Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

European Joint Master's
Degree Programme
in
English and American Studies

Final Thesis

Stories of storytellers: the rhythm of life in Jack Kerouac's, William Saroyan's, and Thomas Wolfe's writing methods

Supervisor
Professor Stefano Ercolino

Assistant supervisor
Professor Abigail Lang

Graduand
Costanza Valdina
878214

Academic Year
2023/2024

A Joe Gould e a tutti quelli come lui,
A tutti gli incontri casuali e fortunati che il destino ha seminato lungo la strada

Le nostre valigie erano di nuovo ammucchiate sul marciapiede;
avevamo molta strada da fare.
Ma non importava,
la strada è la vita.

— Jack Kerouac

Index

Introduction 6

Chapter one Stories of the road 12

1.1. "Song of the Open Road" 13

1.2. The birth of "Spontaneous Prose" 16

1.3. "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose" 18

1.4. "The inner pulse of things" 26

1.5. Living and writing 30

Chapter two People of the road 41

2.1. Hobo, tramp, and bum 43

2.2. "Portrait of a Bum" 46

2.3. "The Bums at Sunset" 51

2.4. "The Rumbling, Rumbling Blues" 58

Chapter three Voices of the road 65

3.1. Rerecording and reporting 68

3.2. "Two Wasted Days in Kansas City" 71

3.3. "Death the Proud Brother" 77

3.4. "Good Blonde" 84

Conclusion 92

Bibliography 96

Primary sources 96

Secondary sources 98

Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the essential principles of "Spontaneous Prose", the innovative approach to writing championed by Jack Kerouac. It traces the lineage of this literary technique back to the influential works which profoundly shaped his artistic sensibilities. The primary focus is placed on the seminal contributions of Thomas Wolfe and William Saroyan. Through a convergence of influences drawn from Wolfe's vivid portrayal of American life and Saroyan's provocative narrative style, Kerouac's journey as a writer is marked by an exploration of empathy, immediacy of experience, and the tension between the self and the world. This study delves into the historical backdrop and formative influences that underpin the emergence of an innovative writing technique that embraces the concrete experience of life. At its core, "Spontaneous Prose" is epitomized by a celebration of orality and the immediate and visceral relationship between the writer and the object of narration. It starkly contrasts the structured and meticulously planned approach of traditional literature, advocating instead for a more direct and authentic engagement with the human experience. With an accurate analysis of selected short stories by Wolfe, Saroyan, and Kerouac, this study offers readers a nuanced understanding of the origins and evolutionary trajectory of this writing method, born to capture the rhythm of life on paper.

Nota dell’autore

Lucy, la madre di mia madre, mi incitava a muovermi nella vita con quello che lei chiamava *gairot*, trascrizione di una parola armena di Bitlis, della sola famiglia Saroyan, o inventata da lei che significava, direi, tutto questo: affrontare il mondo con agilità e lucidità di mente, con un progetto, con passione, prestanza, intelligenza, energia e competenza. «Un uomo senza *gairot*» diceva «è come morto. Crede di vivere invece è morto.»

— William Saroyan

William Saroyan è comparso nella mia vita per caso, grazie ad uno di quegli incontri che lui stesso amava definire «causali e fortunati», i cosiddetti *chance meetings*. Tra i tanti libri ammassati sui polverosi scaffali affacciati su Rio Marin, nella bottega di Luciano Buggio a Venezia, era nascosta una malridotta copia economica Oscar Mondadori di *Che ve ne sembra dell’America?* Come per la maggior parte delle sue opere edite nel nostro paese, anche la traduzione di questa collezione di racconti è stata curata da Elio Vittorini, il primo ad aver scoperto Saroyan e ad aver regalato le sue storie ai lettori italiani. Ad oggi le opere tradotte dell’autore sono praticamente introvabili eccetto per qualche raro volume nascosto tra librerie e bancarelle di seconda mano. La prima lettura del racconto *Due giorni persi a Kansas City*, condivisa poco dopo la fortunata scoperta del volume assieme a Dorasia, è stata fulminante. Abbiamo passato giorni interi a riflettere sul senso di quel racconto in un continuo confronto con amici, parenti e conoscenti. Non siamo mai giunti ad una risposta univoca: in questo irrisolvibile interrogativo si cela tutta la potenza della storia. Da qui, l’intuizione per scavare più a fondo e dedicare, anche in piccola parte, un contributo alla memoria di questo stravagante, insolito, affascinante autore. Saroyan, come i suoi compagni scrittori Thomas Wolfe e Jack Kerouac, ha saputo

riconoscere e raccontare il valore autentico della strada, le voci e le storie di chi la abita o la percorre. A questi tre autori, ignorati, dimenticati o criticati per le loro sregolatezze ho voluto dedicare il mio lavoro. Questa tesi è una «lettera d'amore», come scriveva Fernanda Pivano. Se e solo se sarà in grado di «scuotere dall'indifferenza qualcuno» e indurlo ad «interessarsi ad almeno uno dei libri descritti e al loro autore, avrà raggiunto il suo scopo».

I came across William Saroyan completely by chance, in one of those encounters he would have called "causal and fortunate"—a classic chance meeting. Among the stacks of books gathering dust on the shelves overlooking Rio Marin, inside Luciano Buggio's shop in Venice, I found a beat-up paperback of *Che ve ne sembra dell'America?* Like most of his works published in Italy, this short stories collection was translated by Elio Vittorini, the first to introduce Saroyan to Italian readers. Nowadays, it is nearly impossible to find his translated works, except for the odd hidden gem in second-hand bookstores or market stalls. The first time I read *Two Wasted Days in Kansas City*, not long after discovering the book and sharing it with Dorasia, it was an electrifying experience. We spent days reflecting on the meaning of the story, discussing it endlessly with friends, family, and anyone who would listen. It left us with more questions than answers, which sparked the idea to explore Saroyan further, and in some small way, keep alive the memory of this fascinating, quirky, and brilliant author. Like fellow writers Thomas Wolfe and Jack Kerouac, Saroyan had a gift for capturing the essence of the road—its voices, stories, and the people who travel it or call it home. I want to dedicate my work to

these three authors, often overlooked, forgotten, or criticized for their unconventional styles. As Fernanda Pivano would say, this thesis is a “love letter”. It will have accomplished its goal if it succeeds in "shaking someone out of their indifference" and “sparks even one person's interest in these books and authors”.

Introduction

The term "storytelling" defines the social and cultural activity of sharing stories, a tradition deeply embedded in human history from early forms expressed through rock art to the oral traditions of ancient civilizations. In his work *Politics*, Greek philosopher Aristotle states that the human being is "ζῷον λόγον ἔχον", meaning "a being endowed with word, speech" or, as it is more commonly translated, "a rational animal". Considering humans for their ability to perceive relationships and their capacity to create new ones, the term λόγος offers the possibility to provide different explanations of this definition. According to the German philosopher Heidegger, the word speaks to humanity, not vice versa. Consequently, humans do not possess the word. This is because λόγος corresponds to the verb λέγειν (légein), which originally meant "to gather". This concept is mirrored in the Latin word "lego", emphasizing the essential act of gathering. Thus, humans do not simply acquire words rather they listen and gather words and offer them to the Other (Ariemma 2005, 24-28). It is no coincidence the term "communication" has its roots in the Latin word "communicare" which means "to share" or "to make common". The prefix "cum-" indicates a sense of togetherness or joint action, while "mūnŭs" means "gift" or "service". So, at its core, communication involves the idea of sharing information, thoughts, or feelings between individuals or groups. The North American scholar Jonathan Gottschall asserts that this human behavior of telling and sharing stories is innate and defines the human being as "the storytelling animal" because in nature "no other animal depends on storytelling" (Gottschall, 2013). Humans, indeed, are creatures inextricably tied to stories, and stories touch nearly every aspect of

their lives. In 1951, The North American writer Jack Kerouac introduced "Spontaneous Prose", a new storytelling method designed to capture the rhythm of life on paper. This innovative writing approach is epitomized by a celebration of orality and the immediate and visceral relationship between the writer and the object of narration. It starkly contrasts the structured and meticulously planned approach of traditional literature, advocating instead for a more direct and authentic engagement with the human experience. Kerouac's spontaneous prose represents a significant evolution beyond both the surrealist *écriture automatique* and the modernist stream of consciousness. While all three approaches aim to capture the immediacy of thought and experience, his innovative method introduces a distinct and innovative dimension to literary expression. Surrealist *écriture automatique*, or "automatic writing", was pioneered by writers like André Breton and sought to bypass the conscious mind to tap into the subconscious. This method involves writing without deliberate thought or self-censorship, allowing unconscious ideas and images to surface. However, this technique often results in fragmented, disjointed narratives that prioritize surreal imagery and the irrational over coherence and narrative flow. Modernist stream of consciousness, as exemplified by writers like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, also aims to represent the inner processes of the mind. It seeks to portray the continuous flow of thoughts and sensory experiences, often using fragmented narrative structures and shifting perspectives. While this method provides insight into the psychological processes of characters, it remains somewhat constrained by its adherence to a structured representation of consciousness. Kerouac's spontaneous prose transcends these approaches by emphasizing an unmediated and immediate capture of lived experience through a more fluid and

dynamic narrative style. His writing, influenced by his use of the tape recorder, aims to reproduce the rawness and spontaneity of natural speech. Unlike *écriture automatique*, which can become disconnected from a coherent narrative, Kerouac's prose maintains a sense of narrative coherence and continuity. Furthermore, he goes beyond the stream of consciousness by integrating a more conversational and oral quality into the text. His style reflects a continuous, unstructured movement akin to spoken language, eschewing the more introspective elements of stream of consciousness in favor of an immediacy that mirrors actual dialogue and real-time experience.

This thesis aims to explore the essential principles of his new method of writing, tracing the lineage of this literary technique back to the influential works that profoundly shaped his artistic sensibilities. The primary focus is placed on the seminal contributions of Thomas Wolfe and William Saroyan. Through a convergence of influences drawn from Wolfe's vivid portrayal of North American life and Saroyan's provocative narrative style, Kerouac's journey as a writer is marked by an exploration of empathy, immediacy of experience, and the tension between the self and the world. Both influences are mentioned in the introduction of *Lonesome Traveler* in which he writes "read the life of Jack London at 18 and decided to be an adventurer, a lonesome traveler; early literary influences were Saroyan and Hemingway; later Wolfe (after I had broken leg in Freshman at Columbia read Tom Wolfe and roamed his New York on crutches)" (Kerouac 1988, 6). This work examines the method of spontaneous prose from three distinct perspectives. Firstly, the subject matter it addresses, namely the stories of the road. Secondly, the characters it portrays, specifically ordinary people and individuals on the streets. Thirdly, the language it employs which is a faithful and

authentic reproduction of everyday spoken language. A selection of nine short stories written by Wolfe, Saroyan, and Kerouac will serve as practical examples. As Nona Balakian asserts, "The short story came to flourish as a popular genre, it was because it had the potential for being a 'people's literature'. More easily than novels, it could deal with topical matters and the dailiness of life in a narrative that was succinct and direct. It was a form of writing that came naturally from the writer who was often 'of the people', self-educated, familiar with the life of the common man, if not directly a part of it" (Balakian 1998, 79-80).

The first chapter "Stories of the road" delves into the road narrative as a polyphonic space where people meet, exchange stories, and have the chance to explore their identity in motion. The road becomes a literary device option based on progression as well as a metaphor for the conventional quest myth. As Walt Whitman suggests in his poem "Song of the Open Road", the world can be envisioned as a network of interconnected paths where every traveling soul is part of a universal adventure shared with the individuals they encounter. All these people depart from home to alter their surroundings, transcend the constraints of custom, tradition, and familiar circumstances, and, if only temporarily, forge an alternative way of life. The writers of the Beat Generation, and especially Kerouac, are profoundly influenced by the Whitmanesque lesson. In his "sketches," he portrays these kinds of stories and tries to record the inner pulse of life as he learned from Jack London in his advice for young aspiring authors. Before him, his forebears Saroyan and Wolfe did the same thing. Their influence is evident in his short stories "A Day of September" and "Today" which were written in "the style of Saroyan, Hemingway, and Wolfe". Both authors, indeed, have always experienced and

professed the deep intersection between living and writing, as they express in “Myself Upon Earth”, “A Cold Day” and “Story of a Novel”.

The second chapter “People of the road” is dedicated to people of the street. In the Thirties, a decade in which both Wolfe and Saroyan wrote several works, documentary-style fiction and creative non-fiction dominated the North American literary landscape. The homeless, the workers, the poor, the jobless, the ethnic minorities, and the oppressed became the new heroes. Among them, the figure of the hobo-tramp-bum is the most exemplary. Whether by choice or necessity, this individual living the everyday reality of the street emerges as the most representative figure of life on the road. This character appears in many works of Saroyan, Wolfe, and Kerouac. Saroyan’s “Portrait of a Bum” revolves around Harry Brown, a middle-aged man who embraces idleness and nonconformity. He prefers a life of simple pleasures—reading, enjoying music, and observing nature—over societal ambitions. Wolfe’s “The Bums at Sunset” captures the lives of a group of hoboes near a train track at dusk. The narrative explores themes of longing, displacement, and the search for belonging, with the transient existence of the hoboes symbolizing broader human desires for return and identity. Kerouac’s “The Rumbling, Rumbling Blues” is set in a railroad diner in Des Moines, where a young narrator encounters an old African American hobo. The encounter profoundly impacts the narrator, who is restless and contemplating leaving town.

The third chapter "Voices of the road" examines how the faithful reproduction of everyday spoken language contributes to the authenticity of literary works. It highlights the role of the tape recorder as a key technological advancement that enabled authors like Kerouac

to capture and convey the immediacy of spontaneous speech. This technology allowed writers to document unfiltered, natural conversations, enhancing the oral and intimate qualities of their texts. The chapter also explores how Kerouac's spontaneous prose style resonates with Gertrude Stein’s concept of the "continuous present". Her approach emphasized the idea of capturing the fluid, unstructured nature of experience, focusing on the immediacy of the moment rather than adhering to traditional narrative forms. In “Two Wasted Days in Kansas City” by Saroyan, the protagonist's interaction with a young girl reflects his hope for genuine human connection, yet her abrupt disappearance underscores the ephemeral nature of such encounters. Wolfe’s “Death the Proud Brother” employs a stream-of-consciousness technique to convey the inevitability of death against the backdrop of a chaotic urban environment, capturing the inner turmoil of facing mortality. In Kerouac’s "Good Blonde," the juxtaposition of the Greek man’s grounded wisdom with the young blonde woman’s carefree spontaneity highlights the narrator’s contemplation of life’s unpredictability and his search for meaning. The chapter illustrates how these authors employed the voice of their characters, immediacy, and spontaneous expression to convey profound human experiences authentically, each in a distinctive manner.

Chapter one
Stories of the road

"The Open Road. The great home of the soul is the Open Road. Not heaven, not paradise. Not 'above.' Not even 'within.' The soul is neither 'above' nor 'within.' It is a wayfarer down the Open Road."

— D. H. Lawrence

American people have long considered the road a sacred space. The act of hitting the road offers a fresh start, a unique opportunity to explore vast spaces, meet new people, and return home to document the experience in writing. A key aspect of this fascination lies in understanding why so many travelers feel compelled to share their stories and why so many are eager to read them. Protagonists embark on these journeys for different reasons, and when their goals are frustrated, the lack of resolution makes storytelling even more urgent. Narrating these events is not merely a record of what happened, but an attempt to understand life experiences. The road genre represents the framework through which this discovery mode takes shape. The development of North American road literature draws from long-standing traditions of travel, quest, and adventure narratives. Western travel literature dates to epic poems like *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, and Icelandic and Norwegian sagas, which tell action-packed tales involving protagonists on the move. Around 1300, Marco Polo's Travels brought the East to Europe, sparking a renewed interest in map-making and exploration. In the late 14th century, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* described a pilgrimage from London to Canterbury of thirty people who shared stories to entertain and express their world views. These storytellers ventured into the unknown and, in doing so, defined their culture's values, attitudes,

and beliefs. The appeal partly stems from the road's carnivalesque disruption of the ordinary. Moreover, the genre's transformative power also lies in its ability to get people talking, meet others on the path, and swap stories. American people have found in the road narrative a way to connect the oppositions between "high" and "low" culture, tradition, and innovation. The road genre is richly polyphonic because it incorporates different voices within particular social settings. The evolution of these narratives has transformed into a socially constructed portrayal of a community defining itself through movement. Every road narrative stands alone as a unique text, yet collectively they form a genre that embodies a cultural conversation on personal and national identity. While the solitary quester often travels alone, the journey inevitably intersects with a community of fellow travelers who share similar aspirations. Likewise, engaging with a road narrative transcends mere textual analysis of individual works; it unfolds as a dialogue reflecting the evolving significance of the genre within the broader cultural landscape. Literary forms serve as preservers of storytelling traditions, yet the road narrative expands beyond these boundaries into a socially constructed discourse on a collective past, present, and future (Primeau 2018, 1-5).

1.1. "Song of the Open Road"

The poem "Song of the Open Road" by Walt Whitman epitomizes the essence of the North American road narrative. This text, first published in the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1856, encourages readers to defy convention and question prevailing norms, urging them to venture forth and challenge established values. In these lines, the poet expresses a profound declaration of personal freedom and

self-determination, shedding all societal and mental constraints. Listening to people on the road, he acknowledges the importance of external voices and incorporates their wisdom into his journey:

> From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and imaginary lines,
> Going where I list, my own master total and absolute,
> Listening to others, considering well what they say,
> Pausing, searching, receiving, contemplating,
> Gently, but with undeniable will, divesting myself of the holds that would hold me.
> I inhale great draughts of space,
> The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are mine.
>
> — *Leaves of Grass* (1855)

Whitman describes a deliberate and thoughtful process of introspection and liberation, "gently" yet resolutely freeing himself from anything that restrains him. Embracing the vastness of the world, he metaphorically inhales great draughts of space, claiming the entirety of the compass as his own, symbolizing his boundless spirit and unity with the universe. In the poem, the speaker sheds responsibility and embraces the open road in search of the hidden truths of "unseen existence" (Whitman 1855). Tuning into "the cheerful voice of the public road" (Whitman 1855), he discovers wisdom that cannot be fully gleaned from formal education but rather from the essence of the human soul. Throughout the journey, people, places, and events blend seamlessly. The road represents a metaphorical space where people from all walks of life come together. It transcends social hierarchies, allowing everyone to travel and interact on equal terms. This shared journey represents a new way of living, where the ideals of universal brotherhood and equality are not just envisioned but actively practiced. The road, therefore, evokes the

possibility of a harmonious existence, where diverse individuals connect and share experiences:

> To know the universe itself as a road, as many roads, as
> roads for traveling souls.
>
> — *Leaves of Grass* (1855)

In these lines, Whitman presents the universe itself as "a road, as many roads", suggesting that life is a vast network of interconnected paths, each offering unique experiences and opportunities for growth. They are not just physical spaces, but metaphorical journeys for "traveling souls", emphasizing the idea that every individual's experience is part of a larger, universal adventure. This perspective depicts life as a series of explorations and encounters, where each road we take contributes to our understanding of the world and our place within it. As Whitman states in *Democratic Vistas*, sharing personal stories on the open road gives rise to an idea of literature grounded in the ordinary, the physical, the democratic, and the popular. Moreover, this kind of narrative embodies a strong spirit of protest. Individuals depart from home to alter their surroundings, transcend the constraints of custom, tradition, and familiar circumstances, and, if only temporarily, forge an alternative way of life (Primeau 2018, 21). Whether Whitman in the mid-19th century or the Beats a hundred years later, these writers challenged established norms. From a literary point of view, the Beat Generation was born, indeed, as a reaction against the cold, academic style that dominated the Forties and early Fifties in the United States. They created a counterculture, challenging the time's dominant, conservative literary doctrines to replace conformity and precision with an uncalculated, unpredictable, and spontaneous style just as life is happening.

1.2. The birth of "Spontaneous Prose"

In 1951, Ed White suggested to Kerouac that he should "sketch in the streets like a painter but with words" (Condo 2006, Preface to *Book of Sketches*). In August of the following year, the North American author began writing down prose poems, "sketches", in small notebooks that he kept in the breast pockets of his shirts. He used his words as a brush to record travels, observations, and meditations on life as he moved across America. In his work, the writing becomes a visual form of art, following the tenets of "Spontaneous Prose" such as the immediate and visceral relationship between the writer and the object of narration, the unitarian process of composition and product, the imitation of natural speech, the musical rhythm of experience, and the celebration of the present.

He wanted to see literature "return its origins, in the bardic child, truly ORAL… instead of gray-faced Academic quibbling" (Preface to *Scattered Poems,* 2001). He championed a fresh approach to literary writing that would incorporate spontaneity into the art form. According to Fernanda Pivano, the fundamental element in Kerouac's writing style persists in the embrace of worldwide sincerity in both content and form. He found the rigid constraints of traditional English overly restrictive, as they clashed with the genuine framework of his mind and hindered the expression of the emotions he aimed to convey (Pivano 2017, 111).

Kerouac's "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose" was initially crafted as a favor to his friends Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs to elucidate his writing approach after he showed them the manuscript of *The Subterraneans*. They were so amazed that he had written the entire book in three nights, sitting at the kitchen table in his mother's apartment in Queens, that they asked him to explain how

he did it. Published in the Autumn 1957 issue of the *Black Mountain Review*, it remains one of his most significant reflections on compositional methods. Two fortuitous events in 1951 served as catalysts for his decision to adopt a spontaneous mode of writing. On one hand, in December 1950, Kerouac received the so-called "Joan Anderson letter" from Neal Cassady, a rambling and extensive handwritten piece of writing in which he recounted "all about a Christmas weekend in the pool halls, hotel rooms and jails of Denver, with hilarious events throughout and tragic too, even a drawing of a window" (Berrigan 1968). It was composed of thousands of words describing a star-crossed romance with a woman named Joan Anderson in 1940s Denver, typed single-spaced on both sides of several pages, with sporadic handwritten edits and interjections. As Kerouac comments in his interview with Ted Berrigan for the *Paris Review:*

> The letter, the main letter I mean, was forty thousand words long, mind you, a whole short novel. It was the greatest piece of writing I ever saw, better'n anybody in America, or at least enough to (Herman) Melville,(Mark)Twain, (Theodore) Dreiser, (Thomas) Wolfe , I dunno who, spin in their graves … Neal and I called it, for convenience, the Joan Anderson Letter.
>
> — *Jack Kerouac* (1968)

After reading his friend's composition, "all in first person, fast, mad, confessional" (Berrigan 1968), he renounced his earlier stylistic forebears as Thomas Wolfe and William Saroyan, and resolved to trust free association. What Kerouac found most striking was how Cassady's personality leaped off the page. He had been searching for a method to invigorate his writing, and the directness of his friend's narrative, teeming with digression and temporal shifts, sparked an idea. On the other, the suggestion from Ed White to "sketch in the

streets like a painter but with words" (Condo 2006, Preface to *Book of Sketches*) led him away from conventional methods, emphasizing the importance of capturing the fluidity and spontaneity of his imagination. The fundamental principles outlined in "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose" laid the theoretical groundwork for this new writing method.

1.3. "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose"

In the opening section of "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose", Kerouac highlights his preference for direct observation and the immediacy of the connection between writer and subject:

> SET-UP The object is set before the mind, either in reality as in sketching (before a landscape or teacup or old face) or is set in the memory wherein it becomes the sketching from memory of a definite image-object.
>
> — *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* (2007, 485)

Kerouac wants to break away from conventional, premeditated forms of expression, opting for a more direct, in-the-moment engagement with his subjects. The "image-object" that he mentions is later referred to in the "Center of Interest" section where he writes, "begin not from preconceived idea of what to say about image but from jewel center of interest in the subject of image at the moment of writing" (Kerouac 2007, 485). Through spontaneous sketching of his "image-objects", Kerouac generates meaning on multiple levels, capturing various lines of thought as they unfold in the interaction between himself and the subjects of his writing. He believes that the immediacy of sketching dictates the flow of language as it was happening and not beforehand. This approach allows him to distance himself from a priori analytical

approaches to the novel such as outlining both plot and development. His method does not simply communicate a preexisting reality; instead, it chronicles the continuous process of discovery as it unfolds. In a letter to John Clellon Holmes dated June 5, 1952, Kerouac writes:

> What I am beginning to discover now is something beyond the novel and beyond the arbitrary confines of the story ... into the realms of revealed Picture ... revelated prose ... wild form, man, wild form. Wild form's the only form holds what I have to say—my mind is exploding to say something about every image and every memory in.
>
> — *Selected Letters* (1996, 371)

This approach offers a shift in perspective that accomplishes engagement, comprehensiveness, and communal consciousness. The interactive nature of this dialogue's performance encourages readers to participate in the process of meaning-making, thus promoting the exchange of perceptions about the subject.

In "PROCEDURE" Kerouac writes:

> PROCEDURE Time being of the essence in the purity of speech, sketching language is undisturbed flow from the mind of personal secret idea-words, blowing (as per jazz musician) on the subject of image.
>
> — *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* (2007, 485)

In this second section, he mentions the importance of time. Kerouac's reliance on the synchronic moment allows him to navigate time and space fluidly, following the dictates of his associative logic. The metaphoric association with music suggests that his approach recalls a performance of bop; he aspires to imitate this musical genre in the form of literature. The originators of the jazz movement known as "bebop", including Charlie "Bird" Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and Miles Davis, developed a sound of postwar America in

direct contrast to the big band swing jazz of the Thirties and Forties. A rallying point of these experiments was improvisation based on the combinations of phrasing and quotation. According to Timothy Hunt, two key elements bring cohesion to these jazz performances. The first entails employing melodies and chord progressions as the foundation for improvisation. The second centers on the musician's vocabulary, denoting the unique and identifiable way they craft their phrasing. This technique leads to the development of recurring patterns that are distinctly characteristic, establishing a signature sound for each artist. (Hunt 2010, 146). Improvisation, or what Kerouac terms "blowing on the subject image", involves an intricate intersubjective method where the artist and subject connect through free combinations. Like jazz, the style possesses the freedom to ignore linear development and grammatical rules. Periods are replaced by space dashes to recall the artist's natural pauses for breath between riffs.

As Kerouac highlights in "METHOD":

> METHOD No periods separating sentence-structures already arbitrarily riddled by false colons and timid usually needless commas-but the vigorous space dash separating rhetorical breathing (as jazz musician drawing breath between outblown phrases)—"measured pauses which are the essentials of our speech"—"divisions of the sounds we hear"-"time and how to note it down." (William Carlos Williams)
>
> — *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* (2007, 485)

In this third section, he rages against the conventional and artificial application of punctuation, advocating instead for dashes to be inserted where natural pauses would occur in spoken language. As he comments about the convergence of language and music, "Jazz and bop in the sense of a, say, tenor man drawing a breath and blowing a phrase on his saxophone, till he runs out of breath, and when he does,

his sentence, his statement's been made … that's how I, therefore, separate my sentences, as breath separations of the mind" (Berrigan 1968). Moreover, the final mention in brackets of the writer William Carlos Williams adds something more. It represents a reference to his concept of "organic prosody", particularly referring to the use of natural pauses in writing. Williams, known for his innovative approaches to meter and lineation in poetry, aimed to create a uniquely American poetic style centered on everyday life and common experiences. He focused on creating verse that mirrored the spontaneous flow of thought and conversation, often using irregular meter, free verse, and colloquial language. This style emphasized the essence of ordinary life and the experiences of common people. Kerouac tries to translate this innovative approach from poetry into prose.

In "SCOPING", the author writes:

> SCOPING Not "selectivity" of expression but following free deviation (association) of mind into limitless blow-on-subject seas of thought, swimming in sea of English with no discipline other than rhythms of rhetorical exhalation and expostulated statement, like a fist coming down on a table with each complete utterance, bang! (the space dash)- Blow as deep as you want-write as deeply, fish as far down as you want, satisfy yourself first, then reader cannot fail to receive telepathic shock and meaning excitement by same laws operating in his own human mind.
>
> — *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* (2007, 485)

In this fourth section, the author emphasizes the importance of unrestricted creative exploration. He rejects the notion of selective expression in favor of allowing the mind to freely wander and associate ideas without constraint. He compares this process to "swimming in the vast sea of the English language", guided only by

the rhythms of rhetorical expression. Kerouac vividly describes the act of writing as a forceful declaration, likening each complete utterance to the impact of a fist hitting a table. He encourages writers to delve as deeply as they desire into their thoughts and emotions, prioritizing the creative process. Moreover, the author suggests that by authentically expressing oneself, writers can evoke a telepathic connection with readers stimulating their minds through shared human experiences and emotions. As Ann Douglas highlights in her essay "Telepathic Shock and Meaning Excitement: Kerouac's Poetics of Intimacy", "Kerouac makes the reader his confidant, taking her into his most private thoughts and experiences, into areas which the world sometimes seems to prohibit us from sharing with anyone. Our feelings about our bodies, our self-imagings, the moods that inspire and afflict our need to believe" (Douglas 2000, 9).

In "LAG IN PROCEDURE", Kerouac writes:

> LAG IN PROCEDURE No pause to think of proper word but the infantile pileup of scatological buildup words till satisfaction is gained, which will turn out to be a great appending rhythm to a thought and be in accordance with Great Law of timing.
>
> — *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* (2007, 485)

In this fifth section, he endorses a spontaneous approach to writing, rejecting the urge to pause and search for the perfect word in favor of allowing words to flow freely, even if they initially seem crude or raw. He suggests that this uninhibited accumulation of words can ultimately contribute to the rhythmic quality of thought, aligning with the overarching principle of timing in writing. This approach embraces imperfection and spontaneity, trusting that the natural rhythm of expression will guide the writer.

As Kerouac highlights in "TIMING":

> TIMING Nothing is muddy that runs in time and to laws of time-Shakespearian stress of dramatic need to speak now in own unalterable way or forever hold tongue-no revisions (except obvious rational mistakes, such as names or calculated insertions in act of not writing but inserting).
>
> — *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* (2007, 485)

In this sixth section, the author underscores the importance of adhering to the flow and rhythm of time in writing. He parallels the urgent and unyielding nature of Shakespearean drama, emphasizing the necessity of expressing oneself in the moment without hesitation or revision. Moreover, he refers to the British author for his preference for blending high and low styles to achieve a profoundly authentic outcome. Kerouac, in fact, supports a writing process that avoids unnecessary revisions, except for obvious mistakes or deliberate additions made during the act of composition. This approach prioritizes spontaneity, reflecting a deep respect for the natural cadence of creative expression.

In "CENTER OF INTEREST", Kerouac writes:

> CENTER OF INTEREST Begin not from preconceived idea of what to say about image but from jewel center of interest in subject of image at moment of writing and write outwards swimming in sea of language to peripheral release and exhaustion-Do not afterthink except for poetic or P. S. reasons. Never afterthink to "improve" or defray impressions, as, the best writing is always the most painful personal wrung-out tossed from cradle warm protective mind-tap from yourself the song of yourself, blow! -now!-your way is your only way-"good"-or "bad"-always honest ("ludicrous"), spontaneous, "confessionals" interesting, because not "crafted". Craft is craft.
>
> — *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* (2007, 485)

In this seventh section, the author suggests that the writing style should resemble a conversational exchange in which ideas are presented, revisited, and sometimes shared as lived experiences. He is acutely aware of this aspect of his prose and seeks to uphold it by eschewing preconceived notions or post-writing reflections. The concept of "craft is craft" encapsulates his theoretical stance on the integrity of his work. He encourages writers to dive into the sea of language, allowing their thoughts to flow outward until they reach a natural conclusion. He challenges writers to embrace the inherent honesty and spontaneity of their craft, rejecting the notion that writing must conform to predetermined standards of "good" or "bad". According to him, true craftsmanship lies in the ability to capture the genuine essence of things without artifice or pretense and fosters a sense of connection and trust between storyteller and audience.

In "STRUCTURE OF WORK", Kerouac writes:

> STRUCTURE OF WORK Modern bizarre structures (science fiction, etc.) arise from language being dead, "different" themes give illusion of "new" life. Follow roughly outlines in outfanning movement over subject, as river rock, so mindflow over jewel-center need (run your mind over it, once) arriving at pivot, where what was dim-formed "beginning" becomes sharp-necessitating "ending" and language shortens in race to wire of time-race of work, following laws of Deep Form, to conclusion, last words, last trickle-Night is The End.
>
> — *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* (2007, 485)

In this eighth section, the author's perspective suggests that modern unconventional narrative forms, such as those found in science fiction, often arise from a sense of linguistic stagnation. He warns against the illusion of novelty created by merely exploring different themes. Instead, he promotes a structured yet fluid approach to writing, comparing it to the flow of a river over rocks. He encourages writers

to let their thoughts flow freely until they reach a pivotal moment where the vague beginning transforms into a clear and necessary ending. As the narrative progresses, language naturally condenses, echoing the urgency of time's passage. Ultimately, he suggests that "last words" mark the end of the creative process, likening it to the final trickle of a river.

As Kerouac highlights in "MENTAL STATE":

> MENTAL STATE If possible, write "without consciousness" in semi-trance (as Yeats' later "trance writing") allowing subconscious to admit in own uninhibited interesting necessary and so "modern" language what conscious art would censor, and write excitedly, swiftly, with writing-or-typingcramps, in accordance (as from center to periphery) with laws of orgasm, Reich's "beclouding of consciousness". Come from within, out-to relaxed and said.
>
> — *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* (2007, 485)

In this ninth and final section, he calls for a writing process that surpasses conscious control, resembling Yeats' notion of "trance writing". This approach, also known as automatic writing or "trance automatism", is a process where an individual enters a state of altered consciousness or trance and allows their subconscious mind to dictate their writing without conscious interference. In this state, the writer may produce words, phrases, or entire texts that flow spontaneously, often bypassing rational thought processes. Therefore, Kerouac encourages to enter a semi-trance state, allowing the subconscious to freely express what conscious thought might censor. This approach involves writing with excitement and speed, even to the point of physical discomfort, guided by the natural flow from inner inspiration to outward expression. Kerouac aligns this method with the principles of orgasmic release and Wilhelm Reich's idea of "beclouding of consciousness". According to the psychiatrist, during moments of

intense emotional or physical release, there is a temporary obscuring or clouding of consciousness. This state is characterized by a loosening of the ego's grip on awareness, allowing for a more direct experience of instinctual drives and emotions. Reich believed that this temporary clouding of consciousness was a natural and necessary part of the process of releasing pent-up emotional energy and achieving greater psychological health. In the context of Kerouac's writing, the reference to Reich's concept suggests a similar idea of allowing oneself to write without the inhibitions and constraints imposed by conscious thought, thereby accessing deeper levels of creativity and authenticity.

1.4. "The inner pulse of things"

In the incipit of the short story "Road-kids and Gay-cats", published in the book *The Road*, Jack London writes:

> I learn that it was in order to study sociology that I became a tramp. This is very nice and thoughtful of the biographers, but it is inaccurate. I became a tramp--well, because of the life that was in me, of the wanderlust in my blood that would not let me rest. Sociology was merely incidental; it came afterward, in the same manner that a wet skin follows a ducking. I went on "The Road" because I couldn't keep away from it; because I hadn't the price of the railroad fare in my jeans; because I was so made that I couldn't work all my life on "one same shift"; because--well, just because it was easier to than not to.
>
> — *The Road* (2019, 133)

The passage reflects the motivations behind the choice of going on the road. The decision to adopt a life of wandering is driven by intrinsic restlessness and wanderlust and becomes the most authentic way to "study sociology". Like Whitman, also this author emphasizes that meeting people on the road significantly contributes to his experiences

of understanding the world. These interactions offer firsthand insights into various social conditions, behaviors, and cultures, far beyond what any formal study of sociology could provide. This constant exposure to different people and their stories is a driving force behind the author's wandering. Life on the road shapes a deep understanding of human nature and society, born not from textbooks but from real-life encounters. A key lesson that London imparts is the need for writers to maintain a constant awareness of life as the primary source of inspiration. He stresses the importance of keeping this connection intact, ensuring that written words resonate with genuine truth and deep meaning. In 1899, in an article for *The Editor* "On the Writer's Philosophy of Life", London writes:

> You must come to read the face of life with understanding. To comprehend the characters and phases of any movement, you must know the spirit which moves to action individuals and peoples, which gives birth and momentum to great ideas (…) You must have your hand on the inner pulse of things. And the sum of all this will be your working philosophy, by which, in turn, you will measure, weigh, and balance, and interpret to the world. It is this stamp of personality of individual view, which is known as individuality.
>
> — *Jack London* (1899)

London's philosophy underscores the necessity of reading life with a discerning and empathetic eye. This means having a "finger on the inner pulse of things". Through this process of immersive understanding, the writer develops a working philosophy that consists of a set of principles and insights that allow for the measurement, evaluation, and interpretation of the world. By staying connected to the essence of life and its intricate realities, authors can produce work that resonates with authenticity and captures the complexity of the human experience. Furthermore, the passage argues

that this process of internalizing and interpreting the world's complexities results in a distinctive personal perspective. This individualized viewpoint, informed by a deep understanding of life's underlying currents, constitutes what is known as individuality. Individuality, as portrayed here, is not merely a superficial trait, but a profound expression of one's engagement with the world's deeper truths. In Kerouac's method of Spontaneous Prose, the principles underlined by London resonate deeply. As Paul Crumbly highlights in his essay "Being Beat: The Stern Reality of London's Tramp Diary and Kerouac's Road", "For London and the Beat writers who came after him, the 'stern reality' of the road exerted an almost irresistible appeal precisely because of its power to strip romance of illusion and ground adventure in the unmediated demands of the present moment. It was contact with a reality they could trust that liberated the self from falsehood and self-delusion" (Crumbly 2019, 33). This fascination with the liberating potential of stern reality reemerged strongly in the mid-twentieth century when Kerouac associated the term "Beat" with a new generation of young American seeking unfiltered experiences that would not appeal to everyone. Kerouac's account of how the word first entered his vocabulary underscores its connection to street life and the dismantling of romantic ideals. In a well-known and often-quoted interview published in the June 1959 issue of *Playboy magazine*, Kerouac recalls that the first time the word struck him as an appropriate label for a life attitude was in 1944 when a heroin addict named Herbert Huncke turned to him in Times Square and said, "Man, I'm beat". Kerouac initially says that he "knew right away what [Huncke] meant somehow", but later in the same interview, he reinterprets that encounter: "And so Huncke appeared to us and said, 'I'm beat' with

radiant light shining out of his despairing eyes... a word perhaps brought from some Midwest carnival or junk cafeteria”. The “us” in Kerouac’s second account includes Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs. What’s most notable is that this now “radiant” junkie “appeared” to all three, and each found the word fitting for a perspective on American culture through the eyes of the outsider, who in his way rebelled against conformity to demand more from life. Regardless of how misguided his effort was, it was the impulse that mattered (Crumbley 2019, 34). William Everson, in his book *Archetype West: The Pacific Coast as a Literary Region*, places both Kerouac and Saroyan within the “school of naked experience”, an approach to writing that the critic traces back to London. He writes that “self-educated man, only minimally confined by his hastily acquired and shaky intellectual structures, London pursued the work of reduction with fantastic energy, an onslaught of raw vitality (…) Thus was born the school of naked experience, a reduction that was to extend through many popularizers down to such figures as Saroyan and Kerouac. It is a method singularly effective in registering the shock of encounter” (Everson 1976, 80). London exemplifies the ethos of living fully through his unbounded pursuit of raw experience and vitality. This approach, echoed later by writers like Wolfe, Saroyan, and Kerouac, focuses on capturing life’s raw immediacy and the profound impact of personal encounters. In alignment with London’s philosophy, Saroyan in the preface to *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze and Other Stories* writes some pieces of advice for writers to “be wholly alive”:

> The most solid advice, though, for a writer is this, I think: Try to learn to breathe deeply, really to taste food when you eat, and when you sleep, really to sleep. Try as much as possible to be wholly alive, with

> all your might, and when you laugh, laugh like hell, and when you get angry, get good and angry. Try to be alive. You will be dead soon enough.
>
> — Preface to *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze and Other Stories* (1997, 10)

Saroyan's guidance encourages a writing style that is and profoundly rooted in the human experience. Writers are encouraged to imbue their work with a sense of immediacy and intensity, much like savoring a delicious meal or fully experiencing a moment of deep sleep. By being "wholly alive" in their writing, authors can create narratives that resonate with readers on a visceral level, capturing the full spectrum of human emotions. Furthermore, the advice suggests that writers should embrace life's fleeting nature as a source of inspiration. Saroyan, indeed, encourages them to immerse in the sensory richness of everyday life. Writing, like living, should be a visceral and authentic expression of human experience.

1.5. Living and writing

In the works of Wolfe, Saroyan, and Kerouac, the theme of the profound connection between writing and living emerges as a pervasive motif. Several of their short stories intricately weave around the theme of the written word itself, transcending mere narratives and delving deeply into the intersection of writing with the essence of human existence.

In 1935, Wolfe prepared an extensive preface for *Of Time and the River*, in which he expressed his profound gratitude to his editor Maxwell E. Perkins for his assistance in the book's final preparation and elaborated on the processes involved in its creation. However, this preface was not included in the published version. Subsequently,

Wolfe was invited to serve as a visiting novelist at a writers' conference at the University of Colorado, where he utilized this unpublished preface as the foundation for his public lecture. Wolfe believed he delivered an effective presentation, which lasted an hour and forty minutes. The manuscript of his speech, after undergoing revisions by his agent, Elizabeth Nowell, was serialized in the Saturday Review of Literature on December 14, 21, and 28, 1935. Following further editing and expansion by Wolfe, it was published as a small book by Charles Scribner's Sons in April 1936, under the title *The Story of a Novel*. This work offers a compelling glimpse into the creative process behind his iconic work, *Look Homeward, Angel* and it serves as a testament to his meticulous approach to writing, embodying a process of self-reflection. Through the pages, the author delves deeply into his creative process through a metanarrative exploration that prioritizes spontaneity over rigid structures and plots. He engages readers directly with its unstructured style, encouraging them to activate their creative faculties and participate actively in shaping the narrative. Wolfe firmly believes that writing should not be a separate, privileged moment detached from everyday existence; instead, it should actively engage with and authentically reflect its authentic essence. Thus, the narrative of the novel becomes inseparable from his own life story. Wolfe views living and writing as fundamentally intertwined, opting for a style that deftly blends fictional narratives with autobiographical elements. He attributes his journey to becoming a writer not to a deliberate choice or external influence, but to an intrinsic force that demanded expression. As he writes, "certain force in me that had to write and that finally burst through and found a channel" (Wolfe 1936, 26). That is an intense creative impulse or a profound need to articulate thoughts,

experiences, and emotions through writing. This concept encapsulates the powerful and sometimes uncontrollable urge to write, framing it as a natural and essential aspect of his being.

In his reflection on writing about everyday life, Wolfe reflects:

> I wrote such things as this, not only the concrete, material record of man's ordered memory, but all the things he scarcely dares to think he has remembered; all the flicks and darts and haunting lights that flash across the mind of man that will return unbidden at an unexpected moment: a voice once heard; a face that vanished; the way the sunlight came and went; the rustling of a leaf upon a bough; a stone, a leaf, a door.
>
> — *Story of A Novel* (1936, 46)

Writing about ordinary things is a central theme in this passage. His references to "a voice once heard", "a face that vanished", "the way the sunlight came and went", and "the rustling of a leaf upon a bough" underscore the significance of everyday details. These simple elements carry deep emotional and sensory resonance, often evoking powerful feelings and insights when they resurface. Writing becomes a means of preserving not just the major events and factual accounts of life, but also the subtle, often overlooked moments that shape our inner worlds. The closing passage of *Story of a Novel* encapsulates the core points of his philosophy of writing:

> Out of the billion forms of America, out of the savage violence and the dense complexity of all its swarming life; from the unique and single substance of this land and life of ours must we draw the power and energy of our own life, the articulation of our speech, the substance of our art.
>
> For here it seems to me in hard and honest ways like these we may find the tongue, the language, and the conscience that as men and artists we have got to have. Here, too, perhaps, must we who have no more than what we have, who know no more than what we know, who are

> no more than what we are, find our America. Here, at this present hour and moment of my life, I seek for mine.
>
> — *Story of A Novel* (1936, 93)

This passage highlights the importance of "hard and honest ways" in the pursuit of finding one's voice and language. Wolfe implies that true artistic and personal integrity comes from a sincere and earnest engagement with reality. He captures the profound and multifaceted relationship between the individual and the national identity. This struggle involves navigating the "savage violence" and "dense complexity" of American life, indicating that the country's diverse and dynamic nature can be both a source of inspiration and challenge. The nation, indeed, is depicted as a vast canvas of "billion forms". For Wolfe, the writer must engage deeply with the multitude of elements they encounter in their everyday life. His method of writing highlights his keen attention to registering reality and capturing every single detail. He stores fragments of places, people, and events. The experience on the road serves as an opportunity to catalog and capture the vividness of real-life experiences and the intricate details that form the fabric of his literary creations. As Hugh Holman writes in his essay "Thomas Wolfe and America", "He (Wolfe) walked alone, stark and sad, across the vast moonlit landscape, and yet was never alienated from the central impulses of his world. If the purpose of art is, at least in part, to point out to us, its readers and its viewers, aspects of our world and ourselves, things which in Browning's words 'we have passed a hundred times nor cared to see', then Wolfe truly is for all of us, as he wanted to be, the poet of his native land, the singer of America" (Holman 1977, 74).

Likewise, Saroyan identifies himself as a storyteller whose singular narrative focus is humanity, eschewing any established rules of

rhetoric. Rejecting the notion of fixed poetic or narrative structures, he promotes an approach that authentically reflects his deep connection to everyday reality. In his essay-like story "Myself Upon the Earth", the author writes:

> I am a storyteller, and I have but a single story—man. I want to tell this simple story in my own way, forgetting the rules of rhetoric, the tricks of composition. I have something to say and I do not wish to speak like Balzac (…) "I am interested only in man (…) "Do you know that I do not believe there is really such a thing as a poem-form, a story-form or a novel-form? I believe there is man only. The rest is trickery. I am trying to carry over into this story of mine the man that I am. And as much of my earth as I am able.
>
> — "Myself Upon the Earth" (1977, 31)

By emphasizing their interest solely in "man", Saroyan suggests that genuine storytelling should reflect the complexities, emotions, and struggles inherent in human existence. He rejects established literary norms and forms because they represent artificial constructs that obscure the essence of pure experience. Furthermore, his desire to "carry over into this story... the man that I am" (Saroyan 1977, 31) underscores a deep commitment to autobiographical authenticity. He intends to infuse his narrative with personal insights and reflections, making storytelling a medium for introspection and self-expression. This approach not only aims to engage readers on a visceral level but also challenges them to reconsider conventional literary boundaries and appreciate the raw, unfiltered essence of human storytelling. As David Stephen Calonne writes in his book *My Real Work is Being,* "Saroyan seeks the experience of being; he wants to go straight to the core of things—energetically, immediately, passionately. He is, in Philip Rahv's conception, a 'redskin'. Stephen Axelrod has pointed out that Rahv believed American literature composes itself into a

debate between "palefaces" and 'redskins'. The 'palefaces' (Henry James, T. S. Eliot, and Allen Tate would belong to this party) produce a patrician art which is intellectual, symbolic, cosmopolitan, disciplined, cultured. The 'redskins' (Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams would tend to belong here) produce a plebeian art which is emotional, naturalistic, nativist, energetic, in some sense uncultured… All such formulations attest to a basic bifurcation in American literature between writers who experience primarily with the head and those who experience primarily with the blood. These remarks define exactly Saroyan's literary identity. He wants to feel the world directly, intuitively—like D. H. Lawrence, 'with the blood'. (Calonne 1983, 10). Saroyan delves deep into the human landscape, seizing hidden truths that have evaded other writers. Confronted by the limitations of conventional form and structure, he strives for immediacy. Thus, he rarely pauses to meticulously craft narratives or weave "artistic" tales, nor does he adhere to literary rules. Instead, he disrupts his stories with raw, unrefined fragments, letting them collide and expose his unfiltered thoughts and emotions, unapologetically and without explanation.

In this sense, the short story "A Cold Day" serves as an example. In the text, Saroyan describes the extreme cold of that day in San Francisco when he intended to write a great story but found himself unable to do so because the freezing temperature was physically and mentally debilitating. He does not organize the plot, and he does not plan winning narrative strategies. He simply expresses whatever comes to his mind by sitting at his typewriter:

> I want you to know that it is very cold in San Francisco today, and that I am freezing. It is so cold in my room that every time I start to write a short story the cold stops me and I have to get up and do bending

> exercises. It means, I think, that something's got to be done about keeping short story writers warm. Sometimes when it is very cold I am able to do very good writing, but at other times I am not. It is the same when the weather is excessively pleasant. I very much dislike letting a day go by without writing a short story and that is why I am writing this letter: to let you know that I am very angry about the weather.
>
> — "A Cold Day" (1997, 89)

This passage portrays the writer's immediate, relatable struggle with the cold weather in San Francisco. Despite his initial optimism and a morning spent feeling warm and inspired, he finds himself unable to capture the great story that had formed in his mind. As the day progresses, his discomfort grows, and his frustration mounts, culminating in the simple, resigned acknowledgment of the cold that has stifled his creativity and productivity. Saroyan's humorous tone brings to life the inconvenience and discomfort of trying to write in a freezing room. His frustration is palpable as he describes how the cold repeatedly interrupts his attempts to craft a short story, forcing him to resort to physical exercises just to keep warm.

Line by line, Saroyan defines once again his idea of storytelling:

> But emphasize the glorious truth of mere being. It is the major theme. You do not have to create a triumphant climax. The man you write of need not perform some heroic or monstrous deed in order to make your prose great. Let him do what he has always done, day in and day out, continuing to live. Let him walk and talk and think and sleep and dream and awaken and walk again and talk again and move and be alive. It is enough. There is nothing else to write about. You have never seen a short story in life. The events of life have never fallen into the form of the short story or the form of the poem, or into any other form. Your own consciousness is the only form you need. Your own awareness is the only action you need. Speak of this man, recognize his existence. Speak of man.
>
> — "A Cold Day" (1997, 93)

In this passage, the writer emphasizes the importance of celebrating the deep significance of simply existing. He challenges conventional narrative expectations that demand grand climaxes or heroic deeds to validate a story's greatness. Instead, he proposes that the essence of life itself, in its everyday moments—walking, talking, thinking, sleeping, dreaming—is inherently worthy of exploration and expression. By emphasizing the ordinary activities and thoughts of a person's existence, the passage suggests that these essential aspects of life form the core of meaningful storytelling. "Early this morning when I was warm with coffee, I had this great story in my mind, ready to get into print, but it got away from me. The most I can say now is that it is very cold in San Francisco today, and I am freezing" (Saroyan 1997, 94), writes the author in the final lines. In this short story, as in all his works, he shows a persuasive sense of life to which the reader responds with some part of his own experience. While other writers would get into meditation to clarify and arrange materials and wait for something to say, he sits at his typewriter and writes about his perceptions felt in the act of sitting at his typewriter without anything to say.

Years later, with the same writing approach, Kerouac composes *Atop an Underwood: Early Stories and Other Writings*. This book offers a compelling glimpse into his formative years, showcasing his development through a diverse array of early works through a vast collection, spanning stories, essays, poems, and sketches. *Atop an Underwood: Early Stories and Other Writings* derives its title from a collection of stories Kerouac envisioned publishing in 1941. Readers familiar with Kerouac's novel *Vanity of Duluoz: An Adventurous Education, 1935–46* will recognize this title, as it appears in the story of Jack Douloz's youth in America. Jack Duluoz, the fictional alter ego of

Kerouac, is part of a semi-autobiographical body of work known as the *Duluoz Legend*, where Kerouac used thinly veiled versions of himself and his friends. This persona allows the writer to explore his own experiences and those of his generation through a fictional lens. After spending his days working at a gas station in Hartford, Connecticut, also Duluoz would retreat to his room at night to write stories "in the style of Saroyan, Hemingway, and Wolfe, titled *Atop an Underwood*".

In the short story "A Day of September", Kerouac quotes Saroyan's "A Cold Day". Similarly, the story begins with the protagonist waking up on a crisp September morning, feeling a mixture of anticipation and melancholy. He reflects on the changing seasons, noting how this month marks a transition from the warmth of summer to the coolness of autumn. This sense of change is mirrored in his internal state as he contemplates his existence. As he goes about his day, the protagonist finds himself wandering through the city streets, observing the hustle and bustle of urban life and interacting with various characters. Each encounter leaves a subtle impact on him. The story concludes with the protagonist returning home at dusk, reflecting on the day's events and his ongoing quest for meaning, realizing that life's beauty lies in its transience. Kerouac not only inserts a copy of Saroyan's short stories on the bed of the protagonist but also evokes a similar sense of coldness experienced by the protagonist of "A Cold Day" in San Francisco:

> There is a copy of William Saroyan's short stories on the bed. Richard picks it up, reads a few lines, and drops it again. His eyes are too heavy and his mind too despondent; he couldn't read a page if he had to, even Bill Saroyan. Richard closes his eyes and feels his nude body begin to cool, until finally his body begins to be coldly clammy. It clamors for the need of warmth. Richard moves his tired bones, slithers in bed, and

> then stays limp. "I can't make it," he says out loud. "I'm going to die like this, freezing in a cold, empty house, at two o'clock in the afternoon on a gray day."
>
> — "A Day of September" (1997, 39)

The link between these two authors is evident also in Kerouac's short story "Today". In Saroyan's "Myself upon the Earth", the narrator laments the absence of his typewriter, which is tied up in a pawnshop: "After a month, I grew increasingly somber, longing to reclaim my typewriter. I yearned to write again, to start afresh, to express something and determine its correctness. However, I lacked the funds. Day after day, this desire persisted" (Saroyan 1997, 167). Similarly, Kerouac writes:

> You see, first I go hungry, and I am writing this at nine o'clock in the evening without having had any supper except some old bread and cheese. Secondly, I have no cigarettes, and my lungs are crying out for the strong body of smoke. (Will one or two of you readers slip me a spare butt on the sly?) Thirdly, they're going to take away the typewriter, and then I will be left alone in this room with nothing. You see, my heart resides in a typewriter, and I don't have a heart unless there's a typewriter somewhere nearby, with a chair in front of it and some blank sheets of paper.
>
> They took my food, my drug, and my heart away.
>
> — "Today" (1997, 167)

This passage poignantly captures the narrator's profound connection to his typewriter, illustrating how it transcends its function as a machine to become a catalyst for seizing the present, empowering the act of documenting life's nuances with immediacy and authenticity. To describe this writing approach, Wolfe once underlined during an interview with a staff reporter from the Star-Times in September 1935, "I want to put down everything I've observed about life. Technique can come later. It seems to me that a novelist's first business is to report

life accurately. I haven't much patience with the writers who become wonderful craftsmen but never have anything to say" (Magi and Walser 1935, 48).

Chapter two
People of the road

"Whatever may have been the case in years gone by, the true use for the imaginative faculty of modern times is to give ultimate vivification to facts, to science, and to common lives, endowing them with the glows and glories and final illustriousness which belong to every real thing, and to real things only."

— Walt Whitman

During the Thirties, documentary-style fiction and creative non-fiction dominated the North American literary landscape. Even though the term "documentary" defines a medium that gives facts and information about a particular subject without editorializing or fictional matter, "the document, when human, is the opposite of the official kind; it is not objective but thoroughly personal" (Stott 1986, 7) and results radically democratic because it frames a fraction of reality, dignifying the usual and leveling the extraordinary. "Most often its subject is the common man, and when it is not, the subject is looked at from the common man's point of view" (Stott 1986, 49). The intellectuals and artists of the Thirties paid a great deal of attention to an America few had noticed in the Twenties. They were interested in common people, rather than the celebrities that crowded the media. These subjects, far from being the society's rulers, often felt overlooked, unheard, and forgotten. Documentaries, indeed, made vivid the unimagined existence of a group of people by picturing in detail the activity of one or a few of its numbers, turning the invisible into visible and giving voice to the voiceless. As the North American author Sherwood Anderson writes in the preface to his collection of essays *Puzzled America*, "People want to tell their stories, are glad to

tell. I blame myself that I do not get more of these stories, do not often enough get the real feeling of the people to whom I talk" (Anderson 1935, IX).

The journalist and social critic Harold Edmund Stearns, one of the most famous intellectuals among the expatriates in Paris of the Twenties, defined the United States in the Thirties as a "rediscovered land" (Stott 1986, 52). This statement suggests a collective introspection and renewed exploration of the country's identity, values, and social fabric during the Great Depression. Those years saw a marked resurgence of interest in ordinary people. The homeless, the workers, the poor, the jobless, the ethnic minorities, and the oppressed became the new heroes. "There is, among these writers, a common, implicit assent that 'reality' is to be found 'on the road', that the underground world contains the darkest, most valid truth" (Seelye 1963, 551).

In 1934, Saroyan wrote "Prelude to an American Symphony", a story about a low-class genius composer who, as he gets drunk, reviles the rich people fawning at him. "He came from the street and didn't care if he did because the street was a damns sight realer than they'd ever be" (Saroyan, 1934). These are, indeed, the heroes of the road that Whitman refers to in his poem "Song of the Open Road"; a wide range of ordinary individuals enter the sacred space of the road where they encounter adventures and face trials that educate, heal, and expand their horizons. Storytellers of that time recount tales of down-and-out characters striving to recover from misfortune, fallen individuals seeking healing, and the anxious or angry yearning for the temporary relief of escape; they all seek answers in the fast lane and through perpetual motion. As Ronald Primeau suggests in his book *Romance of the Road: The Literature of American Highway*, the act of swapping road

stories becomes "a chance to explore and define the American individual in the context of the larger community" (Primeau 1996, 142).

2.1. Hobo, tramp, and bum

The figure of the homeless stands as the most powerful symbol of life on the road, embodying the essence of transient existence and the quest for survival outside conventional societal structures. This figure represents not just physical displacement but also a profound search for identity and purpose amid instability. The homeless wander through urban landscapes and rural stretches alike, their journeys marked by a perpetual movement that underscores a struggle for belonging and stability. Their presence on the road challenges the norms of fixed residence and economic security, making them a symbol of the broader human experience of searching for meaning and place in a world that often values permanence and predictability.

Nels Anderson was an American sociologist renowned for his groundbreaking research on homelessness and vagrancy in the early 20th century. He was one of the first to systematically examine the lives and social conditions of itinerant individuals such as hobos, tramps, and bums. His seminal book, *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man*, offers a detailed analysis of these three groups. Published in 1923, this book emerged from Anderson's firsthand experiences and extensive research during his time at the University of Chicago, under the guidance of the influential sociologist Robert E. Park. He traces a significant distinction between several types of itinerant individuals in his work. Among them, there are the bum, the hobo, and the tramp. Even though these labels are often used

interchangeably in everyday discourse, they represent distinct categories within the sociology of homelessness, each characterized by unique behaviors and attitudes toward work and mobility. Hobos are itinerant workers who travel from place to place actively seeking employment, embodying a strong work ethic and a willingness to labor for their survival. This group emerged prominently during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in response to economic fluctuations and the expansion of the railroad system, which provided the means for widespread travel in search of seasonal and temporary jobs. In contrast, tramps also lead a nomadic lifestyle but are generally averse to consistent work, often relying on handouts, temporary shelters, and other forms of charity as they move from one location to another. Tramps may engage in sporadic labor but tend to avoid steady employment, reflecting a more transient and less work-oriented approach to survival. Bums are typically stationary and neither seek work nor travel, subsisting instead on charity, small-time hustles, or public assistance. They often remain in one location, relying on the local community's resources for sustenance. These distinctions highlight the varying degrees of agency and engagement with labor and movement among homeless individuals, reflecting broader socio-economic dynamics, survival strategies, and personal choices within the context of homelessness (Anderson 1923, 91-105). In *The Story of the American Railroads*, Stewart Holbrook later adds that "tramps are often called hoboes or bums, but although all three are migrants, they are not the same thing. Ben L. Reitman, who tramped a good deal himself, remarked that a hobo works and wanders, a tramp dreams and wanders, and a bum drinks and wanders. Migratory workers, if they apply any of the terms to themselves, are more likely than not to say they are hoboes" (Holbrook 2016, 393). From a literary point of

view, London can be considered one of the first North American authors to speak from intimate knowledge and understanding about the hobo. His engagement with this figure is both a reflection of his personal history and a broader commentary on the socio-economic forces of his time. His writings offer a nuanced perspective that moves beyond the romanticized or stigmatized depictions common in earlier literature, instead presenting the hobo as a product of economic determinism under capitalism. London's own life paralleled the experiences of countless transient laborers, including ranch hands, loggers, railroad men, and migratory workers, who were often displaced by economic hardship and forced into a nomadic lifestyle. These individuals, frequently riding the rails and enduring the harsh conditions of jails and work camps, became a prominent and somewhat tragic feature of the American landscape. Through the author's lens, the hobo emerges not merely as a social outcast, but mostly as a significant social reality shaped by the economic conditions of the time. London "used the hobo to expose the economic contradictions of capitalism. By a ruthless stripping away of the lies and pretenses with which society surrounds itself, he tries to show that the tramp and the hobo were the inevitable accompaniments of capitalism and were necessary to its existence. He reasoned that a system which requires the maintenance of a vast surplus labor army, and which keeps the bulk of the populace in a state of chronic misery and starvation must inevitably fall" (Feied 2001, 82). This explains, in part, the reason why the writer did not often use the hobo as a fictional subject. Nevertheless, the narratives of these road heroes vary in perspective. These figures have different roles in the short stories written by Wolfe, Saroyan and Kerouac. They mostly serve as potent literary devices to explore profound questions about human existence

and the quest for authenticity within a conformist society. Notably, in their works, the categories theorized by Anderson are not strictly respected, indicating a different approach to character development and thematic exploration. Through their depictions of wanderers, the three authors illuminate several aspects of the North American experience, ranging from the romanticized ideal of the open road to the harsh realities of societal exclusion.

2.2. "Portrait of a Bum"

For Saroyan, the road represents not just a physical path, but a vibrant tapestry of human experiences. The time he spent selling papers and delivering telegrams was vital in his years of formation. Although he was dissatisfied with the job, he performed well and he came to love the streets, movement through them, and the people in them. In *The Bicycle Rider in Beverly Hills*, he underlines his love of the road; "our comfort is the streets, the lanes we took, the time we took in them, the other walkers we saw in them, in the light of day, in the electric light of night, in wind, in rain, in snow—the hard, gray streets in which we lived or tried, in which we were blind or came to seeing" (Saroyan 1948, 483). The road, indeed, becomes a venue for human connection. The encounters along these paths, whether fleeting or lasting, contribute to the sense of community and belonging. On the same page, Saroyan champions the common man in all his writing; he insists that no one is more important or worthy than any other. As he asserts in a letter to the magazine *Story*'s editor Martha Foley, "The man you write of need not do some heroic or monstrous deed in order to make your prose great. Let him do what he has always done, day in and day out, continuing to live. Let him walk and talk and think

and sleep and dream and awaken and walk again and talk again and move and be alive. It is enough. There is nothing else to write about" (Balakian 1998, 85). "His primary emphasis had always been on the quest for individual identity, purpose, and meaning—and ultimately, he sought the brotherhood of man, the spiritual realization of all humanity. His work attempts to define man's state of spiritual exile and fragmentation, to record his anguished yearning for completion and inner fulfillment. He does not seek to escape from reality and its harshness, - on the contrary, he fully realizes that 'we live in a real world, a hard world a mean world, an anxious, lonely, frightened, and angry world but this state of affairs must be understood, accepted, transcended, through an affirmation of the miraculous nature of being itself.' We must 'never stop being amazed by human beings. By what passes for reality' (Calonne 1983, 145-146). For Saroyan, "Those who say or do something unforgettable are people of true worth, and the only ones capable of such remarkable achievements are the outcasts, rogues, and rebels, those who transcend the rules of the commonplace" (Cummins 1995, 174). In 1928, he published his short story "Portrait of a Bum" in *Overland Magazine*. This literary magazine was established in 1868 in San Francisco by Bret Harte and Charles Warren Stoddard, initially as a quarterly magazine aimed to highlight the artistic achievements of the American West, providing a platform for writers, poets, and artists from the region. During its early years, the magazine published works by prominent writers such as Mark Twain, Jack London, and Ambrose Bierce, establishing itself as a key outlet for North American literature. Throughout its history, *Overland Monthly* went through several changes in ownership and editorial direction. Despite these shifts, it remained a vital part of the literary landscape, continuing to publish works that captured the evolving

character of the American West. The magazine's legacy lies in its role as a pioneering publication that celebrated and chronicled the experiences and cultural contributions of the region.

"Portrait of a Bum" centers around Harry Brown, a middle-aged man who embraces a life of idleness and nonconformity. The narrator, the author himself, meets him on the road. Harry candidly admits his preference for not working and his enjoyment of a life free from societal ambitions. His activities involve simple pleasures, reading literature, appreciating music and art, observing nature, and engaging in thoughtful conversations. According to him, these are "the worthwhile things in life":

> His was a nature which preferred ease to anxiety, and idleness to labor. Idleness. Complete physical idleness. That was his joy. To sit and read a good book with nothing to worry about; with his mind dead to the world and its petty difficulties. To walk in the sun of a music shop and listen to a bit of jazz or opera. To lean against a corner lamp post and watch the troubled people hurrying about as if they were occupied with something actually important. To roll and smoke a cigarette to the tune of a dream. To listen to religious fanatics and socialists and to smile at their idiocies. To visit parks with their aquariums and museum. To sit on a bench and watch young people moving in rhythms of grace as they played tennis. To walk through a cool fog to the beach. To climb a hill and look down on dreary Alcatraz Island covered with its Government Penitentiary and to realize what a wonderful thing it was not to be locked up in such a dismal place, with the ocean waves forever whispering of freedom and restless movement. To watch glorious freighters drag themselves towards the sea. To notice the elegant swervings of the gulls and to listen closely for the queer noises they made. To smell the ocean's mist as it mixed with the earth and grass and leaves. To notice the way the sun's bright rays made playful shadows of trees. To be idle, to do anything he liked. To be free to go anywhere he liked, any time he liked. To be nothing but a bum. That was Harry Brown.
>
> — "Portrait of a Bum" (December 1928, 421)

The Whitmanesque catalog of this passage offers a sensory-rich experience for the reader, highlighting Harry's deep contentment with idleness and his appreciation for simple pleasures. His mindset sharply contrasts with the hurried, goal-driven lives of those around him. This detachment points to a preference for a more unstructured form of existence. In this case, the label "bum" is reclaimed as a positive state of ultimate freedom from any societal constraint; Harry's mind is "dead to the world and its petty difficulties". Saroyan's use of irony further enriches the narrative. His humorous tone, coupled with a touch of cynicism, allows for a light-hearted yet incisive critique of societal norms. The narrator's reflective commentary on Harry's lifestyle—juxtaposed with society's obsession with ambition and material success—invites readers to question their own life choices and values. This blend of humor and reflection creates a narrative that is both entertaining and thought-provoking. Once again, the author highlights the beauty in the ordinary and the dignity in every individual, urging readers to hold on to the ideal of human potential:

> I gave him a dime. That was all I could spare. That left me a dime, so together we walked into Kentucky Bar on Third Street, a sturdy survival of wet days, and he coffee and snails. We were very happy with our coffee and snails. I might say we were as happy as any man could have been with coffee and snails. We talked for a long time (…) I turned around to watch him walk away and I thought he must have been smiling to himself or possibly at himself and so I, too, smiled to myself or at myself, I can't say which.
>
> — "Portrait of a Bum" (December 1928, 421)

At the core of Saroyan's narrative lies a steadfast vision of human potential. As Dickran Kouymjian suggests in his essay "Whitman and Saroyan: singing the Song of America", "The urge to identify the self

with the universe, the 'universalizing' of experience, is a quality Saroyan shares with Whitman. That we are all the same person underneath the superficial masks of daily social interaction is for him a visible truth. Behind this vision of life is the conviction that we are all tied together by the bonds of common humanity within each human breast beats the same cosmic energy" (Kouymjian 1992, 20-21). In "Portrait of a Bum", Saroyan dedicates his words to a man he encountered by chance on the road. Through his introspective and descriptive style, he provides a direct insight into the existence of Harry. The pervasive use of dialogue allows the author to delve deep into the authentic personality of his character. This literary tool creates a conversational space where Harry's views are explored in depth. The reader meets him directly through his voice. Saroyan "believed the writer should be possessed by the writing itself; the movement of the language, not the writer's intentions, should be in charge. What he wanted was a written language as fluid and natural as the language he heard in the street. A story, he said, was 'the most natural of forms, coming directly from people talking to one another ... long before writing ... long before literature.' Ideally, then, a story would try to maintain the illusion that it was spoken. 'The nearer [writing] comes to an approximation of real talk,' he said, 'The better [it] is'" (Foster 1991, 18). The dialogue in the story is crafted with a naturalistic precision that captures the rhythms and nuances of real speech. The consistent use of spoken language not only enhances the authenticity of the characters but also grounds the story's more abstract themes in tangible, relatable interactions. The author writes with "a fixed vision of the human potential—an ideal—which most of us, in the process of living, often lose sight of. To keep that vision alive, he repeatedly places before our eyes fragments of what he calls a world which can

be 'inhabited'" (Balakian 1998, 264). Saroyan's people seem to exist to establish the fraternity of man. The urge to identify the self with the universe, the "universalizing" of experience, is a quality the writer shares with Whitman. "That we are all the same person underneath the superficial masks of daily social interaction is for him a visible truth. Behind this vision of life is the conviction that we are all tied together by the bonds of common humanity—within each human breast beats the same cosmic energy" (Kouymjian 1992, 21).

In essence, "Portrait of a Bum" is a blend of realistic character portrayal, introspection, and social critique. Saroyan's ability to weave together humor, irony, and deep reflection creates a narrative that is both engaging and profoundly insightful. Through the figure Harry, the author offers a poignant exploration of what it means to live authentically, challenging readers to rethink their definitions of success and fulfillment. This story is a testament to his skill as a writer, capable of infusing even the most ordinary of lives with extraordinary depth and meaning.

2.3. "The Bums at Sunset"

Wolfe set himself to capture and subdue the multiplicity and diversity of American life. His dedication to this monumental task is perhaps best illustrated in his notebooks, where his sense of America's vastness and variety appears in staggering evidence. The writer gradually begins to see his pocket notebook records as his unique research method. He strives to capture the fleeting words and impressions that come to him as he roams, attempting to reel in elusive memories from his subconscious and sort through the jumble of facts in his mind. He selects details and illustrations from the lives around him, arranging them to convey the tone, color, and richness of the

American experience. Wolfe's characters, for instance, are preeminently alive, not in the realistic sense of being "true to life" but in the vitalistic sense of throbbing and overflowing with dynamic energy (Kussy 1942, 307). "The writer who comes immediately to mind as most similar to Wolfe in impulsion and approach is Whitman. For him, as for Wolfe, the source, the driving energy, and the supreme value are 'Life immense in passion, pulse, and power'. For him even more explicitly than for Wolfe, the universe in which we live is itself alive and bursting with vital energy 'the procreant urge of the world'" (Kussy 1942, 310). As James Dickey suggests in the foreword of *The Complete Short Stories of Thomas Wolfe,* "This is what you read Wolfe for: complete immersion in a scene, imaginative surrender to whatever a situation or a memory evokes; quite simply, the sense of life submitted to and entered" (Dickey 1989, XV). The consuming desire for quantity, arising from the overflow of vital energy, cannot be satisfied with any fixed quantity, however large. "There is always more to be had, and indeed more must be had, since there is a limitless flow of energy for which an outlet must be found. Wolfe's insatiable quest to encapsulate the vastness of American life reflects this boundless energy, driving him to continually seek more experiences, more stories, and more details. Through his vibrant and dynamic characters and his richly detailed settings, Wolfe brought to life an America that was both intensely real and imaginatively profound, a living and breathing entity. But the America that he had to include was not only this America of pastoral history and rural setting, not only the aspect of the nation which could lead Wolfe exultantly to cry, 'I'm a Long Hunter from Bear Creek, and a rootin', tootin', shootin', son-of-a-gun from North Carolina'. It was also the land of great cities and vast industrial growth, a place of 'harsh and sordid poverty and

obscene wealth' but also one 'flaming in all the hues of magic' (Holman 1977, 66). Wolfe's vision encompasses the full American spectrum, from its most bucolic landscapes to its most vibrant and chaotic urban centers. "He was always thinking of America as a whole and planning trips to some part that he had not yet seen, and in the end taking them. His various quarters in town always looked as if he had just moved in, to camp for a while. This was partly because he really had no interest in possessions of any kind, but it was also because he was in his very nature a Far Wanderer, bent upon seeing all places, and his rooms were just necessities into which he never settled. Even when he was there his mind was not. He needed a continent to range over, actually and in imagination. And his place was all America. It was with America he was most deeply concerned, and I believe he opened it up as no other writer ever did for the people of his time and for the writers and artists and poets of tomorrow" (Perkins 1985, 88). Through his meticulous notetaking and his imaginative reworking of reality, the author strives to convey the essence of a country teeming with contrasts and contradictions in a kaleidoscope of experiences. In the diversity of his literary America, the bum is a recurring figure. From a biographical point of view, it also marks a crucial moment in his life. In the summer of 1938, he embarked on a long journey across the United States, summarized in the book *A Western Journal*. During a stop in Seattle, he shared a pint of whiskey with a bum probably suffering from the flu. Wolfe contracted the same illness. The first symptoms appeared while he was sailing from Victoria to Vancouver on July 6th. Instead of seeking treatment, he decided to return to Seattle, and it was only on the 11th of the month that he was seen by a doctor, who diagnosed him with pneumonia. He was transferred to Providence, where an X-ray

revealed an old tubercular lesion in one lung. As the weeks passed, his condition worsened; on September 6th, he suffered a severe headache and was transferred to Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. On September 10th, brain surgery was attempted to determine the cause of his illness, which was found to be a form of cerebral tuberculosis that had already spread to an entire lobe.

"The Bums at Sunset" is one of the stories published in the collection "From Death to Morning". Like "No Door", "Death the Proud Brother" and "The Four Lost Men" appeared in the October 1935 *Vanity Fair*. Wolfe's portrayal of bums is both realistic and sympathetic. His writing style is distinguished by its rich, descriptive language, lyrical and poetic elements, and deep psychological insight. These characteristics combine to create an immersive narrative that explores the harsh realities and the inherent dignity of life on the margins with profound sensitivity and complexity. This short story revolves around a group of bums who emerge from a jungle-like area near the train tracks and make their way toward a water tower as night falls. The narrative delves into their physical appearances, social dynamics, and interactions, particularly focusing on the characters of Bull, the leader, and a young boy who has joined their ranks for the first time. As night falls, the narrative shifts to a lyrical reflection on the night and the broader existential themes of wandering and longing. The sounds of the night, the stars, and the distant train create a symphonic background to the scene. The story ends with a sense of anticipation and longing, as the bums wait by the rails, symbolizing their transient existence and the universal human desire for return and belonging.

Wolfe uses detailed imagery to describe the physical appearance of his characters. For example, the oldest man is described as a

“shapeless agglomerate of sodden rags, matted hair, and human tissues” (Wolfe 1989, 274), conveying a sense of degradation and abandonment. The juxtaposition of the youngest boy, fresh-faced and innocent, with the older, more weathered bums, underscores the passage of time and the inevitable wear of a bum’s life. The stark differences between the characters emphasize the transformative effects of their itinerant lifestyle:

> The oldest was perhaps fifty, but such a ruin of a man, such a shapeless agglomerate of sodden rags, matted hair, and human tissues, that his age was in determinate. He was like something that has been melted and beaten into the earth by a heavy rain. The youngest was a fresh-skinned country lad with bright wondering eyes: he was perhaps not more than sixteen years old. Of the remaining three, one was a young man not over thirty with a ferret face and very few upper teeth. He walked along gingerly on tender feet that were obviously unaccustomed to the work he was now putting them to: he was a triumph of dirty elegance-he wore a pin-striped suit heavily spattered with grease stains and very shiny on the seat: he kept his coat collar turned up and his hands deeply thrust into his trousers pocket he walked thus with his bony shoulders thrust forward as if, in spite of the day’s heat, he was cold.
>
> — “The Bums at Sunset” (1989, 274)

In the group, Bull stands out as the leader, and he is depicted with a “curious nobility”. His physical presence—described as “a powerful, shambling figure with a face hewn like granite”—suggests a sense of strength and resilience. Despite his rough exterior, the character exhibits a form of leadership that commands respect and authority among the others. His act of smoking a cigarette is depicted with almost ritualistic reverence. Wolfe’s detailed description of this simple act imbues it with a sensual pleasure that speaks to the character’s ability to find joy in small moments, despite a life filled with hardship.

This portrayal suggests an appreciation for life's simple pleasures, even in difficult circumstances:

> Once he paused, thrust a hand into the baggy pocket of his coat, and drew out a cigarette, which he lit with a single motion of his hard cupped hand. Then his face luxuriously contorted as he drew upon the cigarette, he inhaled deeply, letting the smoke trickle out slowly through his nostrils after he had drawn it into the depths of his mighty lungs. It was a powerful and brutal gesture of sensual pleasure that suddenly gave to the act of smoking and to the quality of tobacco of their primitive and fragrant relish. And it was evident that the man could impart this rare quality to the simplest physical acts of life-to everything he touched-because he had in him somehow the rare qualities of exultancy and joy.
>
> — "The Bums at Sunset" (1989, 275)

Wolfe's deep psychological insight is evident in his characterization. He delves into the psyche of his characters, revealing their inner lives through their physical appearances and interactions. Bull's complex character is revealed through his actions, such as his authoritative demeanor and ritualistic smoking, which suggest a blend of strength and resilience. The interaction with the young boy introduces the theme of mentorship. His rough, yet friendly guidance—inviting the boy to stick with him—illustrates a sense of protection within the community. The dynamics among them, such as the smaller bum's initial hostility toward the boy and Bull's subsequent defense of him, reflect the complex social hierarchy and the mix of tension and solidarity within the group.

The use of internal monologues or stream-of-consciousness passages, particularly in the lyrical sections reflecting on the night and human condition, provide further insight into the broader existential themes that Wolfe wants to explore. Moreover, the lyrical and poetic elements of prose are particularly evident in the rhythmic sections of

the narrative. The passage beginning with "O night, now, night!" (Wolfe 1989, 277) showcases his ability to infuse prose with a musical quality. The repetition of phrases and the rhythmic cadence of the sentences create a poetic effect that elevates the narrative, making it resonate on an emotional level. These introspective passages reveal the characters' longing and sense of displacement. Wolfe's descriptions, indeed, often carry symbolic weight. For instance, the sunset symbolizes a transitional moment in time and the lives of the characters. The repeated phrase "Return, return, return!" (Wolfe 1989, 278) emphasizes a universal longing for belonging that is not just physical but an emotional state and identity the characters have lost or never found. The night symbolizes a time of introspection, where the characters, especially the young boy, confront themselves:

> It was almost dark; there was still a faint evening light, but already great stars were beginning to flash and blaze in cloudless skies. Somewhere in the woods there was a sound of water. Far off, half heard and half suspected, there was a faint dynamic throbbing on the rails. The boy sat there quietly, listening, and said nothing (…) Oh, will there not be some return for all men wandering on the earth? (…) And the bums are waiting by the rails at sunset, and all of the million voices of the earth cry out, "Return!"
>
> — "The Bums at Sunset" (1989, 277)

The symbolic and recurrent use of trains in Wolfe's work serves as a powerful representation of his protagonists' desire to break free from their limited native environments and explore the vast world beyond. It's not merely the sight of a train that inspires this longing for escape, but rather the evocative sounds associated with it—the distant wail of a whistle and the faint thunder of wheels on tracks. These sounds ignite a vision of the vast world awaiting discovery. For his characters, who are often depicted as searching, the train becomes a lifeline, a

conduit for their relentless quest for knowledge, experience, and human connection. As Richard Walser underlines, "for the 'homeless', peripatetic young Wolfe in his passion to satisfy his hunger for knowledge, for experience, and for coming in contact with all mankind, the train station and the railway cars provided a means whereby to feed his appetite for people, crowds of people" (Walser 1988, 10).

2.4. "The Rumbling, Rumbling Blues"

In Kerouac's writing the wanderers are more difficult to classify. On the one hand, the contemporary tramp or hobo is more likely to be found on the highway than on the railways, and, in the case of the hobo, may even own a jalopy or buy one on-time payments. On the other, Kerouac's migrant may be a young man from the middle class who sees life on the road as a form of rebellion against conformity and middle-class mores. However, a proper hobo might object to the claimed kinship with Kerouac's characters and to the complete abandon with which he uses the terms tramp, hobo, and bum interchangeably (Feied 2001, 19). As Holmes suggests, what make these figures beat "was something which seemed to irritate critics most of all. It was Kerouac's insistence that actually they were on a quest, and that the specific object of their quest was spiritual. Though they rushed back and forth across the country on the slightest pretext, gathering kicks along the way, their real journey was inward; and if they seemed to trespass most boundaries, legal and moral, it was only in the hope of finding a belief on the other side" (Holmes 1958). Although Kerouac's wanderers are the forerunners of a growing movement of protest, they do not see themselves as part of any

organized effort, and their form of protest does not find expression through political means. Instead, their rebellion is more personal and existential, rooted in a rejection of conformity and middle-class values. Their journey on the road symbolizes an individual quest for freedom, rather than a collective statement. This detachment from formal political movements underscores the deeply individualistic nature of their protest. "It is the search for this belief, for this release, that provides the real motive power of Kerouac's hoboes. It is this desire to flee or turn away from the hideous realities of their times that distinguishes his fictional hoboes from those of earlier times" (Feied 2001, 91).

In 1960, Kerouac published "The Vanishing American Hobo" in the magazine *Holiday*, later reprinted in his book *Lonesome Traveler*. The writer reflects on this American figure to provide a poignant critique of the modern surveillance state and the decline of a once-romanticized lifestyle. The hobo, characterized by his itinerant existence and pursuit of freedom, faces increasing difficulties in contemporary society due to heightened police surveillance and societal shifts. He describes how various areas, from highways to river bottoms, have become zones of scrutiny, effectively erasing the spaces where they once found refuge. In California, the "pack rat" hobo (Kerouac 1988, 150)—a figure embodying the essence of the wandering, self-reliant individual—has all but disappeared. These "Homeless Brothers" (Kerouac 1988, 150), who once walked from town to town with their belongings on their backs, are now unwelcome in prosperous towns that no longer have a place for the old bums who "founded California" (Kerouac 1988, 150). Kerouac paints a vivid picture of an old man hiding with a can of beans and a small fire, lamenting how the very places these hobos helped establish

now reject them. This decline, which the author observed firsthand, was exacerbated in the late Fifties as mainstream media began disseminating fear-mongering news, portraying hobos as vile creatures. As Kerouac laments, "the media painted hobos as the rapist, the strangler, child-eater; 'Stay away from strangers, they'll give you poison candy' they say" (Kerouac 1988, 151). This cynical sentiment fostered a growing external distrust, making "mothers hold tight to their children when the hobo passes through town because of what newspapers" (Kerouac 1988, 151). Within a few years, what was once natural had become a taboo, a phenomenon that persists today as hitchhikers are seen as dangerous or at least socially awkward strangers. Moreover, the author's own experience as a hobo, though temporary and marked by the hope of literary success, offers him a unique perspective. He recalls the camaraderie among them, the shared meals, and the simple joys of existence on the open road. This life, filled with "secret eternal hope" (Kerouac 1988, 151), contrasts sharply with the suspicion and hostility hobos face in contemporary America. He notes how even Whitman, who celebrated the open road and the human spirit, might be viewed with suspicion today. The hobo's decline reflects a loss of a certain American ideal—one of self-reliance, exploration, and a deep connection to the land. As Kerouac suggests, "There's nothing nobler than to put up with a few inconveniences like snakes and dust for the sake of absolute freedom" (Kerouac 1988, 150), lamenting the final days of the true American dream and the romantic aspiration for total self-reliance embodied by the hobo.

The success of the novel *On the Road* encouraged editors to publish his short story "The Rumbling, Rumbling Blues" in 1958 for the January issue of *Playboy Magazine*. Kerouac's contributions to the

magazine not only expanded his reach as a writer but also helped to bring the ethos of the Beat Generation to a wider audience, influencing popular culture and solidifying the magazine's role as a platform for groundbreaking literary and cultural discussions. The founder and editor-in-chief of *Playboy* Hugh Hefner's "basic recipe for the monthly had not changed much since the 1950s: insistent juxtapositions of high and low culture, the ingredients, as he wrote in his 1953 inaugural editorial, for 'a quiet discussion on Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, sex' at a cocktail party" (Loyd 2017). "The Rumbling, Rumbling Blues" is set in a railroad diner in Des Moines and captures a fleeting yet profoundly impactful encounter between the young seeking narrator and an older, wiser African American hobo. The entrance of the old man marks a significant turning point, introducing an element of the mystical and the unknown. In exchange for a meal, the hobo sings his blues. The narrative is in first person, heavily descriptive, emphasizing the sensory details of the man's appearance and the ambiance around them:

> He was an old *southern* Negro hobo and he came from those swamps. I was curious about the story of his life but he wouldn't talk about himself, just sang. In his pockmarked black skin, all white bristles, there gleamed enormous eyes that had grown larger since he left home. The bayou was his hometown, the world was madder to see, he had been around, all 48 states, Canada and Mexico several times. He scared me when he first came in — not all customers spend three hours in the dark watching from across the street, as he did before he slid the doors in an empty hour to join me in a spate of time. He made a strange remark about my secret thoughts, which were about leaving Des Moines because I'd been there too long, only I was short of money and kept hesitating.
>
> — "The Rumbling, Rumbling Blues" (2016, 40)

This technique immerses the reader in the narrator's perspective, creating a vibrant backdrop against which the hobo's enigmatic presence stands out. The narrator, though central to the story, remains somewhat opaque, serving primarily as a lens through which we observe the main character. His curiosity and eventual decision to leave Des Moines suggest restlessness and a yearning for something beyond his current existence. The hobo, in contrast, is richly characterized through detailed descriptions of his physical appearance and the songs he sings. The description of the fog as a "palpable shroud" and the hobo's clothing as "greasy and dark like Beelzebub in hell" (Kerouac 2016, 41) further enriches the narrative, evoking a sense of ghostly, almost mythical presence. His songs, filled with cryptic references and melancholic tones, hint at a life of hardship and wandering:

> His songs were those mysterious rumbling, rambling blues that you hear with low-register guitar and unknown words rising out of the Deep South night like a groan, like a fire beyond the trees.
>
> — "The Rumbling, Rumbling Blues" (2016, 41)

The "mysterious rumbling, rambling blues" suggests a sound that is both complex and meandering, much like the hobo's life. The "low-register guitar" grounds this imagery in a specific musical tradition, hinting at the blues' historical and cultural roots in the African American experience of the Deep South. The groan-like quality implies a deep, almost inarticulate expression of sorrow that transcends words, resonating with the listener on a visceral level. His songs are not just personal expressions but seem to echo a collective experience. To characterize the hobo, Kerouac uses a regional dialect:

> He pronounced his words so darkly I had to ask him what they meant: "nine-tunny-na," that was nineteen twenty-nine, "polanmay" was Portland, Maine, "tunsee" Tennessee, so on. Print can't read like he sounded, so mournful, hoarse and swampy-like.
>
> — "The Rumbling, Rumbling Blues" (2016, 41)

These phonetic spellings — "nine-tunny-na", "polanmay", "tunsee"— provide authenticity to his character, grounding him in a specific cultural and linguistic context. These details highlight the uniqueness of his voice and the lived experience that shapes it. Kerouac acknowledges the inherent limitations of the written word in conveying the full sensory and emotional impact of speech and draws attention to the unique power of oral storytelling and how it conveys the full spectrum of human experience. For the hobo, his voice is a key aspect of his identity, reflecting his life's journey and the cultural *milieu* from which he comes. For the narrator, this realization signifies a moment of empathy and understanding, recognizing the depth and complexity of the other's lived experience. The hobo's cryptic remarks and his final prophetic message to the narrator imbue the story with a mystical quality. This mysticism culminates in the narrator's epiphany and subsequent departure, suggesting that the man's presence has a transformative effect:

> It was a prophetic night for me. I watched him go across the railyards — said he was going to "Sanacisca" right soon, or "Awg'n", which are San Francisco and Ogden, in Utah, I know — a tarpaulin ghost aimed for the nearest empties on the track, to fold inside the dryest reefers or find his bed of paper, in any old gondola, any box, even the rushing cold rods themselves, "Just long as they ball that jack!" as he yelled when he left. So he was gone. In the morning I collected my pay, packed my old torn bag, and rode a bus to the edge of town. I'd never get caught, I'd roll far too. I got on that old road again. I knew I would see him somewhere at least once more.
>
> — "The Rumbling, Rumbling Blues" (2016, 44)

This passage captures a turning point in the narrator's life, depicting his decision to embrace a life of movement. The encounter catalyzes change, pushing him towards a life of movement and adventure. The hobo is likened to a "tarpaulin ghost", emphasizing his ethereal and transient existence. This imagery suggests a life unbound by the constraints of conventional society, highlighting the freedom and uncertainty of the wandering lifestyle. Moreover, the colloquial expression "just long as they ball that jack!" from the hobo subculture conveys the idea of "going fast and energetically", capturing the sense of rapid, vigorous movement that wanderers would often experience while traveling by freight trains. The narrator's actions the following morning—collecting his pay, packing his bag, and leaving town—reflect a decisive break from his previous life. His determination to "never get caught" and to "roll far too" signifies his commitment to embracing the uncertainty and freedom of the road. The closing line, "I knew I would see him somewhere at least once more", suggests a belief in the interconnectedness of wanderers and the inevitability of their paths crossing again. This sense of continuity reinforces the idea that the road is a place of recurring encounters and shared experiences that make heroic deeds possible in a way that is impossible when static or indoors. What the road represents is, of course, freedom.

Chapter three
Voices of the road

"Submissive to everything, open, listening."

— Jack Kerouac

Voice, as a marker of authenticity, stands out as a dominant feature. In the context of postwar North American literature, the introduction of the tape recorder became a symbol of intimacy, personal expression, and even confession. This technology allowed recording spontaneous, raw, and unfiltered speech to capture the nuances of natural conversation. This ability to register and report the true sound of a personal voice creates a sense of intimacy as if the reader were hearing the world in first person without mediation. This technological influence is evident in many of Kerouac's works, in which the presence of recorded speech injects a sense of orality into the text. They "illustrate how not just the voice, but sound more broadly works as a signifier. Recording the voice was not the only thing that drew writers to the tape recorder" (Teague 2021, 97). In the early Fifties, Kerouac and his friend Cassady were among the pioneers experimenting with tape technology, specifically the Ekotape recorder. At that time, magnetic recording technology was on the brink of broader consumer availability, with Philips introducing a tape recorder to the market nearly two years later. Although magnetic recording technology had been in development since the late 19th century, its evolution involved non-linear advancements rather than a straightforward progression. Tape technology, initially developed for commercial and military use, did not initially rival the popularity of phonograph. During World War II, magnetic recording was utilized for propaganda and surveillance, leading to its post-war

adaptation for various uses, including computer data storage. By 1951, IBM had started using it for computing. Kerouac's experimentation with tape paralleled this broader technological development, though he approached it more as a tool for recording and reflecting on memory rather than as a technological breakthrough. In his book *Visions of Cody*, he began to explore how this device could transform literary practices, offering a new approach to organizing sound in literature (Teague 2021, 98-102).

Philosopher Jacques Derrida argues that Western thought privileges speech over writing because it is believed to offer direct access to a speaker's intention, making it appear closer to pure meaning or truth. He identifies "presence" as a central concern in the metaphysical tradition, where it refers to the idea of being, or meaning that is directly accessible and fully present. In this context, speech is thought to embody presence because it seems to connect directly with the speaker's consciousness. When a person speaks, their voice is seen as an immediate extension of their thoughts, implying that meaning is fully present to both the speaker and the listener in the moment of utterance. Writing, by contrast, has been seen as a secondary, derivative form of language that distances meaning. It is often associated with "absence"—of the speaker, of immediacy, of original intent—and is therefore regarded as less reliable for conveying truth or meaning. Derrida critiques this hierarchical opposition, arguing that even in speech, meaning is never fully present but always mediated by signs and subjects. However, "the tape recorder used by Kerouac injects into the text a sense of orality; the so-called 'presence' of speech theorized by the philosopher" (Riley 2006). The North American author's method of recording and reporting seems to break the Western dichotomy between spoken and written language. By

incorporating recorded conversations, he introduces a polyphonic discourse echoing Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "polyphony". According to him, polyphony disrupts dominant monologic discourse, erasing distinctions between roles such as speakers and listeners and blurring the lines between audience and performers. In a polyphonic novel, we hear a variety of voices, each with its own perspective. These voices are not harmonized or subordinated to a central voice; rather, they exist in a state of dynamic interaction and conflict. This structure undermines the dominance of any single perspective and fosters dialogue among different consciousnesses (Bakhtin 1984, 6). This aspect is evident in Kerouac's dialogues, in which each speaker's contribution merges into a collective exchange.

Kerouac's spontaneous prose style aligns closely with Gertrude Stein's vision of writing as a vibrant and living process. Her approach significantly reshaped the literary landscape by revitalizing Whitman's poetics and adapting them to the Twentieth century. Stein's work, deeply influenced by the poet's expressionistic style, introduced theoretical frameworks that emphasized the essence of the present moment. Unlike traditional literature, which often aimed at mimetic representation or objective description, she focused on creating works that embody and manifest the immediate experience. Her writing was characterized by a dynamic, self-sustaining movement within the words themselves, intended to convey the complete and actual present rather than merely representing it. "Stein in effect took Whitman's poetics and refurbished it with theoretical underpinnings, bringing his expressionistic manner into the twentieth century and thereby setting the foundations for a tradition that extends through Sherwood Anderson to William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and Jack Kerouac as well as William Saroyan. Stein believed

that ‘the business of Art’ was ‘to live in the actual present, that is the complete actual present, and to completely express that complete actual present’” (Foster 1995, 83).

3.1. Rerecording and reporting

When Gertrude Stein published her book *Three Lives* in 1909 readers were struck by her peculiar, repetitive style. “One dust jacket review described Stein’s prose as resembling a ‘stubborn phonograph’” (Teague 2021, 1). The metaphor refers to the moment when the needle jumps out of the groove and the same few seconds of a recorded loop and repeats until a person lifts the arm of the phonograph and resets it; this error suspends the forward motion of musical time, revealing the mechanical nature of the machine. A record repeating in this way is considered “broken”, but language too can break when subjected to repetition—a phenomenon Stein experimented with in her works. Although this comparison might seem unremarkable today, in 1909, when the phonograph was still a relatively new technology, reveals how at least one early reader perceived her writing. Even in the early years, sound recording was beginning to shape the way people read, providing insights into the interplay between mechanical sound reproduction and literary interpretation. Georgiana Goddard King observes Stein had “pushed the method of realism as far as it would go” (Teague 2021, 1).

During her 1934-35 American tour, the writer gave a series of lectures, promoted *Four Saints in Three Acts*, and made several appearances on the radio. It was the first time North American readers heard the author in her own words. The recent publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* had given readers a more accessible

glimpse of her world; the success of *Four Saints in Three Acts* on Broadway, however, put her playful approach to language in a new, performative context. As one journalist described her lecture series, "To hear Miss Stein read her work is to understand it – I speak for myself – for the first time… You see why she writes as she does; you see how from sentence to sentence, which seem so much alike, she introduces differences of tone, or perhaps of accent. And then when you think she has been saying the same thing four or five times, you suddenly know that she has carefully, link by link, been leading you to a new thing" (Meyer 1990). The combination of public appearances and lectures, the performances of her work, and radio brought the writer's sound to new ears. In addition, she also visited the speech lab of lexicologists George W. Hibbitt and W. Cabell Greet at Columbia University to make recordings of her writings, including an excerpt from *The Making of Americans* and several of her "Portraits". As Chris Mustazza documents, these recordings were made as part of Hibbitt and Greet's studies of American dialect and became part of the first audio archive of poetry (Tegue 2021, 5). In "The Tune of Thinking: Gertrude Stein's Narration," Abigail Lang offers a comprehensive exploration of the author's distinctive narrative style, focusing on how her innovative use of language challenges conventional literary forms and transforms narrative experience. Unlike linear approaches, Stein often eschews a straightforward plot in favor of an emphasis on the rhythm and texture of language itself; her method is more concerned with capturing the immediacy and fluidity of spoken language. As the writer underlines, "the new narrative must come to express 'being existing', an 'immediate existing' because knowledge has no succession: 'How do you know anything, well you know anything as complete knowledge as having it completely in you at the actual

moment that you have it. That is what knowledge is, and essentially therefore knowledge is not succession but an immediate existing" (Lang 2014, 20). In her works, indeed, the narrative is not bound by the constraints of time or logical progression. Instead, it unfolds in a manner that mirrors the chaotic and often disjointed nature of human consciousness. Her writing captures the way thoughts and perceptions occur in real time, without the artificial imposition of narrative order. This technique aligns with her concept of the "continuous present". Stein, indeed, believes that traditional narratives, which often rely on past and future tenses, fail to convey the true nature of experience as it is lived. Instead, she aims to create a form of writing that remains rooted in the present, reflecting the fluid and ever-changing nature of perception. In *How to Write*, she suggests "the time of the composition is the time of the thing composed" (Stein 1926). She adds "in order for writing to be literature, the thing written must have no existence before the writing. Writers 'try to make a thing a thing that they recognize while they are writing make it something that had no existing before that writing gave it recognition'. This is why history mostly can't be literature, as the 'thing' exists before it is written. And the same is true of anything that has been plotted or premeditated" (Lang 2014, 5). She wants to craft a literary experience that prioritizes not only the spontaneity of thought but also the rhythmic qualities of language. A central aspect of her style, indeed, is the use of repetition and rhythmic patterns to create a distinctive narrative voice that emphasizes the musicality of words. Both literary devices disrupt the conventional flow of sentences, forcing the reader to engage with the text on a deeper, more auditory level. "More than any modernist, she was committed to immediacy, moment-to-moment composition, so that narration was bound to

bother her, given its involvement with dual times or remembering and with intersubjectivity or communication. Like translation, the narration is about *re*creating 'the point of view of somebody else', which accounts for the smoothness of the words" (Lang 2014, 3). As Stein has demonstrated, writing should be a living process that exists within the same temporal framework as the life it seeks to express. "A sentence should have life and the writer should give it life by his intention to give it life. All the while he is alive he gives it life, and that is writing" (Stein 1935, 231).

3.2. "Two Wasted Days in Kansas City"

In Saroyan's short stories, there are no major dramatic situations. Instead, both significant and minor tragedies are so deeply embedded in daily life. Heroic deeds are not central; rather, they are seen as natural human responses and evidence of our instinctive drive to reach our highest potential. "In the absence of an exciting narrative, the author expects to hold the reader not simply with the strangeness of the commonplace (Emerson's 'the miraculous of the Common') but with the shock of recognition: if we do not live alike, we dream alike as people" (Balakian 1998, 40). Saroyan's characters, indeed, are "people forever swinging on the trapeze between the real world and the world toward which they aspire" (Balakian 1998, 40). His narratives are conveyed in a straightforward language that remains fresh and engaging, thanks to the author's unique mixture of common sense, extravagant insights, and zany humor. Saroyan used to walk around the city, listening carefully and absorbing the spoken language until it had merged into a voice distinctly his own. He tries to achieve

a written language as fluid and natural as the words he used to hear in the street.

Following the success of *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze and other stories,* Saroyan published a new short stories collection in 1936 entitled *Inhale et Exhale*. Outlining the book's contents to Bennett Cerf, the author writes, "The idea is to imply through the title, the meaning of the words involved . . . and through how the title is printed, these things: the inseparability of all opposites in the living, in the world, the universe, and everywhere else, including nowhere: life & death (*inhale & exhale*)" (Balakian 1998, 92). In his new book, Saroyan's subject is still himself, but "the circumference of the contemplating eye now enfolds a spectrum of varied human beings": 'the unmerciful panorama of America, and everything that is taking place', is how the author puts it in one story" (Balakian 1998, 94). Through the pages, he gives expression to the sound of his country and the common life seen from within a previously unknowledge and invisible cosmos. His vast ensemble of characters, all dreamers at heart, find unity in their shared resilience, where their laughter fuels their strength, and their darkest moments are buoyed by an unyielding faith in the essence of life. Among them, there is the protagonist of "Two Wasted Days in Kansas City". The story opens with the narrator, who is engaged in a dice game at a gambling joint in Kansas City. He is confident about his luck, boasting to the casino worker that he is about to roll a four—a number he considers particularly difficult. As he prepares, a young girl enters the gambling joint, casually smoking a cigarette. Her presence immediately captures the narrator's attention:

> The girl stood very quietly. I could see she wasn't walking the streets yet, and I could see my good luck was happening at last because she

> wasn't walking the streets yet but would be in an hour or so if something didn't happen.
> That's why I didn't go away with my money.
> Just before a girl from a small city in a big city starts to walk the streets a condition is established in the world which is of pity, pride and humility; and no girl is ever so beautiful as a girl who has decided to live, even if she has to give over everything she has, and is waiting timidly to see if something in the world won't let her live the way she is and wants to be.
> I could see she was very hungry, very sure everything would turn out for the worst, very angry, very proud, and at the same time very humble, very innocent, very faithful in her belief in the innate goodness of things.
> I am not speaking of faith in God. I am speaking of faith in things. Maybe it is the same thing.
>
> — "Two Wasted Day in Kansas City" (1948, 45)

He perceives the girl as someone who is "waiting timidly" for a chance to live authentically, even if it means sacrificing everything she has. This character represents "the archetypal Saroyan heroine, the vulnerable small-town girl in the big city about to lose her dreams. As in future works, the little girl with the cigarette (a prostitute in the making) is momentarily drawn to the modern knight-errant who cannot tolerate the destruction of innocence" (Balakian 1998, 98). The author's focus on her impending decision—whether to "walk the streets" or maintain her faith in "the innate goodness of things"—embodies the quiet, yet significant struggles that populate his stories. The girl's situation, much like a gamble, is precarious, teetering between potential ruin and the faint hope of something better. Just as the protagonist in the story places his bets with a mix of faith and desperation, her life is portrayed as a series of high-stakes decisions, where her faith in "things"—not in any divine intervention, but in the simple possibility of goodness—becomes her wager against a harsh reality. The simple language—blending practical observations with a

deep emotional and philosophical insight—ensures the reader perceives the gravity of her situation without needing dramatic embellishments, aligning with Saroyan's belief that true human responses, like the girl's faith or the narrator's empathy, are themselves significant without being overly dramatized.

The narrator is struck by her appearance and believes that if he can make the number four, it will be a result of her presence, symbolizing an unusual twist of fate that he feels is now on his side. He rolls the dice and, contrary to his initial intention of losing, he gains a four. This unexpected success fuels his belief that the girl is somehow connected to his newfound luck. He places a ten-dollar bet, knowing that if he wins, it is not just for him but for her as well. As he continues to roll the dice, he is fixated on the idea that his winnings are somehow meant to support her and prove that there is good in the world. While the narrator is in the middle of gambling, the girl leaves the table and walks towards the door. This departure disrupts his focus, and, with her absence, he feels a profound sense of loss. He is troubled by the thought that she does not understand the significance of what he is doing. Without her presence, the narrator's luck falters. He continues to gamble, but his attempts to roll favorable numbers fail. He is left with the realization that her departure has somehow broken the connection:

> I was baffling because I knew the arrangement was broken.
> She doesn't know, I said. She is walking up a dark street in a strange city and she doesn't know I want her to believe. She is not here, she is lost again in the world and no one there will do anything for her, and I will lose, I will be sure to lose (…) I prayed for luck. She is not here, I said, but she was here, and I believe, I believe in everything, please let me make another seven, or an eleven, and I will run up the street and find her and give her the money, so she can believe, too. I never saw her before, but she's from a small town somewhere and she's waiting

> to find out if there is any good in anything, and I want her to know there is. I know there is and I want her to know there is, too.
>
> — "Two Wasted Days in Kansas City" (1948, 46)

Her departure from the scene shatters the fragile hope he had built around their brief interaction. Her anonymity—she is just "a girl from a small town"—heightens the universality of her plight, making her a stand-in for anyone who feels lost or abandoned in an indifferent world. The narrator's plea for luck, "Please let me make another seven, or an eleven", is more than a gambler's prayer; it is a profound wish for the chance to restore hope in the girl's life. "This instant 'metamorphoses' happens when the girl starts to leave the gambling joint: at that moment only does the young man realize why he wanted so much to win" (Balakian 1998, 99). His desire to "find her and give her the money, so she can believe, too" illustrates his yearning to provide her with a tangible sign that goodness still exists and that her faith in the world is not in vain. The repetition of "I believe" serves as a mantra, reinforcing his commitment despite the odds. His prayer is not just for a win in the game of dice but for the possibility of affirming the goodness he desperately wants to believe in, for himself and for the girl. To have "saved" her with his money would have confirmed his innate faith in "everything in the whole boundless universe" and "in the goodness of all things organic and inorganic" (Saroyan 1948, 48). After his gambling session, he roams the city in search of her, driven by the need to ensure that she understands that there is good in the world and to give her the money he won:

> I wasted two days in Kansas City, hoping to find her. I only wanted to tell her I made my number because I knew how it was with her and wanted her to have the money so she could go on being alive the way she wanted to be alive. For a minute there, while she was in the

> gambling joint, we had the whole world and every idea of right on our side, and I wish to Christ she hadn't gone away and left me with only a lot of silly money in my pocket, instead of the real rich winning I had made.
>
> — "Two Wasted Days in Kansas City" (1948, 47)

The narrator has spent two days in Kansas City only to end up empty-handed. He reflects on his experience with a sense of futility, lamenting that while he won, he failed to achieve the deeper connection and sense of purpose he had hoped for. Saroyan uses both first-person narration and a stream-of-consciousness technique to provide readers with direct access to the narrator's thoughts and feelings in a fluid, fragmented, conversational, and unstructured way, mirroring his mental state and inner conflict. He employs repetition and rhetorical questions to emphasize the inner turmoil and desperation. The use of vernacular enhances the portrayal of the setting, making it more immersive. Moreover, the consistent presence of gambling terminology becomes a lens to explore the narrator's perception of fate and fortune. The dice and bets become metaphors for the uncertainties of life and the protagonist's struggles with control and destiny. "Using the imagery of gambling, the young narrator indirectly acknowledges the worthlessness of money in and of itself, while at the same time recognizing that the real 'winning' lay in his impulse arising from his better self—to salvage another person's dream" (Balakian 1998, 99). Saroyan's attention to the human voice is a defining characteristic of his storytelling. Through his careful rendering of dialogue and internal monologue, he captures the rhythms and nuances of everyday speech, using voice as a tool to explore character, build empathy, and convey the emotional richness of ordinary life. For instance, the way the narrator speaks about the girl in the story—his urgent, repetitive language, and use of simple,

declarative sentences—conveys deep concern and an almost obsessive need to protect her. His voice is marked by a mix of tenderness, desperation, and a kind of raw honesty. The naturalistic dialogue reinforces the idea that, for Saroyan, speaking and being heard are fundamental and intrinsic aspects of the human experience.

3.3. "Death the Proud Brother"

Maxwell Perkins, Wolfe's editor, underlines "Tom must have lived in eight or nine different parts of New York and Brooklyn for a year or more. He knew in the end every aspect of the City—he walked the streets endlessly—but he was not a city man. The city fascinated him, but he did not really belong in it and was never satisfied to live in it" (Perkins 1985, 88). The writer himself reflects "in this endless quest and prowling of the night through the great web and jungle of the city, I saw, lived, felt and experienced the full weight of that horrible human calamity. [The time was that of the bottom of the depression when Wolfe was living in Brooklyn.] And from it all has come as a final deposit, a burning memory, certain evidence of the fortitude of man" (Bishop 1985, 66). Wolfe never wanted to go back to his North Carolina, because the raw energy and continuous dynamism of the city offered him the vital inspiration required for his creative pursuits. "He was not 'celebrating' America, as Whitman had done; he was trying to record it, to assimilate it, to echo it in himself. This, the very quality and turn of his abundant energy, was the source of his frenzied passion for American details, of his need to reproduce them exactly for the substance of his art" (Kazin 1985, 53). Wolfe's whole career was an endless search for a language and a form to communicate his vision of reality. His style is marked by a profound oral quality, resonating

with the cadence and melodic power of spoken language in favor of a more intuitive and spontaneous narrative style.

In the summer of 1934, *Scribner's Magazine* bought three of Wolfe's short stories and published them in successive issues in the summer of 1934. One of them, "Death the Proud Brother," appeared in the June issue and was later republished as a short novel in "From Death to Morning." In his short story, Wolfe selected a group of intensely autobiographical incidents all centering on death and loneliness, dislocated them in place and time, and bound them together by recurring themes and elements. For the author, indeed, "everything is in the moment; he can so try to impress us with the immensity of the moment that it will take on some sort of transcendental meaning" (Bishop 1985, 65). The meeting with death represents a common and relatable life experience. For a moment, but a moment only, there is a sudden release of compassion, when some aspect of suffering and bewildered humanity is seized. Therefore, the power of these moments lies in the so-called "shock of recognition"— "the discovery that one's inmost feelings have been articulated by another so that presumably they are worth having after all" (Rubin 1985, 20).

"Death the Proud Brother" begins by reflecting on the narrator's chance meetings with death in the city, having seen it three times already and now witnessing it once more during a chaotic and frenzied night of wandering. The story employs a first-person narrative and a stream-of-consciousness technique to give readers direct access to the narrator's thoughts and feelings in a fluid and unstructured manner. The night, marked by its sense of madness and detachment, leads him to the city subway where he quietly observes a man die. His death is so peaceful and sudden that those around him are almost unwilling to acknowledge it:

> Three times already I had looked upon the visage of death in the city, and now that spring I was to see it once again. One night, one of those kaleidoscopic nights of madness, darkness, and fury that I knew that year, when I prowled the great street of the dark from light to light, from midnight until morning, and when the whole world reeled about me its gigantic and demented dance-I saw a man die in the city subway.
>
> He died so quietly that most of us would not admit that he was dead, so quietly that his death was only an instant and tranquil cessation of life's movement, so peaceable and normal in its action, that we all stared at it with eyes of fascination and unbelief, recognizing tl1e face of death at once with a terrible sense of recognition which told us that we had always known him, and yet, frightened and bewildered as we were, unwilling to admit that he had come.
>
> For although each of the three city deaths that I had seen before this one had come terribly and by violence, there would remain finally in my memory of this one a quality of terror, majesty, and grandeur which the others did not have.
>
> — "Death the Proud Brother" (1989, 30)

The narrator recounts the first death he witnessed in the city, which occurred four years earlier in April. He describes the setting—a dingy, bustling street on the Upper East Side, filled with the noise and life of a densely populated area. The city is personified as a powerful, indifferent force, speaking directly to him about its nature; it mocks the smallness and insignificance of human beings, who, despite their hopes, dreams, and emotions, are fleeting parts of its endless cycle. On the street, the narrator sees the accidental death of a middle-aged Italian street vendor. He is operating a cart filled with cheap goods and food and is struck by a large truck that loses control. The description of the accident is brutal—the vendor is mangled beyond recognition, his blood spilling out in a violent burst, shocking the narrator and the crowd that gathers around the scene. The aftermath of the accident is chaotic. A crowd of excited people surrounds the

dying man, while the police arrive and forcefully disperse them, treating the bystanders with a rough, almost animalistic disdain. The ambulance arrives too late; the vendor is already dead. Among the items are the pots and pans he used to cook his food, now mixed with fragments of his brain and skull. The narrator reflects on the irony of the situation: the city, with its immense, casual cruelty, has erased this man's life in an instant, leaving behind only the remnants of his daily efforts to earn a living.

The second death involves a man lying unconscious on the ground, teetering on the brink of death. His figure is described as still and solid, with closed eyes and brutish features, reminiscent of the strongmen seen in circus acts. A small crowd has gathered around him, but they show no emotion. Their attitude is one of detached curiosity, as if the sight of a dying vagabond is so common that it evokes no surprise or pity. A man comments with a faint grin, noting that such an end is inevitable for people like the man on the ground. A young intern methodically examines him with a stethoscope, while an indifferent policeman observes the scene. Among the onlookers are a young man and woman, well-dressed and exuding a sense of superiority. Their behavior is callous and detached, as they laugh and joke about the situation with a cruelty that shocks the narrator. His reflections turn towards the fragility of life and the inevitable passage of time; the people are so caught up in their daily lives that they are oblivious to the passage of time and the looming presence of death.

The third death occurs when the narrator admires the architectural beauty and craftsmanship of a building under construction. His reflections are abruptly shattered by a horrific accident on the construction site. A worker, perched high above the ground, is struck by a red-hot rivet tossed from a forge. The description of the accident

captures the terrifying and fatal moment as he is engulfed in flames and falls to his death, his body turning into a “blazing torch”. The narrator describes the immediate aftermath—the sudden cessation of all noise and movement as if life itself has been frozen by the tragedy. The crowd that gathers is compared to “flesh flies” attracted to death, and while some are paralyzed by the horror, life in the city quickly resumes its mechanical rhythm. Suddenly, the short story shifts its focus again to the opening episode. The narrator is surrounded by many people all hurrying to their destinations, lost in their worlds. The subway station is depicted as a space that countless figures pass through every day without paying much attention. Amid this sea of humanity, he notices a man sitting alone on a bench. He is unremarkable in appearance, a figure that one might easily overlook in the bustling crowd—middle-aged, Irish, and shabby, wearing worn-out clothes that speak of a life spent on the margins of society. Despite his ordinary appearance, something about the man catches his attention; there is a sense of stillness about him, a quietness that contrasts sharply with the noisy, chaotic environment of the subway. As the narrator observes, he suddenly takes a deep breath—a gesture that seems to signify his final moment of life. Almost imperceptibly, the man dies on the bench, slipping away without a sound. The death is quiet, unceremonious, and profoundly lonely:

> On his gray face, his dead sunken mouth, the ghost of his recent life and speech sat incredibly, until it seemed we heard him speak, listened to the familiar tones of his voice again, knew every act and quality of his life, as certainly as if he were alive, as he snarled at one man: “I can’t help dat, I don’t know nuttin’ about dat, misteh. All I know is dat I got my ordehs, an’ my ordehs is to keep everyone out unless dey can prove dey’ve gotta a date wit’ Misteh Grogan. How do I know who you are? How can I tell what yoeh business is? What’s dat got to do wit’ me? No, seh! Unless you can prove you gotta date wit’ Misteh

> Grogan, I can't let yuh in....Dat may be true ... and den again it may not be.... Wat t'hell am I supposed t'be? A mind-readeh, or somp'n? ... No, misteh! Yuh can't come in! ...I got my ordehs an' dat's all I know." And yet, the next moment, this same voice could whine with a protesting servility its aggrieved apology to the same man, or to another one: "W'y didn't yuh say yuh was a friend of Misteh Grogan's? ...W'y didn't yuh tell me befoeh you was his brudder-in-law? ...If yuh'd told me dat, I'd a-let yuh by in a minute.Yuh know how it is: here the voice would drop to cringing confidence, "so many guys come in here every day an' try to bust dere way right in to Misteh Grogan's office when dey got no bizness dere....Dat's duh reason dat I gotta be kehful ...But now dat I know dat you're ok wit' Misteh Grogan: it would say fawningly, "you can go in any time yuh like. Anyone dat's ok wit' Misteh Grogan is all right)" that voice would say with crawling courtesy. "Yuh know how it is: it whis pered, rubbing sly, unwholesome fingers on one's sleeve, "I didn't mean nuttin'-but a guy in my position has gotta be kehful."
>
> Yes, that was the voice, that was the man, as certainly as if that dead mouth had moved, that dead tongue stirred and spoken to us its language.
>
> — "Death the Proud Brother" (1989, 56)

Wolfe captures the dead man's voice, heavily marked by colloquialism and dialect. His speech is full of contractions and non-standard grammar, such as "nuttin" instead of "nothing", and "dat" instead of "that". Although the man is dead, his voice is so sharply remembered that it almost brings him back to life. The author's attention to linguistic detail allows the reader to not only visualize the scene but also to understand the character's interiority and the complexities of his social environment. Suddenly, a policeman, making his rounds, notices the man and approaches him. The officer shakes his shoulder, but there is no response. As time passes, a small crowd begins to gather around him. The people are drawn in by curiosity, but they maintain a respectful distance, uncertain of how to react; some are indifferent, and others are visibly disturbed. Among

them, the dead man is seen as a "pavement cipher", a symbol of the countless anonymous lives that make up the city. His face, even in death, carries the marks of a life lived on the edges, constantly struggling to maintain a semblance of dignity in the face of poverty and hardship. The man, though surrounded by people, remains alone in death, just as he likely was in life. The arrival of an ambulance doctor further adds to the scene's somber tone. His actions are mechanical as he examines the body, confirming the death with routine procedures. As he finishes and leaves, the police step in to control the crowd, pushing them back and attempting to disperse the onlookers. Despite their efforts, the crowd remains, their curiosity and morbid fascination undiminished. The dead man, who lived a modest life, now occupies a central and almost ceremonious place as his body is moved through the streets. Meanwhile, the narrator reflects on the night:

> There was something living on the land at night. There was a dark tide moving in the hearts of men. Wild, strange, and jubilant, sweeping on across the immense and sleeping earth, it had spoken to me in a thousand watches of the night, and the language of all its dark and secret tongues was written in my heart. It had passed above me with the rhythmic suspensions of its mighty wing, it had shot away with bullet cries of a demonic ecstasy on the swift howlings of the winter wind, it had come softly, numbly, with a dark impending prescience of wild joy in the dull, soft skies of coming snow, and it had brooded, dark and wild and secret, in the night, across the land, and over the tremendous and dynamic silence of the city, stilled in its million cells of sleep, trembling forever in the night with the murmurous, remote, and mighty sound of time.
>
> And always, when it came to me, it had filled my heart with a wild exult ant power that burst the limits of a little room, and that knew no stop of time or place or lonely distances. Joined to that dark illimitable energy of night, like a page to the wind, and westward, my spirit rushed across the earth with the wild post of the exultant furies of the dark, until I seemed to inhabit and hold within my compass the whole

> pattern of the earth, tl1e huge wink of the enormous seas that feathered its illimitable shores, and the vast structure of the delicate and engulfing night.
> And I was joined in knowledge and in life with an indubitable certitude to the great company of men who lived by night and knew and loved its mystery.
>
> — "Death the Proud Brother" (1989, 62)

The narrator experiences a profound connection to the night that transcends the physical and enters the metaphysical; his spirit "burst[s] the limits of a little room" and becomes one with the "dark illimitable energy" that spans the earth. This fusion allows him to feel as though they "inhabit and hold within [their] compass the whole pattern of the earth". The night, with its vast, encompassing reach, becomes a symbol of the universal connection—a shared, almost brotherly bond among those who are attuned to its secrets and energies.

3.4. "Good Blonde"

Allen Ginsberg comments that Kerouac "was aware of the sound of the language and got swimming in the seas of sound and guided his intellect on sound, rather than on dictionary associations with the meanings of the sounds. In other words, another kind of intelligence—still conscious, still reasonable, but another kind of reason, a reason founded on sounds rather than a reason founded on conceptual associations. If you can use the word reason for that. Or a 'modality of consciousness'" (Weinreich 1987, 57). Kerouac possesses not just an exceptional ability to capture the rhythmic cadences of human speech, but also an extraordinary memory for the words he hears; he incorporates entire conversations into his writing. His sentences

transcend mere representation and engage a nuanced interplay of memory and perception. The unpredictable use of tenses blends temporal dimensions, elongating, and condensing actions, weaving the mesmerizing illusion of a narrator existing concurrently in both the past and the present. "Learning honesty in ear and mouth, he notates the displacements of perception to provide a vivid transcription on the page with which to present that voice: a metatalk" (Hrebeniak 2006, 145). His "free prose," often misunderstood, did not signify a lack of control, but rather a highly contrived artifice to mimic the natural flow of speech. Kerouac explains to Ginsberg "You just have to purify your mind and let it pour the words (which effortless angels of the vision fly when you stand in front of reality) and write with 100% personal honesty both psychic and social, etc. and slap it all down shameless, willy-nilly, rapidly until sometimes I got so inspired I lost consciousness I was writing" (Johnson 2012, 457).

"It is impossible to forget that behind Kerouac lies a complete regression of this country in folklore, history, everyday language, visual pleasures, music, and literature—especially the most recent. Twain, Emily Dickinson, Melville, Sherwood Anderson, Whitman, Emerson, Hemingway, Saroyan, Thomas Wolfe—all of these had been absorbed or at least appreciated by him in his adolescence (along with a biography of Jack London that made him seem like an 'adventurer'); he identified with the newly discovered literary forefathers and ancestors and read everything. This kind of immersion in the literature of his forebears—immersed with the passionate pleasure known only to the children of immigrants—was a necessity before he could stylistically break free in his expression. After this long apprenticeship, he had to possess a sure knowledge and good command of his medium to appropriate such an alien tradition, and

having finally found a way to express himself, he risked his rhythm and tone" (Krim 1978, 120). On one hand, "the most significant link between Saroyan and Kerouac, and through Kerouac to Allen Ginsberg and the Beat Movement in general, was Saroyan's discovery and practice of a new kind of hip American prose style. What Ginsberg was to later call 'spontaneous bop prosody' was the original invention of the Armenian genius from Fresno. Saroyan's early stories are bursting with a hip, casual, direct, autobiographical sound new to American literature (…) The precise image, the vast American landscape, the hip, spontaneous, onrushing improvisatory rhythms: the link to Kerouac's prose is unmistakable" (Calonne 2010, 5-7). On the other, he absorbs Wolfe's relentless pursuit of a new language that transcends mere representation to become an embodiment of life's multifaceted dimensions. This quest for authenticity is evident in both preference for fragmented structures and willingness to sacrifice the security of established literary conventions in favor of a more intuitive and spontaneous narrative style. Wolfe's literary craftsmanship is marked by a profound oral quality, resonating with the cadence and melodic power of spoken language. His prose, characterized by a fervent aspiration to resonate with the heartbeat of the universe, defies conventional literary norms in favor of immediate and authentic expression. His works reflect a deliberate departure from traditional novelistic forms; he eschews the label of novelist, preferring to conceive of his creations as "books" or "the book", emphasizing a holistic and fluid approach to storytelling that integrates art with the pulsating rhythm of life itself. "Through Wolfe, Jack absorbed the influence of Shakespeare, for Wolfe had brought an Elizabethan richness into his language; his word-drunk lyricism also had echoes of Whitman, Melville, and Joyce. But what Wolfe opened to Jack most

of all was a way of transcending his outsider status through a passionate identification with Wolfe's majestic Whitmanesque vision of America—the feeling of the grand immensity and diversity that lay beyond the ethnic ghettoes of Lowell, Massachusetts, or the encircling mountains that isolated Wolfe's Asheville, North Carolina" (Johnson 2012, 115). His novels especially affected Kerouac like "a torrent of American heaven and hell," as he put it, "opened my eyes to America as a subject in itself" (Berrigan 1968).

Kerouac's "Good Blonde" reveals how the narrative's diverse perspectives and voices interact. On the same page as Saroyan and Wolfe, this short story employs a first-person narrative and a stream-of-consciousness technique to give readers direct access to the narrator's thoughts and feelings in a fluid and unstructured manner. "Good Blonde" begins with an encounter with an old Greek man on a beach, who reminds the narrator of his uncle in Brooklyn. He embodies a life rooted in stability and tradition, mirroring the societal expectation of settling into the routine. His presence evokes a sense of enduring, bittersweet continuity with the past and resigned acceptance of a sense of inevitability. In contrast to the Greek man, the narrator embodies the restless spirit of the Beat Generation, characterized by a search for meaning and new experiences. Their dialogue delves into the contrast between reality and dream:

> "What do you think? You think all this is a dream?"
> "What?"
> "Life."
> "Here? Now? What you mean a dream, we're awake, we talk, we see, we got eyes for to see the sea and the sand and the sky, if you dream you no see it."
> "How we know we're not dreaming?"
> "Look my eyes are open ain't they?" He watched me as I washed my dishes and put things away.

> "I'm going to try to hitchhike to San Francisco or catch a freight, I don't wanta wait till tonight."
> "You mens always in a hurry, hey, he he he he" and he laughed just like Old Uncle Nick, hands clasped behind his back, stooped slightly, standing over sand caves his feet had made, kicking little tufts of sand grass.
>
> — "Good Blonde" (2016, 4)

The conversation juxtaposes the concept of life as a tangible, sensory experience against the idea that it might be a dream, becoming a metaphor for the larger existential quest, with the Greek's acceptance of life and the narrator's yearning for transcendence. After the conversation, the young protagonist decides to hitchhike to San Francisco. As he prepares to explore the vast expanse of a highway— "a ribbon of possibility stretching out into an uncertain future"— he meets a young, beautiful blonde woman who offers him a ride. She is a model from Texas and is eager to get to the same place quickly. She is a stunning young blonde girl, around twenty-two years old, wearing a pure white and low-cut bathing suit that accentuates her graceful figure. The woman is exhausted and asks if he has Benzedrine to help keep her awake. The narrator, who has some, offers it to her, and they drive together. She represents spontaneity, freedom, and the potential for new experiences. Her appearance and willingness to take the narrator along for a ride symbolize a break from the predictability of life. In the context of the narrative, since the girl represents the unpredictable and exhilarating possibilities of the road, she becomes a catalyst for the narrator's desire to escape the monotony and explore new horizons:

> Up ahead suddenly I realized the whole city of San Francisco would be all bright lights and glittering wide open waiting for me this very night, and no strain, no hurt, no pain, no freight train, no sweating on

> the hitchhike road but up there zip zoom inside about eight hours. She passed cars smoothly and went on. She turned on the radio and began looking for jazz, found rock' n' roll and left that on, loud. The way she looked straight ahead and drove with no expression and sending no mincing gestures my way or even telepathies of mincingness, you'd never believe she was a lovely little chick in a bathing suit. I was amazed.
>
> — "Good Blonde" (2016, 6)

During their journey together, they speak about life, relationships, and dreams. Her energetic, light-hearted, cheerful tone reflects her enthusiasm and enjoyment of life's pleasures. The narrator, influenced by the Benzedrine, becomes introspective about the nature of life. He feels a mix of attraction and disconnection from the woman, reflecting on his desire for a simple, solitary existence versus the vibrant but possibly superficial life he perceives her to lead. Throughout his entire writing career, Kerouac frequently downplays his use of drugs, even as a narrative element. He used to take amphetamine in the form of Benzedrine, a medication introduced in 1932 for the treatment of bronchial problems and sold over the counter as an inhaler in any pharmacy. "Benny users", as they were called, could obtain the drug legally until 1959; they would buy a Benzedrine tube, crack it open, and consume the amphetamine-soaked wad of paper inside, usually in a cup of coffee or Coke. Amphetamines contract the moment and lead to a sense of acceleration. Composing through the drug-altered body allows the effects of the drug to be transferred onto the written page. The dialogue between the narrator and the girl, indeed, is marked by spontaneity and immediacy, reflecting the nature of their encounter. His attraction to her is not physical but symbolic of his quest for a different kind of life. The encounter serves as a moment of self-discovery, where the narrator confronts his own needs and aspirations more directly and viscerally. This casual and unstructured

conversation contrasts sharply with the more philosophical dialogue with the Greek man, emphasizing a shift from contemplation to direct experience. The girl's relaxed and open demeanor invites a more genuine and unfiltered interaction, aligning with the narrator's desire for adventure. The interplay between these two encounters—one reflective and the other spontaneous—captures the essence of the narrator's search for meaning. The Greek's philosophical stance offers a contemplative perspective on life, while the girl's presence provides an opportunity for direct experience and discovery. Together, they illustrate the narrator's multifaceted approach to understanding his existence. Each point of view offers a different perspective on the American landscape, its promises, and its disillusionment; the coexistence of multiple voices within the short story reflects Bakhtin's concept of "polyphony", wherein these distinct perspectives interact and contribute to the creation of a dynamic, multifaceted narrative.

As the two approach the city, the car runs out of gas, and they get assistance from a truck driver. The narrator is moved by the woman's beauty and brief connection but ultimately feels a deep nostalgia and self-reflection. Upon reaching San Francisco, he says goodbye to her and walks away, reflecting on his past and the changes in his life as he returns to the familiar yet now seemingly different surroundings of his old workstation:

> The smell of San Francisco was great, it is always the same, at night, a compoundment of sea, fog, cinders, coalsmoke, taffy and dust. And somehow the smell of wine, maybe from all the broken bottles on Third Street. Now I was really exhausted and headed up Third Street, after a slow nostalgic survey of the Third and Townsend station, looking desultorily if there was anybody I knew, like maybe Cody, or Mai. I went straight to the little old Cameo Hotel on the corner of Harrison and Third, where for 75 cents a night you could always get a clean room with no bedbugs and nice soft mattresses with soft old clean

> sheets, clean enough, not snow-white (…) I didn't bring it up but followed him up the stairs and down the sad old hall to my door, and the room. I took all my clothes off and got in the cool smooth sheets and said "Now I'll just lay like this for fifteen minutes in the dark and rest and then I'll get up, dress and go down to Chinatown and have a nice feed: I'll have sweet and sour prawn and cold broiled duck, yessir, I'll splurge a dollar and a half on that" and I uncapped my little poorboy of tokay wine I'd bought in the store downstairs and took a swig and in fifteen minutes, after three swigs and dreamy thoughts with a serene smile realizing I was at last back in my beloved San Francisco and surely must have a lot of crazy adventures ahead of me, I was asleep. And slept the sleep of the justified.
>
> — "Good Blonde" (2016, 18)

The landscape changes as they leave the open highway behind, and the road becomes more winding and crowded. The familiar signs of urban life start to appear—gas stations, diners, and motels—each one bringing them closer to the city. The narrator perceives its smells, sights, and feelings. Kerouac vividly portrays the environment and the character's emotions, highlighting a nostalgic bond with the city, a yearning for familiar faces, and the comfort of simple pleasures like a clean hotel room and a meal in Chinatown. The passage also reflects the typical style of his sketches—spontaneous, unedited bursts of prose that aimed to capture the immediacy of a moment or experience, often with a focus on sensory details and personal reflection. The narrator realizes that San Francisco is not just a destination; it is a symbol of the unpredictable twists and turns of life. With her mix of strength and grace, the girl has shown him that even in the face of uncertainty, there is always a way forward. As they finally arrive at the gas station and refuel, the narrator takes one last look at the cityscape before them, knowing that the journey is far from over, but feeling ready to embrace whatever comes next.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored how Wolfe, Saroyan, and Kerouac succeeded in capturing the immediacy of the human experience, offering literary works that reflect life's fluid and dynamic nature. Kerouac emerges as a central figure in this analysis, embodying a distinctive literary style that gained prominence in the mid-20th century. However, it is essential to acknowledge that he is deeply indebted to the work of Wolfe and Saroyan. These authors' literary and stylistic innovations paved the way for him, providing the foundation upon which he developed his method of spontaneous prose and his ability to articulate a reality that had long been marginalized or considered inappropriate for literary expression. Wolfe's sprawling autobiographical narratives and Saroyan's poetic simplicity created a platform from which Kerouac could build his unique style, reflecting the shifting and chaotic nature of the human experience. Together, these three authors redefined the contours of literary expression, bringing the everyday life of ordinary people on the streets to the forefront of North American literature. Through their works, they offered readers a more authentic reflection of life's fluidity, a perspective that has shaped the evolution of modern literary expression. "Owing to his distinctive personality, broad and open-minded intellect, and a deceptively obsessive literary background paired with the romantic, wholesome, all-American appearance of a cinematic heartthrob, Jack Kerouac became both the emblem and catalyst of the Freedom Movement. He initiated a new, authentic literary style that pierced through the emotional fabric of his contemporaries, as it articulated a shared experience long suppressed or considered inappropriate for literary expression. The emergence of

a new style is always a momentous occasion, representing a profound shift in perspectives and values. While time may reveal Kerouac's style to be too superficial to endure the inevitable upheavals of cultural fashion, and while his literary standing may decline as he is seen more as a provocative figure than as a sophisticated interpreter of his own experience, it would be shortsighted for anyone examining North American culture to underestimate the significance of what Kerouac uncovered and propelled into prominence" (Krim 1978, 120). Nevertheless, in its extremity, this continual pursuit of bringing life onto the page may create a paradox related to the tension between the desire for authenticity and the limitations of the written form. In their attempt to capture the immediacy and fluidity of human experience, there is the risk of becoming so consumed by the effort to include every detail, voice, and moment that the act of documenting life in its totality may ultimately be an unattainable goal. The story of Joe Gould, serialized by American journalist Joseph Mitchell in *The New Yorker*, is a quintessential example of this paradox (Mitchell 1964).

In the early 1940s, Mitchell meets Gould. Born near Boston to a prominent family, he attended Harvard University like his father and grandfather but felt out of place in his hometown. It was only in New York City's Greenwich Village, among the unconventional and marginalized, that he found a sense of belonging. Living in poverty, he often stayed in flophouses or on the streets, spending his time in diners, bars, and public libraries. Known as "Professor Seagull," Gould became a popular intellectual in the city. He was known for his ambitious *An Oral History of Our Time*, a purportedly comprehensive manuscript intended to document the voices and stories of everyday people he met in New York City:

> Gould called this book "An Oral History," sometimes adding "of Our Time." As he described it, the Oral History consisted of talk he had heard and had considered meaningful and had taken down, either verbatim or summarized—everything from a remark overheard in the street to the conversation of a roomful of people lasting for hours—and of essays commenting on this talk. "Yes, you're right," he once said to a detractor. "It's only things I heard people say, but maybe I have a peculiar ability—maybe I can understand the significance of what people say, maybe I can read its inner meaning. *You* might listen to a conversation between two old men in a barroom or two old women on a park bench and think that it was the worst kind of bushwa, and I might listen to the same conversation and find deep historical meaning in it.
>
> — "Joe Gould's Secret - I" (September 1964, 11)

He presented his extensive manuscript as the definitive 20th-century work on New York, purportedly consisting of over 9 million words and approximately 20,000 conversations. Despite receiving praise from notable writers like Ezra Pound and E.E. Cummings, Gould only managed to circulate a few chapters. He claimed that his work would be an encyclopedic compilation, representing a broad spectrum of human experience. He aimed to cover all aspects of life, from the mundane to the extraordinary, providing a snapshot of contemporary society. While there were references to Gould's work and his claim in various literary circles, there is little concrete evidence that *An Oral History of Our Time* was ever completed or published in the form Gould described. In his attempt to document the full spectrum of human experience, like what Saroyan, Wolfe, and Kerouac did, Gould's work became too deeply immersed in the quest to capture the essence of human life. His obsession with comprehensiveness meant that he continually sought to include more voices and perspectives, aiming for a totality that seemed to expand indefinitely. He was often described as being paralyzed by the enormity of his task, unable to

finalize any part of his work. As a result of his inability to complete the project, Gould's work ultimately reverted to its oral roots. The extensive oral records remained vibrant and unfiltered, reflecting the immediacy and richness of the human experiences he sought to capture. Gould, therefore, may represent the culmination of the literary explorations undertaken by Wolfe, Saroyan, and Kerouac, emphasizing the ongoing quest to understand and connect with the human condition. In many ways, his project serves as a testament to the idea that literature is not just a vehicle for self-expression but a way of reaching out to others. Gould, much like them, aimed to create a space where the shared human condition could be articulated, understood, and embraced. Whether or not *An Oral History* exists is secondary to the real achievement: creating a deep, meaningful engagement with the people and stories collected on the road. His work reflects the final goal of all these literary explorations: the pursuit of genuine human connection.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Jack Kerouac

Atop an Underwood: Early Stories and Other Writing. Penguin Books, 2000.

- "A Day of September"
- "Today"

Essentials of Spontaneous Prose in *The Portable Jack Kerouac.* Penguin Books, 2007.

Good Blonde & Others. Open Road Media, 2016:

- "Good Blonde"
- "The Rumbling, Rumbling Blues"

Lonesome Traveler. Grove Press, 1988.

Selected Letters 1940-1956. Viking Penguin, 1996.

Scattered Poems. City Lights Books, 2001.

The Origins of the Beat Generation. Jack Kerouac: On the Road Text and Criticism. Ed. Scott Donaldson. Penguin, 1979.

Jack London

On the Writer's Philosophy of Life. The Editor, October 1899. https://thegrandarchive.wordpress.com/on-the-writers-philosophy-of-life/

The Complete Short Stories of Jack London. Stanford University Press, 1993:

- *The Road*

Joseph Mitchell

Joe Gould's Secret—I. The New Yorker. September 11, 1964. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1964/09/19/joe-goulds-secret-i

William Saroyan

The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze and Other Stories. New Directions, 1997:

- Preface
- "A Cold Day"
- "Myself Upon the Earth"

The Saroyan Special. Harcourt, 1948:

- "Two Wasted Days in Kansas City"
- "The Bicycle Rider in Beverly Hills"

"Portrait of a Bum". *Overland Monthly*. December 1928.

"Prelude to an American Symphony". *New Masses.* October 23, 1934.

Walt Whitman

Leaves of Grass. The Walt Whitman Archive, 1855. https://whitmanarchive.org/item/ppp.00270_00351

Thomas Wolfe

The Complete Short Stories of Thomas Wolfe. Collected by Francis E. Skipp. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989:

- "Death the Proud Brother"
- "The Bums at Sunset"

The Story of a Novel. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936.

Secondary sources

Anderson, Nels. *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923.

Anderson, Sherwood. *Puzzled America.* Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935.

Ariemma, Tommaso. *Fenomenologia dell'estremo*. Mimesis Edizioni, 2005.

Axelrod, Steven Gould. *Robert Lowell: Life and Art*. Princeton University Press, 1978. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x16vv

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Translated by Caryl Emerson, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Balakian, Nona. *The World of William Saroyan.* Bucknell University Press, 1998.

Berrigan, Ted. *Jack Kerouac, The Art of Fiction No.41.* The Paris Review, Issue 43. Summer 1968.

Bishop, John Peale. "The Sorrow of Thomas Wolfe" in *Critical Essays on Thomas Wolfe.* GK Hall & Co, 1985.

Calonne, David Stephan. *William Saroyan: My Real Work Is Being.* University of North Carolina Press, 1983.

Calonne, David Stephan. *Bebop Buddhist Ecstasy: Saroyan's Influence on Kerouac and the Beats.* Sore Dove Press, 2010.

Condo, George. Preface to *Book of Sketches.* Penguin Books, 2006.

Crumbley, Paul. "Being Beat: The Stern Reality of London's *Tramp Diary* and Kerouac's Road." *Studies in American Naturalism*, vol. 14 *no.* 1, 2019. *Project MUSE*, https://doi.org/10.1353/san.2019.0013

Cummins, Walter. "The Unforgettable and the Ordinary in Saroyan's *Last Voyald* in *Critical Essays on William Saroyan*. Twayne Publishers, 1995.

Dickey, James. *The Complete Short Stories of Thomas Wolfe*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989.

Douglas, Ann. *Telepathic Shock and Meaning Excitement': Kerouac's Poetics of Intimacy*. College Literature, vol. 27, no. 1, 2000, pp. 8 21. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25112493

Everson, William. *Archetype West: The Pacific Coast as Literary Region*. Import, January 1976.

Feied, Frederick. *No Pie In The Sky: The Hobo As American Cultural Hero in the Works of Jack London, John Dos Passos, and Jack Kerouac*. iUniverse, 2001.

Foster, Edward. *William Saroyan: A Study of the Short Fiction*. Twayne Publishers, 1991.

Gottschall, Jonathan. *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*. Mariner Books, 2013.

Hrebeniak, Michael. *Action writing: Jack Kerouac's wild form.* Southern Illinois University Press, 2006.

Holbrook, Stewart. *The Story of the American Railroads*. Dover Publication, 2016.

Holman, C. Hugh. "Thomas Wolfe and America." *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1977, pp. 56–74. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20077576

Holmes, "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," *Esquire*, XLIX, 35. February 1958.

Hunt, Timothy. *Kerouac's crooked road: development of a fiction*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2010.

Johnson, Joyce. *The Voice is All.* Viking Penguin, a member of Penguin Group, 2012.

Kazin, Alfred. "Thomas Wolfe" in *Critical Essays on Thomas Wolfe.* G K Hall & Co, 1985.

Kouymjian, Dickran. "Whitman and Saroyan: Singing the Song of America", *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 10(1), 16-24. 1992. https://doi.org/10.13008/2153-3695.1350

Krim, Seymour. "L'eredità di Kerouac" in *Kerouac. Graffiti.* Arcana, 2001.

Kussy, Bella. "The Vitalist Trend and Thomas Wolfe." *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 50, no. 3, 1942, pp. 306–24. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27537291

Lang, Abigail. "The Tune of Thinking: Gertrude Stein's Narration", *Transatlantica* [Online], 2 | 2014, Online since 06 March 2015, connection on 02 May 2019. https://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/7047?lang=en

Loyd, Amy Grace. "Nabokov on one page, nudes on the next: a Playboy literary editor reveals all". *The Guardian*, 6th October 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/oct/06/playboy-hugh-hefner-literature-amy-grace-loyd

Magi Aldo, Walser Richard. *Thomas Wolfe Interviewed 1929-1938*. Louisiana State University Press, 2002.

Meyer, Stephen. "A Radio Interview". *The Paris Review*, Issue 116, Fall 1990. https://www.theparisreview.org/miscellaneous/2282/a-radio-interview-gertrude-stein-william-lundell

Perkins, William Maxwell Max Evarts. “Thomas Wolfe” in *Critical Essays on Thomas Wolfe.* G K Hall & Co, 1985.

Pivano, Fernanda. *Beat hippie yippie. Il romanzo del pre-Sessantotto americano.* Bompiani, 2017.

Primeau, Ronald. *Romance of the Road: The Literature of the American Highway.* Popular Pr of Bowling Green State, 2018.

Riley, James. “‘I am a Recording Angel’: Jack Kerouac’s *Visions of Cody* and the Recording Process”. *Electronic Book Review*, 2006. https://electronicbookreview.com/essay/i-am-a-recording-angel-jack-kerouacs-visions-of-cody-and-the-recording-process/

Rubin, Louis. “The Sense of Being Young” in *Critical Essays on Thomas Wolfe.* G K Hall & Co, 1985.

Seelye, John D. “The American Tramp: A Version of the Picaresque.” *American Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 4, 1963, pp. 535–53. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2710972

Stein, Gertrude. *Composition As Explanation.* Hogarth Press, 1926. https://writing.upenn.edu/library/Stein_Composition-as-Explanation.html

Stein, Gertrude. *Lectures in America*. Beacon Press, 1935.

Stewart H. Holbrook, *The Story of American Railroads*. Dover Publications, 2016.

Stott, William. *Documentary Expression and Thirties America.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Teague, Jessica. *Sound Recording Technology and American Literature: From the Phonograph to the Remix.* Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Walser, Richard. "Thomas Wolfe's Train as Symbol." *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1988, pp. 3–14. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20077938

Weinreich, Regina. *The spontaneous poetics of Jack Kerouac*. Southern Illinois University Press, 1987.

Ringraziamenti

Al Professor Stefano Ercolino per aver assecondato e supportato il mio incurabile spirito sognatore fin dal primo momento. Grazie per riempire le aule universitarie «dell'amore per la letteratura, per il linguaggio, per il mistero della mente e del cuore che si rivelano in quella minuta, strana e imprevedibile combinazione di lettere e parole, di neri e gelidi caratteri stampati sulla carta».

Alla Professoressa Abigail Lang per aver accolto e contribuito a questo lavoro: grazie per aver dato spazio tra le mura accademiche alle sincere, sregolate, vivissime parole della Beat Generation.

Al Professor David Stephen Calonne per aver condiviso con entusiasmo la sua esperienza e le sue intuizioni oltreoceano.

Alla Professoressa Elisa Bordin per il ricco scambio sul patrimonio letterario californiano.

A Maurizio, Aliviana, Simone, Brian e tutti gli amici librai, per arricchire ogni volta la mia esistenza di nuove storie.

A mamma e papà, per avermi dato la forza, gli strumenti ed il coraggio di lanciarmi sulla strada e, dunque, verso la vita.

Ai nonni, per aver considerato ogni tappa un traguardo.

A Giovanni, Eleonora, Claudia, Valentina, Cinzia e Fabrizio per non essersi persi una battuta.

A Momo, per tenere stretta la mia mano ad ogni passo. Non siamo mai stati su strade diverse. Tu sei la mia strada.

A Francesca, piccolo sole della mia vita, ci eravamo promesse di festeggiare ogni traguardo di pari passo. Ce l'abbiamo fatta anche questa volta. Excelsior!

A Dorasia, Alice, Rebecca, Eva, Sofia, Laura, Giada, Angelica, Samir e Maria per aver condiviso la strada da vicino e aver reso Venezia casa.

A Benedetta e Martina per aver condiviso la strada anche da lontano.

A Loredana per avermi guidato nella scoperta della lingua inglese.
A tutti gli scrittori che ho incontrato nei miei anni d'insaziabile lettura: grazie per avermi fatto viaggiare nel tempo e nello spazio senza chiedere nulla in cambio. «Da loro appresi che per quanto piccolo ed insignificante uno possa essere, nulla vieta che la tua follia sia tra le più grandi», diceva il saggio topolino Firmino.
A Venezia, di cui non ho solo goduto «le sette o le settanta meraviglie, ma la risposta che ha dato ad una mia domanda», come scriveva Italo Calvino.
A Parigi, che ho avuto la fortuna di «vivere da giovane» nella bellezza della sua «eterna festa mobile». Non posso certo quantificare il reale valore di questo progetto, ma, ancora una volta, mi trovo a dare ragione al vecchio Hemingway: anche per me è stata la migliore città in cui scrivere.

Fino a qui il viaggio è stato sensazionale. La strada è ancora lunga.