wine, leaning up against a wall in Grand Central and pretending you’re a vagrant,’ the episode offers Draper/Whitman’s aptitude for his own class performance as authentically rooted in the hobo (*Mad Men* 2007). Draper’s hobo narrative allows him to claim class affiliations as a social and cultural advantage. This permits Draper to construct and reconstruct his identity as a highly mobile character, building masculine control through strategic class associations that have unchecked access.

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. The last episodes of the season and series, ‘Lost Horizons,’ ‘The Milk & Honey Route,’ and ‘Person to Person,’ serve as highly identifiable circulations of a hobo narrative that still has a place in contemporary popular culture (*Mad Men* 2015). Draper/Whitman’s return to his hobo beginnings reinstates the centrality of his class characterization throughout the series. These final installments of *Mad Men* focus on wealthy, big-city Don Draper as he gradually strips off his constructed identity and returns to being poor, mid-western 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,’¹⁵ Draper’s class-chameleon act is seen under strain in order to show his inherent discomfort in his largely domestic, upper-middle-class life. Draper refuses to be troubled by his secretary’s insistence on choosing furnishings for his new apartment. He also refuses to be emotionally impacted when he is handed divorce papers at work. After his firm’s recent merger, Draper has become merely a presence both professionally and creatively. Draper’s boss calls him his ‘white whale,’ establishing Draper not as a man, but as a spectral pursuit of mythological

¹⁴ In *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (2000), David Brooks argues that the late twentieth century experienced a class shift as it learned to utilize cultural capital to advance identity politics. This included the bobo: a middle class, or bourgeois person who co-opts the qualities of bohemian identity for the advancement of more than economic or social capital. Draper/Whitman’s character is suggestive of movement toward this *bobo*, but who place cultural value on the hobo for historical effect.

¹⁵ As a pop cultural allusion, Frank Capra’s film *Lost Horizon* (1937) 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 arc, his seemingly glamorous life in New York City is put in question, while his journey westward and toward Dick Whitman is noted as a return to the proper course.

proportions (*Mad Men* 2015).¹⁶ As this spectral figure, Draper attends a meeting for a new account with Miller beer and goes unnoticed. He watches a young man deliver a pitch that invokes Draper's style and that uses appeals toward the everyman. Draper leaves the room in middle of the pitch, gets in his car and drives out of the city. After a brief telephone exchange with his ex-wife Betty about the children—none of whom need him—Draper turns onto the Pennsylvania/New Jersey Turnpike and begins heading westward. The episode issues Draper's final journey as taking part in the flight from middle-class life, his personal and professional pressures becoming too much. Yet, Draper's solitary drive westward signals a more complex cultural unconscious related to the hobo narrative, and actively reclaims Whitman's hobo beginnings from season one.

This becomes clear after seven hours of late-night driving, when 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?' (*Mad Men* 2015). Cooper's gesture that running westward is the wrong direction offers that the mid-west, like the Illinois of Whitman's birth, and the far west of California, serve only to undo Draper's assumed identity as established in New York City. Cooper discourages Draper's westward movement because it threatens his self-made persona, and calls attention to Draper's self-destructive need to 'play the stranger' in a life of failed relationships and deceitful interactions (*Mad Men* 2015). The late-night drive and conversation with Cooper codes Draper's escape on the road as one that does not have to choose the 'right or wrong' direction, but that can simply move without risk or repercussion. Instead, the episode uses the road westward as a way to generate self-affirming experience in line with other hobohebian figures of the mid-century period. 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?'

By alluding to Jack Kerouac's famous journey across the American landscape to find himself, Draper claims the hobo narrative as his method of self-making much as the series has claimed it to present his story. Kerouac's inclusion in the scene allows Draper to conflate hobo methods of transportation, offering a nostalgic reference to riding the rails in the early century in comparison to his mid-century passenger car. Further, Cooper's final words in this dream sequence directly quote *On the Road* (Kerouac 1957), a book he has not read but knows word for word. Cooper's recitation of Kerouac's lines present the cultural unconscious of the hobo. This romance of the hobo on the road or rails can be seen propelling Draper's movement, claiming it as an

¹⁶ This allusion to Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) is a provocative one. The relationship between Ahab and Ishmael highlights another issue of working-class representation since middle-class Ishmael documents the workingmen's search for the whale for his own social gain. Secondly, this reference also has mid-century countercultural presence in Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971), which depicts narrator Duke driving 'the White Whale' Cadillac in search of the American Dream, a spectral journey of futile masculine assertion. The 'white whale' allusion in *Mad Men* (2015) denotes not only Melville's creative power, but also the cultural circulation of a white masculinity that has relied on class affiliation throughout American literature and culture for over 150 years.

atavistic return to an American masculinity on the roads westward.¹⁷ These latitudinal strides stoke the hobo narrative when the episode ends with Draper picking up a hitchhiker outside of Wisconsin. Eager to re-invent 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 and need to roam (*Mad Men* 2015).

Though it is Don Draper who leaves the eastern point of New York City, Dick Whitman truly begins to inhabit the driver's seat in 'The Milk & Honey Route' when he reaches the Midwest states of Kansas and Oklahoma.¹⁸ Despite the coexistence of Draper/Whitman thus far on the journey, the geography incites a transfer of primary identification when the car breaks down and he is stranded at a small motel. While the locals see Draper as well dressed and well off, Draper himself takes pains to emphasize that he is Whitman, a tinkering workingman who manages to fix the motel's typewriter, cash register and Coke machine (*Mad Men* 2015). These three symbols approximate more than Whitman's experience with certain types of labor, they also present a rich triangulation of Draper's ability to use language, make money and sell Americana. As Mark Seltzer (1992) makes clear with his reading of the mechanical typewriter, these symbols can be used to understand a "fundamentally different understanding of the work process" as related to the intellectual labor of masculine self-making (p. 14). Draper's intellectual ability to represent Whitman through his labor indicates an economic resourcefulness tied to social capital. Thus, while Whitman's act serves to earn working-class credit by working with his hands, it is Draper's creativity that becomes represented in his hobo narrative. This cross-class moment meditates on a mid-century redefinition of labor while presenting to the motel owners a strategic performance of class.

Surprised by Draper/Whitman's ability to work with his hands, the motel owners also initiate a series of interactions at a fundraiser for the local post of the American Legion. In an interesting revision of the hobo-as-artist where the veterans use their storytelling ability to earn a donation, Draper/Whitman sits silently and listens to them, uncomfortable exposing his class-duality. Yet, after hearing their tales, Draper/Whitman tells of his own struggle, explaining to the table: 'I killed my C.O. We were under fire. Fuel was everywhere. And I dropped my lighter. And I blew him apart. And I got to go home' (*Mad Men* 2015).¹⁹ Finally attended by an audience that wants to hear the story he needs to tell, Draper/Whitman's testimony brings him

¹⁷ Kerouac's lines evoke another poet of the road, Walt Whitman. The western movement of men in 'Pioneers! O Pioneer!' (Whitman 1855) provides writers like 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 is equated to his hobo beginnings.

¹⁸ The title also refers to Nels Anderson's (1930) hobo handbook, *The Milk and Honey Route*, published under the pseudonym Dean Stiff. The milk and honey route originates as an indication of particularly generous handouts on the railroad line from Salt Lake City into Southern Utah. The phrase later represents anyone's personal vision of the good life in a particular space or place.

¹⁹ This episode marks the first time the audience is given the details of the wartime event not through one of Draper's flashbacks, but Whitman's factual retelling of the event with full disclosure. The series had previously indicated that C.O. Don Draper was killed in battle and that Dick Whitman took his name, returning home under a different identity. In the episode 'The Gypsy and the Hobo,' Don Draper's wife Betty confronts him about his stolen identity (*Mad Men* 2009). The details of Draper's Korean War death are not divulged, only that Whitman had taken the name.

closer to Whitman's embodied beginnings and further from Draper's assumed identity. This is further aided by how the veterans respond to his story, reassuring Draper/Whitman that as a general rule, 'you just do what you have to do to come home' (*Mad Men* 2015). These words acknowledge that Draper/Whitman's return from Korea is innately connected to the concept of home, something that his hobo journey has put in question. By using home as a marker of the American dream in the mid-century, the attributes of a prosperous modern life are challenged by the hobo's homelessness, which celebrates spatial, professional and domestic itinerancy.

In this way, *Mad Men* aptly calls attention to the correlation between the homelessness of hobo life and the 'early post-war period's concern with the reintegration of disenfranchised veterans to American civilian life,' what literary critic Erin Mercer points out is at the heart of texts like Draper's idealized *On the Road* (2011, p. 169). Draper/Whitman's reconciliation with his Korean War service makes clear that he requires the hobo narrative for masculine direction, using his multiple identities and class duality to find footing in an era of prosperity that finds the expanding middle class in 'an ambiguous space in which peace and plenty were constantly haunted by a sense of anxiety' (Mercer 2011, p. 190). Draper/Whitman's hobo narrative displays these tensions and shows that white masculinity has become, sometimes strategically, homeless in the twentieth century. *Mad Men's* casual engagement with homelessness becomes period-specific evidence of the central importance of class identity to the masculinity of the mid-century. This suggests that the anxieties of masculine life are in direct opposition to feeling at home anywhere but in perpetual motion. In mid-century interpretations of the hobo narrative, this homelessness is less impacted by socio-economic conditions than this need for movement.

In motion, Draper/Whitman's drive engages a white male fantasy based on the hobo's freedom from responsibility. Compelled to take part in this fiction, Draper impulsively gives his car to a young man who himself is desperate to escape the town. Instead of continuing his journey by driving, Draper/Whitman is shown sitting at a rural bus stop between farm fields, a single plastic bag of his belongings in hand. The absence of the car leaves Draper without the privileged transportation earned by his life in New York City. Yet, by presenting Draper/Whitman as making the *choice* to follow his hobo persona, *Mad Men* acknowledges that one can never really leave behind the privileges one has acquired. This moment clearly frames Draper/Whitman as a resourceful hobohemian, engaging symbols of the hobo narrative in a manner that helps to abate the pressures of Draper's personal and professional life. He has thrown himself into a hitchhiking and rail-riding identity headed westward, without the car but not without the ability to continue moving.

In the series' final episode, 'Person to Person,' Draper completes his transformation to hobo Dick Whitman (*Mad Men* 2015).²⁰ After catching a ride to Los Angeles from

²⁰ Andy Samberg, host of the 67th Primetime Emmy Awards, very aptly referred to *Mad Men* as the story of 'Dick Whitman Horny Hobo' (2015). Heather Tapley (2014, p. 35) 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).' Ironically, the licentious aspect of Draper/Whitman's character is Draper, not the hobo Whitman, even though the latter is raised in a brothel.

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.²¹ He is haggard, dirty and tired; he has not shaved and still has only a bindlestiff bag of possessions. He appears desperate and destitute, asking for liquor in an almost delusional state. Stephanie invites him in, but expresses her concern for him as he collapses on the couch. This completes his hobo fantasy of westward travel away from his life as Draper. But when Stephanie invites him back onto the road to a New Age retreat up the coast he begrudgingly attempts 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. The episode depicts him as stationary in order to reveal the gravity of his perpetual homelessness and hobo-driven desires. 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 immobile, and collapses on the ground, trembling as he asserts, ‘I can’t move’ (*Mad Men* 2015). Fashioned as a mirror image of Jack Kerouac (1962), Draper/Whitman is dressed in plaid with bearded scruff, broken and exposed at the Big Sur retreat.²²

Draper/Whitman is presented as having hit rock bottom, but still remains connected ‘Person to Person’ by the phone, both to request a car to take him away, and to speak with co-worker Peggy in New York City. In both of these exchanges, he utilizes Don Draper’s privileged connections for survival in his immobility on the coast as hobo Dick Whitman. No longer able to participate solely in his hobo fantasy, Draper finds himself at the end of the road. He is unable to fully separate his class identities, and is beginning to understand the power of the two in combination. This internal tension is resolved when 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 (2010) 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. Draper/Whitman walks across the room and hugs the man with intensity. This embrace marks an internal acknowledgement of Draper/Whitman’s life-long class performance. Fearful of his own vulnerable immobility on the cliffs of Big Sur, hobo Dick Whitman is permitted to reconcile with his life as the ad man Don Draper. Embracing this class duality, put

²¹ Stephanie is the niece of Anna Draper, the widow of the Korean War C.O. 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.

²² 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 in *Mad Men*’s narrative (2015) it is 1970 and Kerouac had drunk himself to death the year before. This makes Kerouac’s likeness in Draper/Whitman a not only a provocative cultural symbol of the hobo mystique, but a frightening alternative for Draper/Whitman’s journey as the series nears to an end.

in focus by the hobo narrative, allows Draper to rediscover the mid-century privileges of white masculinity.

This scene is the last moment of the series where Draper/Whitman's class identity exists in competitive duality. Thereafter the series features Draper/Whitman as whole and centred, meditating on the cliffs of the Pacific Ocean, clean cut, and in a white-collared dress shirt and khakis. The final shot zooms in on Draper/Whitman's face, his eyes closed with a grin, before dissolving into the 1971 'Buy the World A Coke' television commercial. The episode's ending provocatively connects the resourcefulness of Draper/Whitman's hobohemian acceptance to the implied authorship of the commercial. As a self-realizing creative hobo, Draper/Whitman's commercial features youthful men and women of various ethnic, racial and national backgrounds. They sing on a green hillside about the collective 'harmony' of consumerism, both drinking Coke and buying it.

Mad Men ends not with Draper/Whitman's introspection, but rather his conscious understanding that his status is imbued with privilege. Drawing again on the symbols of the typewriter, the cash register and the Coke machine, Draper/Whitman has 'sized up' his audience and composed a story that can secure his white, masculine investments through consumer sales. Despite the surface level gesture of goodwill, Draper's relationship to the commercial actually exemplifies a strategy of hegemonic masculinity that secures status by differentiating and exhibiting control over an Other (Connell 1994). The series does this twice. First, it depicts Draper/Whitman telling the story of Coke from within a hobo narrative that uses working-class identity to advance the social status of white masculinity. Second, the series connects Draper/Whitman's intellectual labor as benefitting from the representation—and arguably exploitation—of predominantly young women and people of color.

Though the multicultural celebration of the commercial may inspire some to envision Draper/Whitman's resolution as harmonious and in a positive light, the 'new day, new ideas, new you' mantra of the meditation scene is inherently dark when Draper/Whitman grins (*Mad Men* 2015). This grin does not indicate New Age fulfilment, but rather a self-satisfied expression of control. Like Jack London at the turn of the century, Draper/Whitman's creation of a 'new idea' within his hobo narrative has secured his position, reinforced his status, and afforded him agency in whatever manner he chooses. And like his mid-century contemporary Jack Kerouac, Draper/Whitman has learned in this moment to draw on not only working-class affiliations, but also multicultural representations to disguise the privilege of his white masculine status. The blatant global commercialization of multiculturalism in the English-speaking advertisement renders Draper/Whitman a nearly imperial presence, colonizing viewers with not only a repetitive jingle, but also a status quo that draws on representations of identity to reinstitute a hierarchy of positions within capitalism.²³

²³ The 2017 Pepsi commercial 'Live For Now Moments Anthem' was almost immediately pulled for trivializing the Black Lives Matter movement and other youth-lead demonstrations for multicultural and international unity. *Wired* (Watercutter 2017) argues for a similarity between the controversial Pepsi commercial and the 'Buy the World a Coke' campaign dramatized in *Mad Men*. Both commercials attempt to stage global unity through beverage choice and sell the representation of identity as a consumer product.

Hobohemian California

The final scenes of Draper/Whitman conclude the use of California as a regional symbol, one *Mad Men* had referenced for seven seasons as commercially viable and a space that promised reinvention.²⁴ Engaged in a changing marketplace aided by air travel and television production, the bi-coastal relationship of Draper's New York City ad agency and California impacts his own personal agency, providing the setting for the kind of cross-country drives that have made the hobo narrative iconic. Placing Draper in the geography of the American West in search of his hobo journey suggests that places like California engender the performance of identity as a new frontier in the twentieth century.

It is not surprising, then, that the series would show Draper/Whitman arriving in California to develop this facet of his hobo narrative. California is for *Mad Men* and for Draper/Whitman a location of promise, one that Robert Seguin (2001, p. 94) argues is:

overdetermin[ed]...as the terminal point of migration in America, [and] 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.

Mad Men utilizes California as a fantasy-driven space of reinvention for the hobohemian character of Draper/Whitman. Draper becomes Whitman at Stephanie's door in California not because she knows his name, but because he has successfully 'host[ed]...fantasy investments and projections' of an American unconscious of self-making that is tied not only to the promise of California, but a hobo-driven version of the American Dream.

Mad Men's use of California also helps to exemplify the complex relationship between geography and class in the hobo narrative. The final season's continued allusions to Kerouac (1957) make this clear when they invoke *On the Road*. Kerouac's novel describes its narrator travelling into the Midwest and feeling like 'some stranger...[in] a haunted life' (Kerouac 1957, p. 15). At the geographic point, 'halfway across America' he identifies the landscape as 'the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future...' (Kerouac 1957, p. 15). This relegates the cross-country drive and hobo narrative of *On the Road* (1957) as a coming-of-age story. But *Mad Men*'s hobo narrative does not emphasize chronology so much as bi-coastal class affiliations. In the final season, the East is the site of Draper's professional success and financial security. The West inspires Whitman's hobo fantasy removed from the responsibilities of Draper's life. In this respect, Draper/Whitman's cross-country drive is not a coming of age story but rather one of class-consciousness, specifically a consciousness emboldened by the resource and safety net of white, masculine status.

²⁴ The episode 'In Care Of' (*Mad Men* 2013) has several men from the firm competing for a move to California to run a remote office. Draper gives his option over to fellow partner Ted Chaough, who claims he needs it to keep his family together after an extra-marital affair. As the season 6 finale, the competition for California and episode ends with Draper taking his children to see the dilapidated warehouse where he grew up in Pennsylvania. This primes season 7 to make clear connections between geography and status with Draper's character.

Seguin (2001) also connects California to ‘one of the primal building blocks of American classlessness. . . [:] ‘socio-spatial mobility [where] individual motion itself, can figure forth fantasies of social mobility’ (p. 94). Draper/Whitman’s ‘socio-spatial mobility’ communicates the gains of early-twentieth century hobo travels and their mid-century revisions as exhibiting the value of white masculinity. Arriving in California only to be faced with where the ‘frontier comes to a halt’ on the bluffs of Big Sur, *Mad Men* indicates that Draper/Whitman’s hobo fantasy utilizes geographic access and sudden limitation as a productive option to feature his dual-class identity and creative self. In doing so, Draper/Whitman’s hobo narrative results in a reassertion of his invulnerable status: still employed/working, healthy, economically secure, and selling his privileged access to audiences as evidence of unlimited self-making.

The early-incorporation of the hobo into Whitman/Draper’s character development highlights the profuse cultural appeal of class narratives in America. The hobo narrative provides the kind of flexibility promised by the benchmark American Dream, bound by conventions and classifications while at the same time defying those boundaries in an effort to highlight individuality. Further, *Mad Men* captures the way that the hobo narrative restores equilibrium to white masculinity rather than depicts it in crisis. Characters like Draper/Whitman exhibit resiliency through their cross-class identifications. These identifications provide safe social calculations that enforce privileged access rather show it at risk. Like Jack London or Jack Kerouac earlier in the century, *Mad Men* presents Draper/Whitman as impervious to socio-economic pressures because he understands the marketability of class identity. Locating the hobo narrative not only within a twentieth-century backdrop characterized by increasing movements toward equality for historically marginalized minorities, but also as well received by audiences in a new century, indicates the pervasiveness of using working-class representations to reinforce the status quo of white masculinity. Characters like Draper/Whitman become a highly visible example of how American depictions of race and gender use class to consolidate privileges in the twentieth century, and how this practice has maintained a problematic centrality in the social and cultural discourses of the twenty-first century.

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Jennifer Forsberg earned her PhD in American literature from the University of Nevada, Reno and is currently a lecturer at Clemson University. Her research examines the laboring of American culture within the 20 & 21st centuries, and pays special attention to tactics and strategies for developing subjectivity at the intersections of gender, race and class. Forsberg’s recent work and monograph project explores the refusal to work in American literature and popular culture, and draws tensions between early notions of a Protestant work ethic and the capital gains of individualism.

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