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Fabulous Ordinariness & Self-Making: The Other Side of USonian Identities

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FABULOUS ORDINARINESS & SELF-MAKING:

THE OTHER SIDE OF USONIAN IDENTITIES

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USonian identity has been defined controversially since its inception. Its representatives have largely been independent, white, wealthy, male, and heterosexual. However, the actual population of the US is more diverse and possesses much more complex identities. Some of the identifying factors of USonians derive from the US tradition of self-making. Traditional US self-made narratives, as with larger definitions of US identity, lack a full inclusivity and nationally representative characters, as scholars such as Mary Carden explain. However, rather than simply disappearing, traits of the US self-made man, as part of a larger national identity, continue to exist but in ways more suitable to the US nationality that has developed. For example, some of the newer versions of US self-makers include women, ethnic minorities, and homosexuals.

The more important elements of the changing definitions of US identity and self-making, community building and belonging, arises when more diverse representatives appear in texts ranging from Susan Sontag's *In America* to works like Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*. This dissertation studies more communal self-making models as well as US representatives who are recognized within texts and by readers in works by authors such as Philip Roth. The modeling of these characters results in the opportunity for readers to identify with them and/or some of their contexts. Such a relationship sets the foundation for what I have termed "fabulous ordinariness." This means that despite possessing some fabulous or extraordinary storylines or characteristics, there are daily events, interactions, or traits that readers can empathize with, connect with, or feel

represents them. Such experiences with the characters and texts provide the space for a representative relationship to be established and articulated as such.

The redefinitions of self-making and US identity, along with the enactment of fabulous ordinariness, ask readers to consider how culture, identities, and nationalities are preserved, challenged, and protected. Scholarship addressing traditional US role-models, along with works that support and challenge those representatives and roles, examines contemporary US identities and their connection to the past. This dissertation asks questions concerning the boundaries between fiction and history, culture and its artifacts, as well as readers and their texts.

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Introduction

Todd Thompson, the mentor who has guided me through this dissertation and most of my graduate career, once told me that one of his advisors said to him, "All dissertations are autobiographical." If that is true, then this is a narrative about negotiating my past and national legacy with my present society and contemporary politics. Many contemporary cultural works demonstrate concerns with US national identity, individual identity, and cultural relativism. As such, in addition to striving to understand our own selves, my generation is often fascinated with understanding the relationship the self has to others and to communities. Personally, this project is grounded in interrogations of identifications and connections by and with the world I am inhabiting. This study invests in analyzing the journey to selfhood and communal belonging in USonian settings.[1] This experience has led to one centralizing idea summarized by another scholar, Guillermo Gómez-Peña. In his book, *Ethno-Techno: Writings on Performance, Activism, and Pedagogy*, he explains, "I am not straitjacketed by identity. I have a repertoire of multiple identities and I constantly sample from them" (25). Although he is referring to his performance art, his point holds true for many today including myself. Individuals possess many

[1] I will use USonian to mean what most commonly is considered American. USonian here refers specifically to US national identity (as opposed to the American continent). I adapt the term from Frank Lloyd Wright who used this spatial definition of USonianism in combination with his "organic" architecture to refer to the relationship between environment, daily life, and culture. While my focus is not necessarily to make the distinction between American and USonian identities, this is a useful difference to address, thus allowing me to be more specific and refer to a particular cultural and historical background.

identities, not just one; as such, USonian identity is many things, not just its previous simplified representation.

My generation has recently been dubbed the "slash generation," meaning our occupational selves (a keystone of USonian identities) are invested in multiple roles (Marikar). The strict self-making definition USonians have enjoyed up until now needs revision. We are no longer a nation that can or should subsist by defining oneself solely by occupation, ethnicity, nationality (or more geographically oriented identities), sexuality, etc. USonian literature embodies the complexities these seemingly straight forward identifiers have and continue to encompass, in contrast and in conjunction with self-made frameworks. Past pieces demonstrate the paradoxes and conflicts USonian identity has always embraced. In addition, more contemporary pieces engage explicitly with critiques of cultural self-making, cultural definitions, and the methods used to communicate cultural histories.

History (in its traditional sense of a linear, authoritative narrative) is rarely judicious enough to provide a full picture of who USonians are and how they live. Literature provides places for experiments with cultural identity and records of community construction. The pieces selected for this study allude to the potentially problematic situation of citizens believing in and existing as USonian ideals (of masculinity, independence, and middle-class citizenship) that are contradictory to US realities. The self, as Gómez-Peña points out, is multifaceted: when one is defining the self in one way, it does not exclude including another self-identity. Identities are not mutually exclusive. This means that when I identify as an intellectual and a waitress, my gender roles and class strata position become complicated. To simplify, this dissertation is concerned

with how various identities compliment and contrast with one another to create representatives, individuals, and communities in USonian culture and literatures.

USonian Origin and Ideals

While anecdotal evidence is useful in some fields, literary criticism often asks for more research to support those assertions. To justify the claims made in my opening story (about the connection between the self and other, the paradoxical identity positions USonians hold, a brief discussion of Frank Lloyd Wright's life and works is highly useful. Ada Louise Huxtable observes that Wright's work was both original and not. He was "the inventor of something new" as he claimed as well as being inspired by many existing influences (75). His work that "seems to spontaneously create actually drew on many interests and influences, synthesizing them in a way that was both revolutionary and beautiful, and uniquely his own" (Huxtable 75-6). Wright's work is both self-made and impacted by the history of architecture and its contemporaries. Furthermore, in the development of his work, he also builds his character. Wright is a self-making figure. He is largely self-educated, gains success due to his connections, and adapts social norms to redefine success usefully for himself.

Wright's vision of USonian architecture was deeply invested in creating a space that was harmonious with the environment and its purposes. This meant that when constructing homes, particularly for families (his Usonia series of homes), he created buildings that privileged communal spaces and made them welcoming.[2] He does this ignoring the reality of his own domestic life which contained a failed marriage, a murdered lover (and children), a second mentally deranged wife, and finally a third wife who ensures the continuance of his legacy

[2] See John Sergeant, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses: The Case for Organic Architecture*. New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1976.

(Huxtable).[3] His domestic history is spotted with affairs and divorces as well as attention and abandonment of his children. The larger takeaway from this is not to highlight Wright's scandalous and infamous personal story. Instead, it is to highlight that he still values and promotes connection amongst families. His architecture privileges spaces where individuals become communities (living rooms, dining areas, patios, and lawns). His work manifests elements of USonian identity as it is concerned with the paradox of US existence socially and with the gap between representation and actuality within his own life (and biography).

Wright's character itself has been commented on as a faction of self-making as well. Huxtable describes him writing, “Wright’s integrity was a flexible thing, depending on opportunity and desire; he could rationalize almost anything if it suited his interests” (93). While on the surface this seems like a very self-serving perspective, when the wording is considered it reflects a deeper concern. Wright didn't simply bend norms to his will. Instead, he "rationalizes" character shifts and value changes. For example, he justifies his first affair by saying that marriage should not be a restrictive bond based on Ellen Key's philosophy. Wright changes what marriage should (or in his case, does) mean. As my work goes forward the meaning of US identity as defined by self-made ideals is challenged and subverted in similar ways. Fabulous ordinariness will be featured as characters oppose and change defining characteristics of US identity and representation. As Wright challenges a defining institution of US identity and social norms (marriage) here, characters and texts examined within this project will emphasize the ways US identity and representation has been changing by similar assertions and understandings of individual and communal US space and characteristics.

[3] See also John Lloyd Wright's *My Father Who Is On Earth*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994.

US Social Identities and Contemporary Revisions

USonian contemporary social climates emphasize the rifts various identity categories and conceptions cause. The current (2016) presidential election represents both the damage and potential usefulness such a split community holds. Donald Trump's supporters often alienate non-white Usonians; his extreme right supporters demonstrate the problems with lumping those non-white groups together and targeting them as others. Hillary Clinton, often seen as a character supporting liberal ideals, carries a large group of female and southern African-American voters. The generalizations about those particular groups allow her to design rhetoric intended to continue garnering support specifically seen in the pathological appeals during the Democratic Nomination Convention and in her Democratic Nomination acceptance speech. Finally, the other main contender, Bernie Sanders, is sort of a wild card (often identified as an extremely liberal Democrat). He is a self-proclaimed socialist candidate associated with the 99%. He invokes notions of self-making US narratives, but not in the same way the "Joe the Plumber" campaign did. “Joe the Plumber” invoked concerns of individual wealth-making opportunities and promoted traditional versions of self-making ideals. In contrast, Sanders’s identification with the 99%, despite being a white, upper-class male, is intended to demonstrate concerns for poverty, working-class, and middle-class individuals, as well as communities of various racial and gender demographics. While being able to classify voters and citizens into groups seems to frustrate my argument about communal identity and minority voices in the US, it actually facilitates its discussion. Recognizing the characteristics of USonian subcommunities along with how those labels and identities impact the larger US narrative is central to comprehending contemporary social circumstances. Moreover, in this age of media fueled cultural production, better

understandings of self and other perceptions within US society can provide a fuller picture of how we interpret ourselves and the world around us. USonians receive models of who they are and who they should or should not be in culture and within literary texts. It then becomes the reader's or viewer's responsibility to act in socially responsible ways based on those representations.

For example, father figures in many of the works included in this dissertation serve as a major change in identity categories and expectations for USonian self-makers. Michael Kimmel in *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* studies masculinity in USonian society and cultural representations. While he concludes that masculine toughness is an important trait for USonians, some of the most popular and academic cultural productions seem to contradict this. For example, characters have evolved from the start of self-making depictions (generally around the mid-nineteenth century with Horatio Alger's rags-to-riches stories), becoming more family-oriented in figures such as Abel and Kane (Archer) to Roth's father figures of Herman and Mr. Cucuzza to Russ (Norris) to Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr (Miranda). One thing that the majority of these figures have in common is that they develop as USonian men in the sense of not only being responsible for a family but also needing to participate in and nurture their families. Abel and Kane signal the beginning of this trend in which family becomes important to the USonian male identity as they negotiate complex relationships with their children. Herman and Mr. Cucuzza maintain the same space, but also experience emotions such as fear and pride *with* their families (as opposed to male figures that put up fronts). As such, they become not only less rigidly masculine figures, but they choose to become male role models in more balanced, humane ways. Finally, father figures like Russ, Hamilton, and Burr directly and implicitly

challenge stereotypes USonians apply culturally. Rather than being solely motivated by occupations (they do work to support their families) these characters recognize (or learn) the importance not only of family but of being a father to their family.

Aside from gender roles such as these, race, class, sexuality, and other identity categories have all been interrogated by twentieth- and twenty-first century USonian literatures featuring manipulations of traditional USonian characteristics (self-making, independence, strength). John Breuilly addresses the need for this sort of identity development in his "Introduction" to Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism*. He writes:

> Identity is based instead on culture which acquires new functions in industrial society. Occupational change and mobility mean that people have to be prepared not for unique jobs and positions that will last a lifetime [but they must] furnish an identity. . . with the skills to move between roles in industrial society. (xxiv)

Identity in industrial and post-industrial societies is malleable. As such, USonians perceptions of identities, stereotypes, and representatives must be more flexible. In addition, scholars and USonians must be more open to the complex ways these US identity factors are developed and recorded in cultural mediums.

Many scholars emphasize the created nature of US nationality. Often it appears in analyses of US character as largely male, white, or wealthy; Rupert Wilkinson in *The Pursuit of American Character* explains this scholarly phenomenon, as well as the common perceptions of US nationality as seen in these exclusionary ways. Like Hayden White's work, Wilkinson's attends to assertions positioned as facts about states of being. Both emphasize how considering USonians to be white, male, and wealthy, for example, is a constructed perception, a definition

sanctioned by institutions and power structures. After explaining this problematic misperception, Wilkinson argues the opposite of this exclusionary definition process. He explains that although hazardous, this way of understanding identities holds merit: "the fact that a social-character tendency is bound to differ in form and intensity according to class, sex, region, etc., does not automatically preclude it from characterizing to some extent a complex national population" (3-4). He asserts that masculine white USonian membership is marked by the exaggerated presence of traits that other populations possess to greater or lesser extents varying on social circumstances. While these identity markers can be useful for developing common ground to discuss USonian identity, the characterization of USonians needs to be more complex. Therefore, a deeper discussion of contemporary self-makers and national representatives deserves attention.

USonian Identity and Self-Making

The self-made man has been uniquely USonian, and despite characterizations such as restrictive, s/he is becoming more various. The self-made man, according to foundational scholars of self-made rhetoric and US identity such as Rupert Wilkinson, Irvin Wyllie, and John Cawelti demonstrates commitment to USonian principles of equal opportunity and manifests in various US institutions (religion, politics, education, etc.). Contemporary theorists such as Jim Cullen and James Catano continue to recognize the exclusions self-made rhetoric promotes concerning gender and power structures; however, Mary Paniccia Carden in *Sons and Daughters of Self-Made Men: Improvising Gender, Place, Nation in American Literature* contradicts such a position as she examines female role models and less masculine versions of self-making in US literature. Exclusions exist in part due to the perspective presumed and the restrictive stereotyping of self-making as the texts in this dissertation have shown. Carden's conclusion on

the potential gender diversity in US self-making contrasts with typical ways in which the self-made man is often recognized (as masculine and white), as evident in Michael Kimmel's work. While Carden hones in on gender and Kimmel focuses on gender and race, both identify the self-made man in distinctively USonian ways, as does Samuel P. Huntington in his text *Who are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*. The works examined here enact traditional assertions as well as more contemporary notions concerning US identity, self-making, and representational national figures. Furthermore, as Irvin Wyllie and collaborators, Jack Citrin, Cara Wong and Brian Duff, as well as Leonie Huddy show, self-made rhetoric is an element connecting cultural representations and real life conditions of USonians. Art, life, and self-performance appear as crucial elements of self-making for USonians by way of the characters in these pieces.

History and Fiction in US Frameworks

Examination of these works of historical fiction (loosely defined) within (auto)biographical theories is an interpretative approach to USonian identity critique that requires explanation. The definitions of historical fiction have become more flexible and more compartmentalized as literary criticism has expanded to include cultural studies and reader response (since national identity is culturally informed). Categories such as historical fantasy (indicative of works like *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*) and science fiction as historical fiction represent some of the ways historical fiction is inclusive and expanding. Much of the scholarship on historical fiction discusses its usefulness in teaching literature, history, nationalism, and ideologies in elementary school settings.[4] The scholarship concerning literary

[4] See Jennifer Howell, "Popularising History: Re-igniting Pre-service Teacher and Student Interest in History via Historical Fiction," *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* 39.12 (2014); Todd Horton's "'I Am Canada':

critiques of historical fiction often reflect concerns of writers, readers, and critics regarding historical accuracy as well as questions of the intentions and purpose of historical fictions. Just as Scott Casper in his work on American autobiography asserts that USonians have traditionally reflected on the world through the lens of biography, Michael Elliott asserts in his article, "Strangely Interested: The Work of Historical Fiction," that readers are particularly interested in understanding the past to understand the present. Furthermore, he continues, "These stories turn our desire to hold the past, to preserve it through relics, documents, and edifices into acts of reading that grant us the illusion of its manipulation" (154). Historical fictions express history and ideologies through critical and creative analyses. Perhaps most importantly, as Elliott points out, historical fictions ask readers to reflect on communal and personal histories and belief structures: who sanctions them, how they perpetuate themselves, and how authority is rewarded in various ideological structures. Historical fiction creates spaces to address communal and individual concerns of grand narrative formation. In addition to developing narratives that question traditional US social norms and myths, historical fiction allows authors to interrogate into ontological definitions of selves and communities. Furthermore, as works of creative fiction, they invite the use of the reader's imagination and critical thoughts.

The definition of historical fiction I am using is a bit broader than the traditional definition but does align with scholarly work on the subject. My definition uses as a basis the principle of histories as stories introduced by (auto)biography and historical scholars (such as Hayden White). Since in this case, histories are stories that may not be one hundred percent

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Exploring Social Responsibility in Social Studies Using Young Adult Historical Fiction," *Canadian Social Studies* 47.1 (2014); and Fiona Collins' "Historical Fiction: Engaging the Young Reader in the Past" *Historian* 117 (2013) for more on historical fiction and education.

veracious, the sentiments characters and society experienced at the time of the historical context of the fiction reflects historical accuracy. As such, while neither Richard Kane, Abel, nor Maryna were actual USonian individuals (Archer), their stories articulate sentiments of up-and-coming USonian citizens at particular moments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These pieces rewrite the meaning of USonian then and now. Significant challenges to US history through emotions, communities, and bold paradoxes occur within these texts.

The various historical experiences of US citizenship in the pieces featured here are key to definitions of US culture, history, and individuals. In *Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth Century America*, Scott Casper claims USonians traditionally have "a biographical imagination. . . a proclivity to see individual lives as stories" (14). History is often preserved as a narrative in much of the USonian tradition. John F. Kennedy was not just an icon assassinated; he was the cultural representative of some USonians snuffed out. Many baby boomers today discuss this event as a crucial moment in their life narrative. They talk about it not through facts and figures, or even the extensive amount of research done on conspiracy theories and confidential documents. Instead, they say, “I was at middle school when the principal told us,” or “I’ll never forget seeing my coworkers start crying at hearing the news.” In a similar way, WWII was not simply a series of battles in Europe, Asia/the Pacific, and Africa; it was the root of many daily experiences for much of the global society in the twentieth century, and it continues to affect the population today. Most US citizens have relatives who participated in the war, and many of them have stories to tell about those family members. Furthermore, the media has grasped and transformed these personal stories into representative narratives for readers to connect with through historical and fictional presentations. Slavery is not just a

shameful section in a history book. It is a social mechanism resulting in class and race categories of USonians, ranging from aristocrats to abolitionists to liberals and democrats. Many USonians can relate (positively or negatively) to how slavery and its effects have impacted their lives. In this way, most encounters with these USonian historical events occur as narratives, cinematic representations, or personal experiences. Rather than preserving history to provide a linear chronicle of events, USonians engage with history more commonly through cultural productions that preserve and provoke emotional responses to their narrative elements. Furthermore, it is more often the stories about these historical events that impact cultural representations rather than the events themselves. USonian identity is formed through an engagement with history as a narrative. History is not just facts or records, though it is about "what happens in [each USonians'] house. . . that'll be history too" (Roth, *Plot* 180).

Thus, historical narratives are just as valid as historical records when conducting cultural analyses and studies. Adaptations of historical events often raise concerns that white-washed history neglects. For example, one of the perceived of historical inaccuracies of *Hamilton* is the casting of multiethnic actors in traditionally non-diverse roles. Lin-Manuel Miranda explains that he uses two techniques to allow his piece to be more communally representative of the US while still depicting the past. He explains that empathy and perspective-taking is required. This allows contemporary viewers to comprehend different social norms and circumstances. He says:

> . . . there's a moment at the end of the show where Eliza says "I speak out against slavery; you would have done so much more." And it's right after the Washington Monument moment, and Washington hangs his head in shame and steps back. And we deal with it [US racial history] in a lot of ways, big and small, but it was

> an open thing and a thing to grapple with because it just was a way of life that no one knew how to deal with. . . . (NPR Staff)

Miranda does not create new history. He does not use characters that perform feats of inclusion that would contradict social norms of the past. However, he challenges the staunch ideologies and the thoughts of strict adherence to those perceived social demarcations (as well as mobilities). His work features inquiries into ideologies and social structures that continue today. As such, his fictional performance is as much about history and reality today as it is about the art of enacting it onstage.

History, culture, and narratives facilitate constructions of contemporary identification categories. Culture by definition helps establish communal belonging. In her introduction to *Cultural Agency in the Americas*, Doris Sommer explains, "Culture enables agency. Where structures or conditions can seem intractable, creative practices add dangerous supplements that add angles for intervention and locate room for maneuver" (3). As such, culture both enacts as well as challenges restrictions and community norms. In addition, the writer of *Clybourne Park*, Bruce Norris, explains his overt awareness of the power of artistic production impacting individuals as well as communities. He articulates the importance of using artistic venues to lay these connections bare. In an interview with *NPR*, Norris explains, "It's [*Clybourne Park*] about clannishness and how we divide ourselves up into clans of people when our territory is threatened." The reporter, Cheryl Corley expands:

> But clans have their limits, and the white homeowners, Russ and Bev, fell out of favor with their neighbors after their son, a soldier who committed atrocities in the Korean War, returned home . . . Norris uses his character [Russ] to show race

> is not always the primary force behind the departure of whites from changing neighborhoods. (Corley, *n.p.*)

Significantly, Norris departs from traditional US narratives of social climbing and racial separations to play on themes of mental well-being, patriotism, and social acceptance in US culture. These themes are often less highlighted in US historical and cultural narratives, partially because they are messier but also because they make history less linear, less cut and dry; they develop contested types of community membership. They also undermine notions of US characteristics such as independence (often mental well-being requires a communal support of some sort), demonstrations of emotions (considered feminine), and problematics of in- and ex- -clusionary national membership. As the works studied here toy with notions of identity development and distinction, they make inquiries into 1. how beneficial identity categories are, 2. when they are best used, and 3. when distinguishing oneself from a community is useful to the self or the community. These works emphasize the need to choose one's identity and community as well as recognize the implications of rejecting particular social narratives and groups through US historical events and in US centered literatures.

History and the Narrative Debate

National US identity is formed through interactions between fiction, history, and (auto)biographies. In *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* Hayden White articulates the connections between fiction, history and literature, positioning them as cultural productions that shape one another. The historian is situated as a storyteller in White's work. Bias, varying knowledge levels, and audience concerns all impact how histories are constructed and retold. Thus White connects history and storytelling practices. Storytelling

and history become further enmeshed as scholars delve into the function of US (auto)biographies for US history and identity. For instance, various scholars in Paul Eakin's edited collection *American Autobiography* provide differing opinions on the connections between history, literature, fiction, and autobiographies in the US. The fact that scholars of (auto)biographies are discussing the potential intersections of writing, representation, and reality indicates that they are, at least, connected. Paul Eakin's "Introduction" goes so far as to call for a new genre called "American autobiography." American autobiographies are unique, according to Eakin, because they can be positioned and analyzed as something related to, but separate from, history and literature. Here, autobiography is redefined to consider literary elements (i.e., they are not histories nor are they fictions). Due to the blended status of American autobiographies, both the historical and literary traits need attention. The relationship autobiographies represent among history, literature, and fiction in US culture is further explored by Thomas Couser in *Altered Egos: Authority in American Autobiography* and by Scott Casper in *Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth Century America*. Couser's concern with the authority that autobiographies are presumed to have and Casper's history of the development of biographies in the US provide a starting point for analyzing the cultural impact of (auto)biographies on USonian identity development as literary and historical works. Eakin's contributions explain how this impact (of autobiographies) is more than just cultural or historical. US identity is a complex mixture of history, fiction, and reality, resulting in cultural products that represent an inherently problematic social reality.

The complex identities of contemporary USonian life are already well established via sociological and psychological studies (see Huddy and Citrin et al.). However, what deserves

more attention is how literature communicates contentious aspects of USonian self-development identified in US sociological studies and surveys. The importance of this study is twofold: it recognizes the historical threads of paradoxical US identity (i.e., self-making) that continue to perpetuate today in mutated ways, and it attends to the ways that individual identities in USonian culture consider communal identities simultaneously. By tracing developments of USonian characteristics in works of literature in the supposed post-self-made-man era,[5] historical connections and critiques become obvious in studies of cultural trends. The how of becoming USonian today becomes more of a narrative rather than a disruptive battle of identity and community changes. Developing an argument pertaining to US identity, self-making, and representation requires looking at a broad swath of USonian literature.

In order to develop the fullest critique of USonian identity through literature, literary, historical, cultural, and theoretical works require studying primary works. The texts selected for this project display national diversity concerns often through various methods of character development. In addition, they address US social conditions, history, communities, and individuals based in historical narratives. The following texts showcase alternative and traditional versions of USonian characteristics and narratives by involving US history and literary tropes: *Kane and Abel* by Jeffrey Archer (1979/2009) and *In America* by Susan Sontag (2000) speak to the already complex idea of US identity and self-making from its original inception; Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2004) and *The Great American Novel* (1973) discuss self-makers developed through communal roles who complicate simple social

[5] Based upon the work of scholars such as Richard Hofstadter, John Cawelti, and Jim Cullen, this will loosely be defined as after 1900. Their arguments highlight social changes that enhanced or phased out easy identifying trademarks of the self-made man, social mobility opportunities, and the rise of contradictions within the self-made myth that complicated it.

categorizations; and finally, *Hamilton* (2014) and *Clybourne Park* (2011) demonstrate how cultural separations are a double-edged sword containing paradoxes and complexities within labels and enactments. Due to the connections between history and narratives, as well as (auto)biographies and fictions, the analysis of literary artifacts alludes to and reflects social experiences.

Understanding the history of the self-made man and his relationship to conceptions of USonian identity is crucial to this discussion. Mark Twain's works can serve as a useful reference point for the self-made man's development and as an originating point of US identity in history and literature. Twain is often touted as one of America's most well-known authors. However, he was also a cultural theorist in his own way. Although commonly categorized as a regionalist author, Twain has been described as

> nation-wide, because of the quality of his imagination, because of the regional elements which he freely mixed, the Yankee with the Californian, the backwoodsman with both of these. The wide reach [Twain's works held] may be unimportant for judgments of intrinsic quality, but its significance may be great among a people seeking the illusive goal of unity and the resting-place of a tradition. (Rourke 219-20)

Mark Twain's works may have featured regionally representative characters, but as Constance Rourke explains in *American Humor: A Study of the National Character*, he also developed characters who blended and complicated those separations. Perhaps most importantly, one of the tools he used in striving for unity among a diverse nation was to employ various US characters who used tricksterism as a means to advance their self-making narratives. For example, Tom

Sawyer, Huck Finn, Jim, and Hank (the last from *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*) represented diverse types of USonians who used tricks to varying degrees to produce desired cultural circumstances. This becomes one of the continued unifying elements of US representatives-how clever they are in practice.

Twain's regional writing is also seen as proto-realist: "[Twain's] early texts generally violate the conventional expectations that (1) autobiography will constitute a verifiable narrative of a historical individual, and (2) its author, narrator, and subject will be identical, at least in name" (72). Couser highlights the ways Twain's writing questions literary and social discussion while involving US audiences in critically creative ways by asking them to answer questions his texts propose about reality and narrative. Biographies and autobiographies were some of the best-sellers of Twain's day (and before). Twain plays with genres by constructing stories as fictional biographies, developing characters whose stories were just unbelievable enough to be true. In doing so, he establishes ways that stories can and do provide models for members of US culture to emulate or reject. Twain's writing begins to establish the connection between US self-making national representatives in fiction and history. Furthermore, in doing so, his writing uses fabulous ordinariness as a premise for engaging his audiences. Twain's relatable and clever characters are relatable (they are ordinary). However, they achieve great wealth, moral transcendence, or are positioned in David-and-Goliath battles (which they win), making them fabulous. His works display ways USonians self-made and how presentations of self-making depictions should appear. The trend of US self-makers and subversions to hegemonic models begins manifesting in these early semi-literary, semi-social studies and continues in USonian pieces that straddle similar contradictions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

While USonian cultural works are not explicitly mimetic depictions of reality, they are not solely creative presentations of the USonian experience. The characters presented in USonian texts reflect cultural conditions (particularly the ways social labels impact USonian social experiences), allowing readers to empathize and identify with characters' struggles. Characters establish emotional connections through moments in which works manipulate USonian tropes, humor, and familiar social circumstances often as a kind of "fabulous ordinariness," a term I use to describe specific ways readers and characters identify with a variety of representative models. The heart of this concept is that, while representatives must be inherently remarkable, they are also similar enough that the masses identify and connect with them. This occurs with reader identification with specific characters as well as characters identifying with each other within texts. This more encompassing definition of USonian citizens and models provides an appreciative space for alternative versions of success, citizenship, and reader-relationship to the US self-making myth. In the works, characters and readers accept selected minoritized populations as USonian. Furthermore, they change who USonians are as the portrayals of Americans, women, and immigrants become more than marginal to USonian storylines. These traditionally silenced and ignored populations and voices become crucial to the diversity of USonian identity, definition, and culture.

Fabulous Ordinariness

Fabulous ordinariness personalizes and articulates US culture and history in US texts. Fabulous ordinariness is a rhetorical approach and heuristic tool. Fabulous ordinariness is a way to identify the intersectionality of identities in a variety of cultural productions. More importantly here, there is a focus on both the disadvantages *and* potential for productive self- and other-

recognition through the use of identity markers and challenges. Fabulous ordinariness, when examining US identity construction, establishes a dialectical unity where individuals are part of a community that influences them and vice versa. While this is nothing new, when combined with attention to foundational ideas of the self-made man, fabulous ordinariness highlights the paradoxical space US identity inhabits and thrives in. It emphasizes the need to cultivate a society that is more interested in recognizing, accepting, and reveling in differences *and* similarities. As previously discussed, personal narratives communicate national experiences. Narrated individual experiences are presented as representative of and paradoxically relational to a larger US population. Being USonian is a social process, meaning an individual is part of a collective national identity that reciprocally impacts the nation and the individual. For example, there's a difference between saying the US has unfairly treated its native residents and reading Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine.* The former addresses the reality of social situations, while the latter raises awareness of the humanity of characters and the audience's connection with them and their cultural positions. Readers are given the opportunity to connect with the event versus comprehending the historical interactions of government and citizens (and/or citizens among themselves).

The individual in USonian society and its promotion of individuality can only be as successful as the community in which the individual participates. Representative USonians and the masses' validation of representative models establish measures of success. The variety of role models in USonian society violates the singular and masculine presentation of self-making models of success. Their acknowledgement by the mainstream may be lacking, but that does not

mean alternative models do not exist. The fabulous ordinariness of the characters makes their stories accessible and their successes identifiable with and/or achievable by readers.

Historical fiction emphasizes the problematic storytelling of historical USonian experience as well as its ingrained possibilities for flexibility and diversity. Elliott emphasizes the usefulness of historical fiction as it critiques and offers histories and ideologies to readers. He writes, "Memory . . . becomes a kind of political unconscious to be recovered by the scholar; yet once it becomes institutionalized as formal commemoration, memory becomes history, and thus again the object of suspicion [of validity]" (138). Historical fiction preserves communal and individual narratives in a manner that histories do not. Furthermore, it promotes critically creative thinking in ways that histories and biographies fail to do.[6] Readers are challenged to envision what was, what could be, as well as individual and communal concerns of pasts. Historical fiction develops potential historicities, reflecting experiences of culture and history over factual pasts. Unity and communalism are as apparent as individuality and distinction when identity categories are downplayed and USonian experience is prioritized in literary representations. By creating this paradoxical space, these texts speak to the tradition of USonian exceptionalism: I am special, unique, and independently created. But I also belong to and am a product of a national environment that facilitates this type of character construction in many of its citizens.

In doing this, the modified historical fictions critically studied here utilize Homi Bhabha's concept of supplementarity. He explains this in his theory on nationalism: "The power of supplementarity is not the negation of the preconstituted social contradictions of the past or

[6] Critically creative is a term developed and used by Dr. Mike Sell and his classes on the Black Arts Movement intended to describe critical comments or social critiques made in artistic endeavors and productions.

present; its force lies. . . in the renegotiation of those times, terms and traditions through which we turn our uncertain, passing contemporaneity into the signs of history" (155). The novels and dramas I have selected are historical fictions in that they recount national history and myths. However, they are more complex as they articulate versions of history that have either been untold, marginalized, or overwritten by dominant community groups. Philip Roth's narratives featuring immigrants and religious minorities as well as Bruce Norris and Lin-Manuel Miranda's considerations of USonian overwritten histories invoke contemporary narrations that push against notions of established (white-washed and masculine) history as well as fiction. Most importantly, they question strict definitions of these genres and ask what more literature can do for readers, and what literature/historical fictions can do in addition to preserving history and inciting emotions.

The organization of this dissertation serves to examine narratives that preserve the development and recognition of these cultural complexities. Much scholarship has recognized that, in recent years, villains and monsters have become more complex (protagonists have, too). However, the everyman and his representatives have been left out of the discussion too often. They are either silently presumed to be simple paragons of cultural symbolism or are allowed to fade into obscurity as unexamined, obsolete models. This project answers those reactions by proposing a reflection on those everyday figures and their representative power. The characters analyzed throughout this work tend to be more or less everyday USonians. They conduct themselves in largely unremarkable ways. They navigate events like the Great Depression, World War II, and the Civil Rights Movement with an eye to national meaning as well as personal meaning for themselves and their families. I have coined the term "fabulous

ordinariness" to describe the type of representative power these characters have, the techniques authors use to develop it, and the ways readers react to these models.

As I have defined it, "fabulous ordinariness" refers to ways characters are simultaneously seen as ordinary and identifiable with, yet also able to accomplish extraordinary feats. Lin-Manuel Miranda recognizes this trend when he discusses why he chose Hamilton as his central figure. He explains that, in his pre-writing stages, he thought, "'I know this guy.' I've met so many versions of this guy, and it's the guy who comes to this country and is like, 'I am going to work six jobs if you're only working one. I'm gonna make a life for myself here'" (qtd. In Delman).[7] Miranda's point emphasizes that Hamilton is an ordinary guy (ordinariness manifests). He is a character who contemporary aspiring USonians of many different walks of life can identify with and feel akin too. However, in feeling that Hamilton's story is worthy of being produced as a cultural artifact, Miranda simultaneously recognizes his significance as a representative in USonian culture then and today (fabulous).

Hamilton's very USonian normality makes him fabulous (or his story is in a sense fable-worthy). In an interview with Katie Couric, Miranda explains that part of the fascination with Hamilton in his work is that "this is an amazing message to send to the world that the show is bigger than any of us [the actors/cast]" (Interview with K. Couric). A substantial amount of praise for this work arises from its everyday appeal to the common man. However, Hamilton was a founding father of the US nation who worked to establish federalist concepts that are crucial to USonian identity and are still being debated and negotiated. His prolific writing legacy has led to

[7] While Miranda uses "guy" in his response, I would argue that this is a colloquialism. Evidence pertaining to the demographics of under-employed and over-employed individuals shows that Miranda's comment could be applied equally to USonian men and women in today's society.

an extensive understanding of the basis of USonian ideals and the reasoning of founding fathers for policies and regulations. Furthermore, President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama asked the cast of *Hamilton* to perform at the White House in a show broadcast by CBS to "those who might otherwise not have access" (CBSN). President Obama explains that in this story "we recognize the improbable story of our nation" (CBSN). USonian histories are about ordinary life events, but they are also more often concerned in overcoming obstacles. Inherently, then, USonian stories of fabulous ordinariness must be ordinary and articulate daily life circumstances, but they must also be extraordinary enough to be remarkable stories and reflect experiences that many individuals might not encounter.

In the same way that Miranda recognized Hamilton and his own potential to identify with him, fabulous ordinariness appears in these texts as a key criterion for representative USonian characters. Figures such as Herman, Philip's father in *The Plot Against America*, display ways that fabulous ordinariness can happen. Philip gains a deeper understanding of his father as a human (rather than a type of person: a father) in ways that USonians can find deeper understandings of characters through these humanizations and complexities. Yet both Herman and the rest of the examined characters have the potential to be admired and respected as representative of identifiable types as well as fabulous due to their ideals, their actions, and/or their lifestyles.

Stories of individuals are the foundation of US (self-making, independent) identity. The subjects of biographies are notable; often, early works featured public figures such as presidents, generals, and eventually stories of celebrity lives (see Couser and Casper). However, those representative US characters are also close enough to the general population that, as Casper

states, "[m]any individual readers saw biographical subjects as models for emulation" (85). These USonian characters had to be different enough to be distinguished, yet similar enough to inspire a desire to become *like* him/her. With the US's reputation for pragmatics, self-making, and do-it-yourself attitudes, emulation had to be feasible in order to be enacted. This is why Hamilton, and not Burr, successfully self-makes and serves as a clear manifestation of fabulous ordinariness. Hamilton has convictions and clearly defines his character throughout his journey (regardless of whether it always aligns or detracts from typical US ideals); Burr (in this narrative) wavers on political, character forming, and familial concerns throughout the piece. Both men encounter struggles (highlighting ordinariness), but only one (Hamilton) navigates it successfully to create a convincing political and domestic character (fabulousness). Fabulous ordinariness begins to surface here as readers identify with and desire to empathize and recognize themselves within historical (and as the scholars of [auto]biography often argue, fictional) characters. In the same manner that history, literature, and fiction collide in autobiographies, fabulous ordinariness occurs in the space where fiction, literature, and USonian reality connect. Moments of fabulous ordinariness often become culturally significant when they incorporate particularly democratic and liberal traits in self-making stories. Characters are what USonians connect with through empathy, representative US traits, and traditional national definitions. Their qualities may be what readers desire to emulate. But what provides readers with the feeling of representation within a text, or to recognize themselves within a text, is not the traits themselves. It is the traits, within situational frames, that stir readers to identify with cultural works. When readers recognize themselves within literary works, see characters as representative of their reality, and/or observe characters demonstrating ways identity is

developed, fabulous ordinariness occurs. Fabulous ordinariness is a key factor in the creation and continuation of USonian identity as historically democratic, performed, and continually self-making.

Text Selections

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine, through USonian literature, the ways audiences and authors understand, communicate, and relate to US experiences. While Chapter One revises accepted definitions of self-making, representative characters, and USonian identity as a diverse and communal identity category, Chapter Two focuses on analyzing how fabulous ordinariness works through both a close reading of the text but also in consideration of a reader's response to the text. Chapter Three is concerned with questioning and defining USonian identity, communities, and the effects USonian identity and community have on USonian citizens. The relationship between the individual and community in USonian ideologies deserves to be privileged, and is done so throughout this dissertation.

I examine *Kane and Abel* and *In America* in Chapter One to critique the role of immigrants, women, and the definition of USonian self-making. This chapter questions the criteria that have defined USonian citizenship. It asks what the crucial characteristics and successes of USonians are and how narratives change when dominant white, male narratives are acknowledged, but not accepted as the guidelines for exemplary national and individual USonian membership. This chapter begins the exploration of the connection between US literature, history, and social self-construction.

Chapter Two works to critique more closely how historically constructed USonian identity and literary experiences of USonian individualism and community membership function

in two texts featuring team mentalities: one about baseball, the other concerning patriotic membership and action. It introduces the need to alternately explore history to produce useful cultural narratives of experience and emotion. Through readings of Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* and *The Great American Novel* I interrogate narratives about USonian belonging by revealing the underside of the stories mainstream USonians are familiar with. These works reveal the close relationships between successes, perceived failures, and less privileged narratives in the daily experiences of USonians. They begin to ask what happens when model USonians are not infallible, but continue to remain representative characters for citizens (as a community) and individuals.

Chapter Three reflects on the significance of labels serving as acknowledged identities (in *Hamilton*) versus identity categories being based upon definitive self-making traits (in *Clybourne Park*). It introduces a contemplation of how past and contemporary USonian communities form, maintain themselves, and represent themselves, particularly by way of actions of individuals. These texts provide both successful and failed manipulations of USonian identities and definitions. Most importantly, they reflect a concern with the construction of the individual within a USonian community and the impacts that such character developments possess.

The conclusion wraps up these analyses by reflecting on how such readings usefully promote a diverse self and other conception within USonian society. This final section addresses the significance of recognizing the usefulness of models and stereotypes, the diversity of the USonian community, and the consequences of these on USonian models and narratives in literature and contemporary social circles. All of these chapters reflect on communities with USonian cultural representations and the lessons that can be gleaned from close examinations of

them. In addition all chapters closely examine the ways these texts impact ideas of USonianism by appealing to and affecting US readers through exemplifications of fabulous ordinariness.

The launching point for this project is the need to recognize that there is a problem in USonian society concerning labels and stereotypes. At times they can provide useful generalizations. However, to stop at those stereotypes or leave those generalizations uninterrogated makes for a problematic self and other in US history, literature, and society. The necessary explorations of overlapping identity categories require an acknowledged and critiqued history and historically informed present. Defining who one is today requires discovering who and what constitutes diverse representations of the nation. Both of those necessitate an exploration into the history of the nation as well as into the cultural representatives of that history insofar as they impact the present. Indeed, the importance of comprehending the connection between the individual and community, history and literature, and artistic representations and reality in USonian cultures becomes vital to a larger discussion about how USonians define themselves.

CHAPTER ONE

US SELF-MAKING:

ALWAYS WHITE, MASCULINE, INDEPENDENT?

CHALLENGES FROM SUSAN SONTAG AND

JEFFREY ARCHER

Sometimes one needs a real slap in the face

to make what one is feeling real. (Sontag, 31)

Introduction

What is real? How do USonians encounter reality? How do USonians process and discuss reality? In the US, self-making has served as the nationally unifying myth of social equality and experience. This narrative problematically solidifies the US's individualist citizens into an inclusive community. The fictional depictions of equality and self-making provide a reality (an ideologically based perception of US space) where USonians negotiate and develop identities. While literary works are not sociological studies, they can be a "slap in the face" to US audiences. Literature intended to preserve national ideologies, reveal paradoxes, and challenge those belief systems can be valuable in answering questions of (individual and group) national identity. Works balancing between academic and best-selling lists are effective in manifesting intellectual challenges and mainstream concerns with entertainment. Pieces such as Jeffery Archer's *Kane and Abel* and Susan Sontag's *In America* force readers to reflect upon ways individuals are accepted and developed as USonians, most often through the practice of self-making. This "slap in the face" is not always a bad thing. It fosters a type of self-consciousness and identification with characters and texts that makes works representative. Characters such as

Maryna (*In America*) and Abel (*Kane and Abel*) enact moments of "fabulous ordinariness" where US readers identify with them, often through their redefining acts of self-making within US contexts.

In America and *Kane and Abel* were best-sellers, yet they are often ignored academically. These texts portray ways self-making is re-envisioned in the twentieth-century US. They include examples of revisions made to USonian concepts by developing representative USonian characters from diverse backgrounds. Laying claim to a US identity no longer requires being white, masculine, or native-born (nor, as these works show, has it required those traits for quite some time). Instead, these texts depict individuals becoming and being USonians and changing due to their living within USonian frameworks. This mutually influential relationship reveals complex ways that USonian identity is a white patriarchy as well as how it is a non-hegemonic, humanistic ideology.

These texts are prime models for this study as they provide traditional and varied self-made narratives. Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Abel* provides both models in its main characters. This novel has mirrored plotlines. One story follows the life of William Kane as he walks in his father's footsteps by attending elite schools, becoming a banker, marrying Kate, and having a family, specifically a son (Richard). The second narrative traces the story of Wladeck (later renamed Abel) as he grows up as a peasant with the unprecedented opportunity to study with a Baron's child in Poland who is then displaced due to World War I occupations. Abel's story follows him through Russia and to the US where he adopts the name Abel. Eventually, Archer's novel illustrates Abel's economic success along with his domestic life where he marries another Polish immigrant, Zaphia. She gives birth to a daughter, Florentyna, who eventually serves as another sort of self-maker before being willing to take over her father's business. While Archer's

work gives more conventional and slightly altered versions of self-makers, Sontag's novel *In America* offers a story of much more diverse USonian self-makers. Maryna, a Polish actress, drives this story as she moves herself and some of her Polish comrades to the US. During her time in the US, she uses Miss Collingridge as a tutor, but also feels attracted to her in some ways noting that it's a feeling that could not have happened in her own country. In addition, while establishing her career in the US, Maryna attempts to become USonian by changing her name and claiming a kinship with US citizens. Perhaps more importantly, the US masses acknowledge her as one of their own. Maryna's career and challenges are chronicled throughout this novel as characters such as Minnie and Eliza (women who become acquaintances of Maryna) comment. As this piece narrates female, immigrant USonian experience, it highlights elements of self-making within USonian circles that deserve recognition.

These stories also present characters who enact fabulous ordinariness by representing emotions, daily actions, and circumstances of US life. Sontag shows how Maryna and her community of ex-pat Polish citizens explore ways of becoming USonian and avenues of representation. A variety of immigrant and Polish characters who compose US identities question how US citizenship is attained and what it means to be a member of the US community. Furthermore, while not the poorest of immigrants, Maryna's community is not exactly wealthy either. They self-make repeatedly throughout the narrative but in ways that differ from the traditional town-to-city white male success story. Similarly, *Kane and Abel* tells relatively standard self-made narratives of silver-spooned William Kane and freshly immigrated Abel Rosnovski. However, deviations from original self-making tropes occur in the stories of Florentyna (Abel's daughter) and Richard Kane (William's son). Archer toys with self-making tropes and draws audiences in with elements of fabulous ordinariness as well. Finally, figures

such as Maryna and Bogdan inquire about how sexual preference influences US identities. Both novels use complexly developed representative USonian characters to question how gender, immigration, and sexuality establish US traits. By addressing a variety of typically marginalized USonians, Sontag invites her readers to question USonian myths. In doing so, these authors provide moments of fabulous ordinariness to depict and draw in their US audience as involved and participatory readers.

US Self-Making and Fabulous Ordinariness

Self-construction of a national character depends on the author as well as the audience. The representative USonian will vary according to who is encountering the cultural work. As White and Wilkinson emphasize, recognizing the constructed nature of national representatives and character allows for the recognition of the potential diversity of representational figures. Such theoretical propositions manifest in *Kane and Abel* when Abel is enlisting as a soldier for the US in WWII. When he decides to enlist to defend American democracy, Abel explains to the recruiting General, "I'm Polish . . . [however] This is the only country in the world where you can arrive with nothing and become a millionaire through damned hard work, regardless of your background. Now those same bastards [who destroyed Poland in WWI] want another war . . . I'm not mad, General—I'm human" (Archer 337). Abel explains his allegiances to the US and its democratic ideals. Significantly, he also addresses his history as a Polish citizen. His mixed heritage positions him as one of the diverse national representatives that Wilkinson asserts exists for various US demographics. Abel's heritage also lends itself to developing the diversified national narrative that White claims is possible. Fabulous ordinariness arises here as Abel articulates his position in terms of being an insider (ordinary) and outsider (fabulous) of US culture. Furthermore, his gesture to the universal state of humanism embodies White's and

Wilkinson’s discussions of varied (US) identities and histories by claiming “I’m human” (I'm ordinary). At the heart of liberal US identity is a belief that we are all human, and it is implied that we, USonians (regardless of religion, class, origin of birth, gender, etc.), are all equal. Abel draws attention to this vein of US nationalism (and exceptionalism), and his representational positioning displays the thought process in practice. Doing so implies the created nature of subsets of identities and the problems of such categories.

Changes to representatives of nationalities often manifest in cultural enterprises such as social and artistic performances. The US stage and literature promotes characters and their traits as representatives of various demographics. In addition to the paralleling of different spaces of self-performance, references to national performances reinforce one's USonian traits. Similar to the way Abel depicts a "new" USonian model, Maryna's acclaim as an actress reflects redefinitions of USonian success. In Sontag's work, Maryna's fabulous ordinariness is doubly emphasized through her representational position for the reader as well as for her in-text audiences as they comment on her acting abilities. This type of representation will occur later in Roth's and Miranda's works discussed in Chapters Two and Three. Sontag highlights Maryna's role as such an individual: "In Poland she had represented the aspirations of a nation" (Sontag 306). In Poland, Maryna is an embodiment of Poland's struggles. She plays roles that enact social and domestic conflict mirroring the strife oppressed Poles have endured at the hands of the Russians. While she is not exploring the political environment specifically, her emotions, reactions, and situations inspire her Polish audience to identify in nationally centered ways. Maryna concludes asserting that in the US she could only represent "art, or culture" but that "Americans need perennial reassurance that art was not just art" (Sontag 306). Her comments seem contradictory. How can art or culture just be art or culture yet provide "reassurance that art

was not just art"? It seems that in order to be one, the other must be involved as well. Maryna's performances involve art and culture by translating her Polish performance skills to the US stage. This paradox invites the same debates about the questions of history, (auto)biography, literature, and representation discussed in the Introduction. Her characters are representative of political engagements and emotions without needing to touch on the specific cultural situations themselves. In other words, the roles Maryna embodies symbolically addresses concerns of humanity and nationalities. Maryna's purpose in performing is to "exploit an author's drama to show off [my] ability to allure and to counterfeit" a message (Sontag 322). Maryna is a professional, exuding sympathy enacted through her expression of collective emotions. When Maryna performs, "You can really feel somethin' when [the] woman suffers" (Sontag 284). Maryna becomes well known for her oppressed characters, such as the hopeless Camille and the doomed Adrienne. She can translate the characters' experiences and loneliness in ways that diverse audiences respond to. Her performed narratives embody emotions and situations domestically representative of national oppression and exclusion suffered by many demonstrated by Polish and US audiences, despite Maryna's assertions.

Maryna's representative capabilities for the audiences of the text and of her performances are a matter of emotional invocations at specific historical moments using oppressed characters. As Maryna explains, in both Polish and US theaters, her roles touch upon the emotional and political circumstances of audiences. Oppression, freedom, and domestic as well as economic conditions which may be difficult to clearly articulate can often find expression through representative characters and tangentially related plot points. Fabulous ordinariness, the ability to identify with grandiose characters through daily events, develops a closeness with the text and a realness of the plot points. While her performances are political for Polish audiences, US

audiences acknowledge the artistic value of her work. Polish audiences read themselves, their nationality, as the pitiful main characters of Maryna's performances; US audiences identify with the complex emotions Maryna's roles evoke. Maryna's oppressed characters provide empathetic depictions that do not require explicit identification with characters as community members. In other words, Maryna's roles express oppression and marginal experiences as artistic depictions that get socially glossed in the US. Those characters represent circumstances US social circles accept as tragedies developed as art. US selves recognize these performances as performances, not essentializing representations. Oppressed and marginalized people are characters and humans. Self-makers, then, as US national representatives, must be more and also less than humans and characters. As Maryna and Abel show, USonian representative characters must be specific to the US as well as general enough to reflect the global community. Representative performances are the spaces where fabulous ordinariness develops US identities individually and collectively.

A crucial foundation for fabulous ordinariness is the ability of a diverse group of people to establish a paradoxical sense of unity through an individual. While my work focuses on locating this trend in literature, sociological studies, such as Wilkinson's, have recognized the relationship between the individual and his/her social connections in US culture. US identity manifests in

> the pursuit of individual distinctiveness and a compensating search for community. These themes are old in American consciousness. The emphases change, but the fascination with "self and society," with the tensions and nourishments between the two, is an enduring part of the culture, and a powerful

> element in the fascination with national character. (Wilkinson, *The Pursuit of American Character* 10-11)

US citizens do not develop from some sort of essential character features. Instead, their character is consistently in flux. Maryna, Abel, and Twain's tricksters provide examples of manipulators of USonian self-making to broaden definitions, reflect social and cultural changes, and achieve more varied connections with US readers. The connection between the individual and the larger community receives priority. Newly accepted representative characters of readers in Sontag and Archer's texts manipulate USonian identity formation and cultural depictions (which are indicative of larger social trends). US citizens are concerned with how their selves connect with one another as well as with their country. Since USonians are not "born," but are made by this "fascination with the "self and society," immigrants to the US are entitled to the label USonians (Wilkinson). By claiming US culture as one's own and by considering how one impacts that culture, a person living in the US becomes a USonian. In other words, it takes a combination of connection with representative figures and real world fabulous ordinariness to develop a USonian identity.

Models of Self-Making

Historical and Critical Precedence

USonian identity is a topic addressed in both Archer's and Sontag's texts despite some critics' claims that they are solely works of popular fiction. Archer's critics describe his work as "tell[ing] you how things are" (Levin), a piece for "saga-seekers only" ("Kane and Abel"), and a top-seller, but so is "Kentucky fried chicken *[sic]*" (Naughton). His work was a best-seller in Britain and the US. Furthermore, the text inspired a television series. While the sensationalism and somewhat conventional plotline make for good mainstream reading and watching, Archer's

attention to USonian ideals and characters who manipulate them is a crucial element of his story's success. The focus on depictions and manipulations of USonian representation is a key element of Archer's and Sontag's works that has yet gone unnoticed.

Michael Wood's review of Susan Sontag's *In America* explicitly analyzes the way Sontag addresses American ideology and history. Furthermore, he explains that instead of plagiarizing the life of Helena Modrzejewska, she based her characters on her story explicitly (144). As such, Sontag's work has been called postmodern and labeled historical fiction, unlike Archer's. In addition, some scholars have categorized her work as drama and utopian. Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor argues that Sontag's work contains a "utopic sensibility," meaning it upholds a visionary representation of the US but develops an understanding that it will be tempered by elements of reality (1009). Archer's *Kane and Abel* was a blockbuster (literarily and in the cinematic sense) while Sontag's *In America* was criticized but also received intellectual as well as critical acknowledgement (although it remains one of her lesser studied texts). Choosing two texts that are so different is important to developing a somewhat balanced reflection on the depiction of USonians and their history. Furthermore, it aides in identifying which USonian elements gain wide recognition and which features are more nuanced. These texts also feature altered versions of self-makers, which allows for more diverse USonian narratives to be validated as representative of social demographics.

Elements of self-making as a distinctively USonian trait are evident in early US literature and lifestyles as established in the Introduction. Mark Twain's writing created one of the most well-known models of bildungsroman and self-making in US literature. His stories featuring Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn explore how rural Southern young men grew up. However, as Huck, Tom, and Jim journey across the US and in some stories into Europe and Africa, these characters

become US representatives at home and abroad. One of their most notable features is that although they are often honest, they sometimes use their know-how to get something out of nothing. Such a characteristic continues through various self-made models, particularly those of the well-versed business man both in early and later versions of USonian self-makers. In *Kane and Abel*, such trickery predicts Abel's future success in the US. While in a Russian prison, Abel becomes part of a group that is supposed to chop down a certain amount of trees in a day. If the group does not meet their quota, they lose a day's worth of food. To prevent that from happening, "Wladek [Abel] taught the others in his team to spend the last part of the afternoon clearing the snow off the wood cut the previous day and lining it up with what they had chopped that day" (Archer 72). Due to Abel's ingenuity, his group never misses a meal. Similar to Huck Finn's presenting Jim as a diseased person while travelling through areas where recapture was likely (Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*), Wladek/Abel's actions are intelligent, tricky, and benefit both himself and his community. While this event does happen before Wladek/Abel immigrates to the US, his behavior has a distinctly US bent to it. There is no commentary concerning the type of people he might be helping aside from their common experience of being oppressed peoples. Wladek/Abel's helping others in his community is the focus of these events. In this sense, both examples portray USonian connections with oppressed minorities and creative thinking. These models of young USonians present representatives for US citizens to emulate. Their out-of-the-box thinking style dupes some, but only those in power: a long-touted characteristic of US ideology. Most importantly, this type of trickery becomes a tool of equality. By being sneaky, Huck and Abel subvert authority figures to benefit themselves and others. Without explicitly opposing "the man," Huck and Abel frustrate his power structure and show how communal acts are useful in establishing environments where various peoples can and

deserve to thrive. The earlier paradox of USonian and humanist ideologies rises here as US principles are enacted to achieve democratic and individual/community perseverance.

In a similar moment of trickery in Sontag's novel, Maryna reveals her leadership skills and how communities are involved in self-making. Maryna enters as her troupe of actors is performing recitations. When they prompt her to participate, she enraptures her US students with her recitation. Miss Collingridge (who tours with Maryna to continue providing her enunciation lessons) listens and then passes a note telling Maryna all she did was recite the Polish alphabet twice. However, when Maryna asks Miss Collingridge to reveal to her audience what Maryna has recited, Miss Collingridge says Maryna prayed. Maryna keeps up the deception: "An actor's prayer. In my sad devout country, there is a prayer for everything" (Sontag 352). Maryna's emotional recital convinces her listeners that she has performed a prayer accompanied with smiles and tears. The lesson readers receive is that how one tells a story is as important, perhaps more significant, than the story one actually reveals. This fits into Twain's trickster tradition both as author and with Maryna's character. Sontag positions her audience in the same way Twain does in his "War Prayer." Audience perspective and authorial presentation manipulate the reality one encounters. This incident in particular demonstrates the need to acknowledge that USonian success (or deception in this case) can be reached through many avenues by a variety of people.

Furthermore, these authors commonly use this as a trope in their recognizably USonian writing. Maryna's lesson needs an insider to reveal how important fully committed enactments are to providing convincing characters. Maryna's story is reminiscent of Huck's encounter with one of his neighbors shortly after he and Jim run away. Huck fails to convince the woman he is a lady when she throws an object at him and he closes his legs rather than opens them to catch it. The woman explains that a girl, accustomed to wearing skirts, would open her legs to allow the

maximum area to catch an object (Twain, *Adventures*). The significance of these incidents of trickery is that insiders (such as Wladeck/Abel, Maryna, Huck, and Twain's stranger) articulate these lessons. Just as Abel reuses logs, the importance is not that he is recycling material but that the endgame results in no one going hungry. The intentions of Huck's pranksterism in these incidents are to aid Jim. The stranger in "War Prayer" provides new viewpoints of victory and war. Maryna's alphabet's meaning is unimportant, because her priority is evoking responses from her listeners. These examples show the ways self-making involves the community and redefines successes. These stories also display that the self-made individual is as necessary as the environment in which s/he grows. Such observations connect back to White and Wilkinson's works concerning the development of self-made and US identity definitions. As Twain's anecdotes often have lessons hidden within them with real-world application, so does Maryna's storyline, particularly in this incidence. Sontag's character illustrates Couser's claim about blurring the line between biography, fiction, and reality. The lessons these characters participate in (using tricks to meet community needs in alternative ways) applies to the thinking USonians may have to do in a variety of social circles to be included.

These loosely classified works of historical fiction perpetuate and manipulate USonian ideals and representatives. Abel and Maryna's participation in US activities questions the justifiability of mutually exclusive national identities. Instead, Abel's enlisting and Maryna's articulation of art display ways US communities include and recognize marginalized peoples based on previously established US literary tropes of success and self-making. In addition, Maryna's and Abel's trickery emphasizes the concern for the community, as well as the individual, which US self-making traditionally has had but still needs to address as an explicit component of US self-making. As both of these examples incorporate associations with other

nationalities, they further reflect the need to be more expansive and inclusive in considering representations and discussions of traditional and altered versions of US self-making. Fabulous ordinariness demonstrates how readers and characters with very disparate identities and experiences can reflect one another. Works such as these ruminate on and depict the constant evolution of USonian thought and reality, as well as the need for culture and its narratives to embrace those changes.

Female Self-Mades

Historical fiction often portrays significant observations concerning the time period it was written about, as well as the time period it was written in. *Kane and Abel*, written in 1979, developed into a television series in Britain in the 1980s and received a revision in 2009 for its thirtieth anniversary. Susan Sontag's *In America*, written in 2000, received many awards and much recognition. *Kane and Abel* spans the years 1906 to 1967, while *In America* revisits from 1876 into the early twentieth century. Both are largely set in the US. In terms of women's rights, both pieces engage in reworkings of history informed by the Columbia Trade Exposition, women's suffrage, second and (eventually, in both works) third wave feminism, as well as women's labor and education advocacy. All of these events and movements pushed for broader conceptions of femininity, especially in relation to masculinity and US citizenship. Fictions during this time worked to develop a more nuanced and realistic version of female power by moving beyond a model that allowed only for sentimental feminine power, masculine female figures, or obedient females. As such, historical narratives and cultural artwork had the potential to depict only these models and to portray them in less than favorable ways. Not only do novels such as *Kane and Abel* and *In America* provide more open-minded characterizations of strong female characters and the communities they participate in, but these texts also rewrite the ways

these US females self-make, challenging white masculinist models of self-making. As fuller, more emotionally intelligent and complex characterizations of female characters unfold, the US constructions of these representatives become less typified and more relational. *In America* and *Kane and Abel* present models of feminine and masculine self-making (by female characters). They also present them in situations that prevent those characters from becoming stock characters. These female characters resist the neat categorizations that hegemonic history attempts to place them in. Historical narratives and cultural representations connect in significant ways to reveal how they can supplement one another to develop more multifaceted narratives of being. Self-makers, female characters, and USonians are complicated to reflect more accurately US communities.

Different aspects of US femininity manifest in various characters throughout these novels. Characters such as *In America*'s Maryna and William Kane's grandmothers in *Kane and Abel* demonstrate the power matriarchs possessed within family *and* business circles. Maryna encounters figures such as Eliza Withington, a photographer, and Minnie, a saloon owner. These female entrepreneurs vary in levels of masculinity but not in their unquestionable USonian character. Richard Kane's and Florentyna's mothers (Kate and Zaphia, respectively) display the influence mothers hold in a traditional manner (head of the domestic sphere). These characters also take on more contemporarily empowered positions as mothers who engage family and social circles in new, more demanding ways, including involvement with society and publicity. Jessie, the alter-ego Florentyna develops, revises self-making tropes. Her character does so by diverting Florentyna from becoming a silver-spooned character like William Kane as she requires an apprenticeship regardless of what she's entitled to. More importantly, her role is not to be solely feminine, nor is she to be a masculine female. Her primary goal is not economic security but a

"real-world" education. Her occupational desires balance with other events in the text. She participates in a feminine occupation and a crucial element of Jessie's character is her love affair with Richard Kane. Finally, the maternity ward scenes in *Kane and Abel* position female characters as important components of self- and other- making in US situations. The diverse ways female power manifests is touched upon within these texts to highlight new and useful ways to self-make and represent women in US society and literatures.

Intelligence is a connecting trait that Maryna, Grandmother Cabot, and Grandmother Kane possess, and it separates them from the Victorian notion of intellect and education as detrimental to females. Since self-made men were, to an extent, born out of those influential ideals, the push against those female standards initiates changes to self-making representations. Furthermore, their intelligence is not framed as masculine; they are not typified as blue-stockings. Instead, their intelligence provides them with power and promotes their abilities to make decisions. These texts refute nineteenth-century US notions of femininity and intelligence. Female characters who are self-assuredly involved in domestic, economic, intellectual, and cultural endeavors simultaneously address twentieth century gender issues. By producing such an amalgamation of typically gender-normed circumstances, frustrations of gender categorization occur. For example, Maryna decides when to come to America and when to return to the theatre, and largely negotiates her own contracts, tours, and shows. Similarly, Richard Kane's grandmothers make decisions concerning various elements of his education and his character development, ranging from when and where he will attend school to promoting his introduction to society. Rather than being women empowered by fulfilling masculine success criteria or being dominating in masculine ways, these female US characters combine masculine power roles with female-centered arenas. Historically, rejections of the stereotypes of female characters reflect US

characters in texts and at large, especially the masculine-feminine dichotomy that was so often set up throughout many of the movements referenced earlier.

Sontag's Maryna explicitly positions herself as an intelligent powerful female US citizen. Her character demonstrates female empowerment in USonian spaces as characteristic in the same ways that claims of masculinity and whiteness as USonian traits have occurred. She does so in a few ways as she auditions for the US theatre. In preparation for her audition, she decided she wants to be an "American" actress by performing in American English, at a time when, the novel explains, many actors and actresses touring the US played in their native languages. In addition, Maryna takes enunciation lessons from Miss Collingridge because Maryna wanted to "represent something ideal as an artist" (Sontag 254). Her ideal, as her play choices and assertions throughout indicate, is the expression of human (often communal) emotions. After deciding upon her language and working to develop it fluidly, Maryna goes to Mr. Barton for her audition. It is here, in addition to her rational precautions, that Maryna's intellect explicitly appears. In an exchange right before Maryna and Miss Collingridge perform a portion of a French play, Mr. Barton tells Maryna, "You are proud, you are confident. You are probably intelligent . . . that's no asset for an actor" (Sontag 242). His comment is expressed as an insult; however, Maryna counters it by saying, "But you could be more condescending. You could have said to me that intelligence is no asset for a woman" (Sontag 242). The down-to-business manager responds, "Yes, I could have said that. I shall hereby make note not to say it to you" (Sontag 242). Maryna is not positioned as masculine, or even overbearing here. Yet her comments do give her a sense of superiority and directly acknowledges her gender.

She seems different from female characters who use feminine wiles to get their way and does not appear masculine in her assertions boasting independent mindedness. In short, she

begins self-making her US actress identity when she asserts that she is not a damsel in distress coming to the stage in desperation, nor is she unfamiliar with the power that her position engenders (i.e. she is not emotionally inept). She is intelligent, not just intelligent for a woman. Furthermore, this characterization is not detrimental. Historically, education was still a relatively contested notion for women, ranging from those in the lowest to women in aristocratic classes. Maryna's intelligence is not just that gained from her Latin-teaching father and from Shakespeare. She has also achieved an education through travel, real-world experiences, and travails as a result of the Russian occupation of Poland, as her interactions with Mr. Barton evidence. Traditional education and "real world" learning meet in Maryna's character, producing a more world-aware female USonian. Her character provides an ideal model of intelligence through alternate and self-attained education for self-making US females.

Strong central female figures manipulate conventional definitions of self-makers and female gender roles in *Kane and Abel* as well. While Grandmothers Kane and Cabot are strong females promoting William's education and development, they are also strong in their own rights. Upon Richard Kane's death, both grandmothers are "mindful of the duty that had been thrust back upon them. The responsibility had been passed back to the grandmothers. Anne passively accepted their proprietary role" (Archer 44). At the expense of Anne's power as a guiding figure, the grandmothers gain the power of approving William's actions and life decisions. It is as if the Grandmothers fill William’s father’s shoes without needing to be a strong male role model. Anne loses some maternal agency, but does gain William's undying allegiance and devotion. The agency of the grandmothers is as intellectual and capable females, not as reproductively able individuals (typical feminine agency) nor as masculine females (generally snarky business savvy characters). Rather these women negotiate power (therefore neutralize

power's association with masculinity) with their decisions. For example, the Grandmothers in *Kane and Abel* take on powerful roles in William's life "when William was in his seventh year [they decided] time had come to instruct the boy in the value of one dollar a week but insisted that he keep an inventory accounting for every cent he spent" (Archer 45). The Ledger, which is what his account becomes known as, is maintained by William into adulthood and submitted every year to his grandmothers for review and approval. It is through this supplementary education provided by his grandmothers that William becomes a millionaire in his own right before the close of his college career. The grandmothers are traditional matriarchs of a New England family, which is a stale and familiar role in many US cultural productions. However, Richard's will was dictated. The grandmothers do not have control over the money William will receive nor any of the other clauses included in the estate. In fact, the trustees of Richard's will are William's mother and godparents, not his grandmothers. The grandmothers negotiate to self-make themselves by filling and manipulating standard role model behavior after Richard's untimely death. Realities are shaped by these educated females making informed and assertive decisions in spaces open to them as a result of US cultural conditions and gender typing.

Perhaps they gain their power partially from tradition, but it seems also that the grandmothers earn respect in their own rights as women and not just figures of domesticity. William asserts his surprise at the attendance of Alan Lloyd at a ball thrown in William's honor for his succession as Chairperson of the bank he currently works at. Alan replies, "Have you forgotten that the invitation came from your grandmothers? I am possibly brave enough to refuse one of them, but both−"; William responds "You too, Alan?" and laughs (Archer 165). On one hand this reifies the grandmothers as controllers of social circles by Alan's inability to refuse the invitation. However, on the other hand, considering that Alan does not particularly need social

standing (he is wealthy) nor does he have a wife who desires to maintain or achieve higher social circles, Alan's half-joking fear of William's grandmothers implies their formidable personhood. The treatment of the grandmothers shows the agency and influence they possess and in doing so they take a step out of nineteenth century domestic divisions of labor to self-make themselves. They do not tear up at William's departures nor are there sentimental passages reflecting on his growth. Instead, they supplement his education and foster his intellectual development pushing for some social growth as well but certainly not privileging it. These female characters demonstrate that regardless of which social circle one moves in, intelligence is a prized and well-valued trait for both genders of self-makers in the US.

In addition to the grandmothers in *Kane and Abel* and Maryna in *In America* who push against the anti-blue stocking sentiments and anti-women's liberation movements of their respective time periods, these novels introduce stock characters with a twist. Archer and Sontag invent figures such as Eliza Withington (a photographer travelling the West in *In America*), Minnie (a strong female saloon keeper who reveals her tenderness in *In America*), and Abel's daughter, Jessie/Florentyna (who develops and pushes against traditional self-made roles in *Kane and Abel*). While Eliza and Minnie only make fleeting appearances, all three females are remarked upon by others for their strength (fabulous), their unique femininity (fabulous), and their USonian ingenuity (ordinary, or at least familiar US characteristics). They serve as self-making models for identification and admiration for US readers.

Eliza Withington is a character admirable for both males and females ascribing to US self-making belief structures. This young woman "goes West," making her way through the deserts and mountains, recording history with her camera, fascinated by the chemistry and

artistry of her work (another meeting of traditionally gendered categories). After meeting Eliza, Ryszard (Maryna's Polish journalist lover) comments on her character:

> Only in America could you find a woman like that, who thinks women are no different from men, who spends her life giving orders to other people. She *is* a man! That ginger hair and the man's hat and the Colt in its holster and the morning whiskey and all those boisterous opinions. Wonderful, wonderful! (Sontag 193)

Ryszard's observations demonstrate how Eliza's character is particular to US environments. In addition, he also admires the independence of Eliza's character. What he misconstrues as a masculine trait really belongs to neither gender. Eliza's "giving orders to other people," followed by the conclusion that "She *is* a man!" is rather unfair. As previous character analyses show, such as the Grandmother's actions and Maryna's decision making for her family, "giving orders" (or making decisions for others) can and was done by other females commonly. It is not solely a masculine trait. Further justification of Ryzard's judgement as harsh arises in comparisons of Eliza drinking whiskey to Maryna's smoking in public. Upon one such instance seeing her (Maryna's) visitor's eyes widen at the use of a cigarette, she asks "You have never seen a lady with a cigarette?" to which Mrs. Fenton responds, "No" (Sontag 358). Maryna presumes not necessarily anti-US behaviors (tobacco use was and is widely common in the US, though at the time more USonians chewed rather than smoked). Maryna's use of cigarettes, both then and now, is generally more sexualized than Eliza's whiskey drinking. However, neither behavior was considered becoming of a lady. In short, both of these actions demonstrate how Ryszard's comments (representing categorical processes at large) twist events to emphasize elements, such as smoking or drinking, as belonging to a particular group (male) so as to either explain away or

stigmatize behaviors. In other words, Eliza can only be a strong, self-made character because, "She *is* a man!" rather than being a strong self-made character who sometimes participates in what has been coded as masculine behavior. Referring back to what White makes clear, gendering of this version of US self-making as male only occurs because of its traditional perception. There is nothing inherently masculine about it.

The continued relevance of this discussion becomes apparent when examined in conversation with critiques of female figures who are independent and in authority today. Charlotte Templin, in her article "Hillary Clinton as Threat to Gender Norms: Cartoon Images of the First Lady," observes problematic trends in responses to the leadership skills and authority presented by the former First Lady. She analyzes the cartooned versions of Hillary Clinton, not only as First Lady, but also as an activist and politician. Templin asserts, "The contestatory nature of the discourse about Hillary Clinton signals the deep struggle still taking place in society over the role of women, and the attacks against her can be seen as part of the backlash against the professional woman" (21). Templin's article goes on to critique cartoons that position Hillary as anti-feminine based upon her participation in politics on her husband's behalf and on her own. Hillary plays a role in masculine coded behaviors. The public then responds as Ryszard did and sees her as masculine. Critiques happen of both Eliza and Hillary essentially as being "a man!" However, what the fictional character and political figure are doing is playing a well-established role type of a successful model in the US. It apparently does not work for women except when contrasted with traditional gendered norms. These characters demonstrate the type of female success in US self-making that has come to be accepted, or at least tolerated, as a (paradoxically) stigmatized version of success for females.

An alternate version of successful female self-making surfaces with characters such as Minnie. She has come to California in a derivative of the gold rush craze, explaining, "there was money to be made in saloons. . . you didn't have to be real smart to see there'd be a lot of money to be made off thirsty [silver] miners comin' off their shifts" (Sontag 288). The mid-to-late nineteenth century gold and silver rushes form the means for a traditional US version of self-making and for Minnie to relocate in a parallel to this motif. Her story similarly parrots, with a twist, self-making traditions as she makes her living off working class individuals. However, she does not exploit them, nor rely on slyness or happenstance opportunities. Instead, Minnie and her husband, a former sheriff, provide a safe, relaxing environment for miners to take a load off (for a reasonable price). Minnie is most definitely in control of her environment and, to an extent, of her customers' experiences, as her hustling away customers from Maryna's table shows (Sontag 287). Minnie is not just a service provider working behind or alongside her husband. She owns and runs her own successful business in order to provide an enjoyable experience for all her patrons. Unlike Eliza, Minnie is clearly not "a man!" She may possess a role that is reminiscent of historically masculine social roles, like Grandmother Kane and Cabot; however, Minnie's entrepreneurship is customer centered drawing attention to self-making by being concerned with others.

Florentyna's character does a similar job of developing ambiguous and ambivalent relationships with classed and gendered self-making tropes. Twice she provides an interestingly moderated example of female self-making. Traditional self-making tropes centered around business, chance, and self-education; these constructs are simultaneously engaged and interrogated. Florentyna "was insistent that she wanted some outside expertise before joining her father's group. She did not think that her natural gifts for design, color coordination, and

organization were any substitute for experience" (Archer 399). She finds a medium between self-made educational models such as Franklin and Lincoln and college education. Florentyna's actions demonstrate a cultural revolution enacted (and continued) throughout the twentieth century US. She balances “street smarts,” routine established habits, and academic education in her self-making development. As Irvin Wyllie historicizes the self-made man, "Until the last decade of the nineteenth century the educational ideal of the business community embraced nothing more than common school training, a business apprenticeship, and a program of self-culture" (95). Florentyna does not complete college, but in terms of a business apprenticeship she does.

Furthermore, she denies traditional self-made models a second time. Just when she is prepared to begin managing the shopping malls associated with her father's Baron Hotels, she reveals her love for his arch enemy's son. Abel threatens, "I'll cut you off without a penny" (Archer 417). Florentyna proceeds to leave and marry Richard. Dismissal of these events as a bit of sentimentality or romantic fiction to keep a lengthy novel interesting to a variety of readers misconstrues important plot points. Florentyna's letter to Abel at her exit emphasizes the changes she makes to self-making tropes. She leaves a letter for Abel at her apartment before she and Richard leave for California. She writes, "I shall always be thankful for everything you have done for me" (Archer 420). Her gratitude towards her father is somewhat unnecessary. In traditional tropes, benefactors frequently arrange fortunate situations for self-made characters to encounter. However, thus far, with the exception of some of her travels, Florentyna largely has found circumstances that could have potentially arisen for her regardless of who her father was. Her thanking her father for those circumstances denies her independent self-making and emphasizes how new versions of self-making must recognize both the self and the community.

In her first rejection of self-making tropes, she complicates how education and street-knowledge are related to the rhetoric; in the second set of behaviors her seemingly misplaced gratitude demonstrates the contradiction within traditional self-made tropes. Who and how one self-makes must be rethought and amended to incorporate more ambiguous behaviors based upon Florentyna's story.

Archer extends these challenges to self-made rhetoric and its manifestation in USonian identities through the presentation of mothers (specifically Zaphia and Kate) and the appearances of the maternity ward in *Kane and Abel*. After Richard and Florentyna have gone to California to get married, Kate and Zaphia both visit. More importantly, William and Abel are both aware that their respective wives call on their exiled children (Archer 426, 458). Once again, the simple dismissal of the mothers' behaviors condemns it as sentimental and as women's roles in domestic promotion and family production. However, the novel's discussion of the maternity ward seems to temper this: "William did not need to be guided to the Richard Kane maternity wing, which Kate had officially opened only six months before" (Archer 277). William sponsored the Richard Kane maternity wing. However, Anne's request built the ward and Kate opened it. Furthermore, a nurse greets William "[she] informed him that Dr. MacKenzie was with his wife" (277). The nurse (a female) takes control of the ward while also stating that Dr. MacKenzie (a male) performs many of the primary functions within this normed female space. The mix of genders and their various roles opposes a simplification of pregnancy and familial space as solely female circles for self-making. While such an analysis may have always been possible, what makes it more salient or obvious today derives from challenges the text itself makes to norms, as well as the context in which the reading of the novel takes place. Recall Dorris Sommer's assertion noted in my Introduction that there is an inextricable connection between culture and agency.

The cultural space of production and reception influences the meanings of these works. In light of the social changes in circumstances for genders, female figures can no longer be relegated to a (perceived) inferior domestic circle and males can no longer be excluded from using those traditionally female avenues of self-making for success.

Immigrant Self-Makers

Tropes of self-making in the US are impacted by women gaining rights as well as the full recognition of minorities and immigrants as citizens. Abel's character practices self- and communal identification as a USonian. He does so in a way that invokes representations and identifications for native USonians as well. Abel receives an invitation to one of President-elect Kennedy's many inaugural balls, a major event in its contemporary era as well as today. Due to the election of the first Roman Catholic and a rather liberal President at a time of extreme contention in the US, many individuals reminisce about Kennedy, his actions, and the events during and surrounding his presidency. For example to demonstrate Kennedy's cultural impact, Barack Obama reflects on Kennedy in his autobiography, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance.* For Obama, Kennedy's election was a force for change and equality for the US. His election and actions during his terms fostered a spirit of "seeming triumph of universalism over parochialism and narrowmindedness, a bright new world where differences of race or culture would instruct and amuse and perhaps even ennoble" (Obama 25). Kennedy represents the potential for a more accepting and friendly future in the US. However, Obama clearly feels disillusioned at the end of Kennedy's presidency. But he does also call this spirit a "useful fiction" (Obama 25). Both the character of Kennedy (in text and reality) and the values his run in office promoted display connections between history, fiction, and social circumstances. As Abel identifies with Kennedy and his politics, he demonstrates some of the

core concerns of liberal USonians and a version of US community construction (as Kennedy worked to achieve a more cohesive nation). Reality can be fabricated in some ways as can the representatives of it for useful purposes.

In addition to the reverence many USonians hold for Kennedy's presidency, Abel shows how it was and is important as a piece of US recognition systems. Kennedy's inaugural speech possesses foundational directives for USonians. Abel explains this thought process while listening to Kennedy's proclamations:

> "A new generation of Americans, born in this century"—Abel only just qualified—"tempered by war"—Abel certainly qualified—"disciplined by a hard and bitter peace"—Abel qualified again. "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." (Archer 439)

What might be labeled as universal characteristics Abel views as USonian. USonians are not born, but instead they are made. They take up a call to participate in the making of a country. History is often written and rewritten with new beginnings, shaped by wars and victories, and by societies who often assert that they desire peace and community contributions. Abel's narrative rejects history writing as a project aimed at developing a linear narrative to the present. Abel's present history and contemporary development of a revised USonian definition through Kennedy's character descriptions portrays Abel's current moment and self as historically relevant to US development. History happens within his character, and his character is part of history.

These works are particularly demonstrative of ways USonian definition develops as inclusive of gender and ethnicity without dismissing those identity factors. The re-naming of the self produces seemingly paradoxical requirements of national belonging. In both Maryna and Abel's renaming cases, on the surface, they suggest that others (a manager and an immigration

official, respectively) control Maryna and Abel's USonian selves. However, upon closer readings of the situations, Maryna and Abel participate in acquiring new names that are very relevant to them. Maryna negotiates her new name with her manager, Mr. Barton. He calls her "Madame Zalenska," a last name Maryna derived to refute the claims her first husband might have felt he still had on her or her income (Sontag 252). She retorts "Call me Madame Maryna" (Sontag 252). They also bargain over her first name, finally settling on Marina. She at first objects because Mr. Barton's preferred name is her "Russian" name (Sontag 252). However, she acquiesces when Barton asserts that audiences will think it is Italian and pronounce it like a purr (a vocalization of a pleasing state invoked by another). Maryna becomes a character whose name represents her as a person of many nations claimed by the place of many nations. Abel's name develops in a different manner, but still engenders some of the same concerns about agency and ownership of one's name and identity. The meaning of his first Polish name given by his adoptive family is never really expanded upon except to say, "They would have called him Harlequin if they had known what it meant" (16); instead the family agrees upon Wladek. He lives with and uses this name until he immigrates to the US. When he is being processed Wladek is asked his name, but finds himself speechless. The officer, grabbing Wladek's arm, finds his adoptive father's (the Baron's) bracelet around his wrist and names him Abel (after Baron Abel Rosnovski) (158-59). Abel receives a name which he feels is much more suitable to his life story and identity. Furthermore, both immigrants develop new names along with new careers and identities within the US. On the surface, Maryna and Abel's renaming comes from others. Closer analyses reveal their participation in the process and in developing the new name as a reflection of their self-motivated identity constructions. The self-aware self-constructions of USonians

necessitate more diverse avenues of individual and community development. They participate in becoming members of the country and also influence the country.

Sexuality & US Nationality

In her recent enlightening study of the self-made man (and woman) in American literature, Mary Carden draws attention to narratives neglected because they deviate from traditional self-made rhetoric. She explains that the idea of a repeated version of the self-made man is problematic because within repetition there will always be variance. In other words, promoting the self-made man as an individual who does or says a particular set of behaviors is a flawed concept. Carden explains:

> So much of American literature is haunted, inhabited, or otherwise bedeviled by the self-made man in his incarnation as patriarch and owner, founder and father. Because his story comes to Americans every day in virtually all the spaces and places of the nation, we need what this literature provides: ways of negotiating his demands. (46)

Carden establishes the tradition of the self-made man in literature. She extends beyond observing the pattern of self-making in US literature. She explains that it changes, that self-making identities and rules need negotiating. The self-made man appears in different ways in much of USonian literature and culture. Since he appears in diverse circumstances, Carden calls for a deeper examination of ways in which self-made (wo)men and self-made rhetoric fulfill its requirements. To add to her desire for more in-depth analyses and diverse recognitions of successful versions of self-making, I propose there is also a need to acknowledge meaningful acts of self-making that deviate from self-made rhetoric. As previous sections indicate, gender and nationality deserve reconsideration for their ability to participate in and foster self-making in

USonian circles. Another oft-ignored tool of self-making arises in these USonian texts: Sexuality.

Sexuality is a concern for the major characters in both these novels. Perhaps more importantly, they are representative of a larger trend in US literature since the turn of the century. Furthermore, these concerns arise in many of the canonical selections of today ranging from Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, to James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, to Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*. Judith Butler explains this social trend, which manifests in literary writing:

> The forming, crafting, bearing, circulation, signification of that sexed body . . . will be a set of actions mobilized by the law, the citational accumulation and dissimulation of the law that produces material effects, the lived necessity of those effects as well as the lived contestation of that necessity. (12-13)

The privileging of concerns of sexuality emphasizes heterosexuality and its place as a norm in US society, historically. However, as Butler points out here, attention to surfacings of homo –sexuality and –sociality highlight opposition to heteronormativity. Importantly, these incidences promote ideas of diversity and alternate success stories in US circles. These concerns fit well with self-made models as William and Abel experience them as rites of passage. Alterations begin to occur when Florentyna uses the same trope, but instead of it gently gliding her into adulthood, she receives a slap and a harsh shove into independence. Maryna and Bogdan both experience sexual awakenings that position the US as the space for such revelations to occur. Taken together these samples demonstrate the importance of sexuality, despite its neglect, to self-making rhetoric.

Sexuality, in a most unconventional manner, is a significant part of self-making. Abel literally takes lessons to hone his skills in bed. While one partner admits to being flattered and

courted well, she comments, “in bed, I can tell you, you are nothing” (Archer 178). Abel has been feeling quite pleased with himself: making money on the stock market, getting a Bachelor’s degree from Columbia University, and working on developing his career. However, his lover’s comment is quite a blow to his ego. He wanders the streets trying to decipher how to remedy his failing. Eventually he finds a prostitute, and they agree to conduct “lessons” (Archer 180). Abel’s criterion for completing the course is, as the prostitute (Joyce) puts it, “If you can make me come, you can make an Egyptian mummy come” (Archer 180). She propositions Abel with a literal sexual awakening for her, as well as a sexual awakening of sorts for himself. While Abel has already slept with at least two women, he has not really pleased them. In learning to do so, Abel will awaken a sexual self, one concerned with the pleasure of others (as opposed to the traditionally self-gratifying masculine sexual self). After three weeks of lessons Abel feels Joyce “suddenly come alive in his arms” and at the close of their intimacy she tells him, “Baby, you just graduated top of the class” (Archer 180-81). Joyce does not validate Abel’s masculinity. Her actions and exclamation explain that Abel is capable of providing sexual pleasure to a woman. He is capable of giving, nurturing intimacy, and pleasing: traditionally female coded behaviors. Confirmation of Abel’s sexual prowess comes from his skill at giving pleasure to women, not his ability to take from them.

A sexual rites of passage as part of the self-made trope appears again in William Kane's narrative. Initially William attempts to seduce a girl of his own age and class ranking, but she rebuffs him (Archer 168). In order to become a man officially, he gets lessons of his own. The schoolmaster ("Grumpy" Raglan) leaves to attend a conference. During his departure, William encounters Raglan's wife while doing his duties as house captain. At first, William attempts to perform his job and then return to his bed. Mrs. Raglan, however, has other plans. William,

throughout his lessons, decides he has a goal to achieve when it comes to pleasing Mrs. Raglan. After immediately climaxing at their first encounter William vows he will do better next time. The next night "she sighed. On Wednesday she panted. On Thursday she moaned. On Friday she cried out" (Archer 171). In the space of a business week, William moves from a sexually curious young man to a man who is sexually educated enough to please, not just take, a woman. Just like Abel, his sexual self-making does not depend upon his ability to seduce or participate in intercourse with a woman. Both characters do so, but they both strive to accomplish more than sexual self-gratification in their encounters. In order to be successfully constructed sexually awakened individuals, Abel and William must be capable of pleasing partners. William's lessons take less time. However, his narrative follows a similar trajectory to Abel's, as they both find their sexual selves through intimacy with more experienced women. These narratives clash greatly with preconceived notions of self-made men who easily find success in any endeavor they participate in. Providing another model for readers to identify with as they see characters overcome intimate challenges in gender-bending manners.

Abel’s, Kane’s, and Florentyna's sexual selves as USonians highlight historical changes of the authors and their audiences. Archer's audiences of the '70s-'00s and Sontag's readers of the '00s are privy to decenterings of masculine and heteronormative dominated models of sexuality. The Jazz, Beatnik, and free love movements promoted more sensitive and sensual versions of masculinity as models of successful lovers. Michael Kimmel’s analysis of the Hippie movement in the US shows how viewing Abel (and the others’) sexual rites of passage in alternative interpretations foster new self-making models. Kimmel asserts that Hippies were rejecting masculine conceptions of success (174). What they were doing was developing their own versions of fulfilling lifestyles and alternate criteria for success. Kimmel explains with “their

long hair and flowing, feminine clothes, hippies rejected the corporate clone as a model for manhood" (174). Hippies looked for ways to self-make through androgyny and moved to accept a more sensitive version of masculinity. This movement possesses a similar goal to the prioritizing of sexuality as a means of self-making. Both reconsider, as Abel's case demonstrates, what it means to "be a man," or more importantly to be a "man successfully." Being a USonian self-made man no longer means one is required to be economically successful. These versions of self-making require sexual awakenings as a part of the process of self-realization. Doing so revises traditional narratives of US success and self-development. Furthermore, Hippies and these new self-making models denied the idea of chaste females as a precursor for a desirable partner. USonians embraced communities and lifestyles that simultaneously shaped US communities themselves. This model of self-making refers back to Maryna's and Abel's claiming of US identities by having others affirm it for them. The sexual acts of Abel and Kane make them successful self-making models when their partners literally express their satisfaction with the transaction.

Kane and Abel emphasizes this trope as an important element of self-making when it crosses gender lines and Florentyna unabashedly participates in it. In terms of self-making Florentyna, like William and Abel, is at a pivotal point in her success story. She is just about to finish her self-making experience at Bloomingdale's and begin taking over the management of the stores in the Baron Hotel chains. However, she must reveal her relationship with Richard Kane to her father if it is to continue. When she does, one of Abel's questions is "Have you ever slept with him?" (Archer 417) He asks an extremely personal, and unless Florentyna were pregnant, seemingly irrelevant question. However, Florentyna boldly addresses Abel's inquiry, "Yes. . .Many times" (Archer 417). Her response invokes her father's rage. However, in the

context of self-making with sexual awakening as part of its criteria, Florentyna's reply asserts her agency and participation in an approved self-creation model.

Florentyna's case subverts a point Wilkinson articulates as foundational in self-made rhetoric and US nationalism. He explains, "*men* used their culture's notions of toughness and strength to define their masculinity vis-à-vis women. Yet, from an early point in their history. . . *Americans* as a whole used the same notions to define their national identity" (*American Tough: The Tough Guy Tradition and American Culture*, 8). Wilkinson articulates the traditional interpretation of masculinity and US national identity as male coded/centered and responsibility centered. However, as Abel, William, and Florentyna's cases demonstrate such definitions are due to perceptions and interpretations. Self-making and US nationality are coded as masculine because what has been prioritized is male situations and conclusions developed with masculine-centered perspectives. Wilkinson's work portrays the masculine based discourse which traditionally encodes US identity. Abel's, William's, and Florentyna's encounters could easily be read as promoting masculine agency and assertiveness: Abel becomes capable of sexual conquests, William subverts his school master's authority by sleeping with his wife, and Abel dominates Florentyna by demanding knowledge of her sexual history. However, other interpretations offer different conclusions: Abel learns to please females; William is sexually awakened by an older, more capable female; and Florentyna asserts her sexuality and agency. Reconsidering self-making and US nationality within these frameworks promotes a more inclusive version of both identity categories.

While there is the potential for misinterpretations of my readings as a simplification: these demographics perform hegemonic, white, patriarchical activities too. That would be an unjustified interpretation. Instead, what I am offering is more of a call to stop restrictively

defining categories to consider how different subsets might 'do' USonian. US national discourse promotes diversity in its cultural tropes rather than being a "construction of a discourse on society that *performs* the problem of totalizing the people and unifying national will" (Bhabha 160-61). A variety of characters originating from various nations and of different degrees of genders and sexual orientations (as the next examples will show) provides places for various demographics to participate in constructing the US national narrative in diverse ways. More importantly, these literary and cultural figures provide places for empathetic recognition for readers and audiences. Inclusion of these representatives parallels the influence of those community subgroups in US nationality.

For example, Maryna discusses her homosexual attraction and her connection with the space of the US. Maryna's comments pertaining to Miss Collingridge reflect her notions of USonian openness. Maryna writes to Henryk:

> The first *coup de foudre* I have experienced after a whole year in America is for a bossy, hoydenish girl who wears silly hats and shapeless serge capes and tells me that she keeps, for a household pet, a full-grown young pig. But you already know how I can be seduced by a mellifluous voice. (Sontag 233)

Maryna's first attraction in America is a young lady. While surface analyses will cry "She's a man!" as with Eliza's character earlier, Miss Collingridge is also alternately feminine. She domesticates a pig (pigs were common livestock at the time in America, but not as domesticated house pets). Furthermore, Maryna describes Miss Collingridge's character first, but closes by what the attraction is: her "mellifluous voice." In addition to being attracted to Miss Collingridge's voice, Maryna explains that this is a distinctly US experience for her through her description of Miss Collingridge as similar to a ghal (a female role akin to the New Woman of

the 1920s), but her pet pig and focus on enunciation keep her from that classification while still qualifying her as a USonian. Also, Maryna confesses that her attraction is occurring in the US (and has not nor does anything similar occur for her anywhere else). Maryna's sexuality becomes significant in US social circumstances. Similar to Abel, William, and Florentyna's experiences, Maryna's sexual inquiries are crucial moments of self -exploration and -creation. If sexual and sensual selves are ignored (as traditional self-making tropes do) key elements and communities of USonian self-making and self-makers are excluded in models of self-development. Furthermore, on a national scale, there are rejections of certain minorities and demographics as participants in self-making models. Denials of various US communities results in a silencing of USonian identities when self-made rhetoric stays defined in narrowly conservative ways.

Evolutions of the USonian Self-Maker

Abel's, William's, Florentyna's, and Maryna's narratives question the validity of overarching white, masculine, native-born US narratives. Even the modified business-centered pioneer narratives and the youth who falls into the hands of a benefactor are challenged by these characters, who question traditional power structures and identity categories. The decentering work of masculinist and heteronormative models of approved social interactions invites differing models of success and self-making to develop as particularly USonian. Perhaps the most significant shift in thought these stories provoke is to move from what Jim Cullen observes as "the self-made man represent[ing] a heroic ideal" to instead representing everyday US life and its citizens (12). While original conceptions of the self-made man were rather exclusionary and his narrative arc to success was largely predetermined, today's self-makers are diverse and find their way to successful self-construction in a variety of ways.

The self-made man has been evolving to reflect more fully the various minoritized identity groups the US now recognizes. Women, immigrants, and non-heteronormative individuals participate in and influence narratives of US self-making. USonian culture has responded by including their stories and recognizing alternate narratives of success as valid and useful. Huntington's earlier comment about the need for US politics to "make American reality reflect American principles" also applies to literature (147). Fiction does not need to articulate US realities. However, when it presents model citizens the “cultural work” (Tompkins) those pieces are doing deserves recognition.

Appearances of Fabulous Ordinariness in US Self-Making

Mass consumed culture addresses stereotypes and characteristics of US nationality. Twain’s proto-realist and regionalist (although arguably USonian) pieces articulate trends of self-made men. They feature characters that think unconventionally, interact with and result from their communities. As Couser’s work emphasizes, Twain’s narratives do not just develop literary characters. Instead, these stories feature representative characters who participate in plot points highlighting USonian daily occurrences. Rourke observes, “The Americans had in fact emerged as a theatrical race” (106). The active participation in construction and representation of the people (including minorities) by these pieces ranging from Tom Sawyer's cross-dressing, to Maryna's intelligence, to Abel's sensuality emphasizes the character’s commonality with US citizens (their ordinariness). They behave, perhaps, in exaggerated ways. However, the predictability of their actions is not expected. These stories involve audiences, the characters are intelligent, and they are representative of US notions of strength. Furthermore, their actions emphasize the act of self-performance by attending to the idea of other performance (their fabulous reinventions of selves and others). The performance of others promotes deviance from

norming notions and exclusive power structures. These narratives display how historically manipulated self-making (fabulous) traits extend and alter original models of self-made men (ordinary). Such changes manifesting in somewhat familiar models of self-makers draw attention to the need to expand self-made rhetoric to recognize the rapidly developing variety of US citizens.

Minnie, from *In America*, straddles the line between masculine self-making and feminine coded successes to develop more ambivalent paths of self-making which various USonians can identify with. Her character finds ways to represent both masculine and feminine coded success tropes (thereby invoking a paradoxical universal representativeness reflective of US democratic ideologies). Judith/Jack Halberstam in *Female Masculinity* articulates the problem with gendered perceptions of reality:

> If gender has been so thoroughly defamiliarized . . . why do we not have multiple gender options, multiple gender categories, and real-life nonmale and female options for embodiment and identification? In a way, gender's very flexibility and seeming fluidity is precisely what allows dimorphic gender to hold sway. (20)

One continuing problem with gendered reality, as Halberstam emphasized, is that it becomes self-perpetuating. One's gender exists because s/he reads the world as a gendered entity. There is nothing explicitly wrong with that until the conclusion of this dynamic arises. Because our categorization of the world derives from connotations associated with genders and gendered behavior, our categories become essentialisms. To depart from Halberstam's insightful analyses, though, the solution to such a conundrum is not necessarily to change the perceptive abilities or categorization culture of society. Instead, it may be more beneficial, as in the cases so far with Minnie, Eliza, and the grandmothers, to see the ambiguity their behaviors and roles introduce

rather than viewing them as departures or alignments with particular categories. Eliza is "a man!" because characters (and readers) choose to view her that way; Minnie is not because characters (and readers) make allowances since she is in a serving industry. Their fabulous ordinariness (by being recognizably deviant/fabulous or categorical/ordinary) is what distinguishes and sets these figures apart enough to be remarkable. They broach familiarity while keeping it at arm's length. Doing so produces characters that are complex enough to require deeper analyses but common enough for readers to empathize and identify with.

Different factors, such as national context, local settings, and time periods of production/reception affect the reactions of audiences to the experiences of these female characters. Eliza's manliness considered against the time period of the plotline, as well as that of the novel's reception, invokes notions of change and alternative interpretations of her behavior. The same is true in considering Minnie's entrepreneurship and Florentyna's rejection of traditional self-making tropes. Their behaviors alone (Eliza's independence, Minnie's partnership with her husband, and Florentyna's love-based behaviors) would normally promote conceptions of these characters as masculine, co-dependent, and sentimental respectively. However, read within an era where women's liberation, female CEO's, and decentering of masculinist versions of success occur, these events do not need to be extremist stories, nor do their characters need to be seen as exceptional incidences of US character. Instead, fabulous ordinariness emphasizes the normalcy of their situations (ordinariness) and the changes that self-making conceptions (fabulousness) require to appropriately reflect reality. The originally radical elements of these characters' interactions juxtaposed with contemporary acceptance of those situations reflect the malleability of USonian definitions and the problematics of a singular, sanctified history.

The balance between individuality and communal belonging is found in the renaming rituals that Maryna and Abel participate in, as discussed earlier, similar to the individual and communal concerns addressed by female characters renaming develops a distinguishable yet common US environment and self. As Judith Butler notes, a name of address is intended to "ha[ve] a generality and a historicity that is in no sense radically singular, even though it is understood to exercise the power of conferring singularity" (Butler 29). Names are individual, yet characteristic of their original language or ethnicity.

Perhaps more important to consider might be the reactions that occur upon hearing distinctly American, English, Polish, Russian, etc. names and the judgments that are made based on the name. The connection between an individual possessing a name and the name possessing the individual is very reminiscent of experiences of developing USonian identity. Characters display the fabulous ordinariness experienced by readers as they claim distinct, yet representative names. In contrast with Abel and Maryna's name changes as potentially stimulated by others, Jessie/Florentyna adopts her name based on her own motivation. Furthermore, she consciously chooses a name befitting of the environment she will be entering. Maryna and Abel's names explicitly link them to their pasts: Maryna's in her protests to its Russian roots and Abel's in its connection to the oppression and decimation of the Polish hierarchical system. Florentyna adopts a name to *exclude* her from her original environment while Maryna and Abel's are adopted to negotiate Polish and American identities. Most importantly, Jessie, as a name, is intended to *include* her in a working-class Polish-American community. She develops identities that include elements of both her upper class and working class circles. Her difficulty in navigating those dual identities reflects challenges of USonian identities as they engage a variety of social circles, historical legacies, and contemporary circumstances. The Florentyna/Jessie name change is

probably the best example of fabulous ordinariness working through renaming. Florentyna adopts the name Jessie Kovats during her employment at Bloomingdale's (Archer 400). While she develops an identity associated with that name, it is important to observe that she does not create it as an alter ego. Jessie lives in a high-end apartment (not dwelling with her parents as a working girl would have been likely to do). Furthermore, she fails to keep a straight story pertaining to her background when first courting Richard Kane. If Jessie was a completely separate identity from Florentyna then Jessie would have a fully developed lifestyle and history. However, the blendings of Florentyna's character with Jessie's shows the complex ways that USonians perform variants of their selves in differing circumstances.

The significance of such a multi-faceted self is that Florentyna demonstrates complex USonian character development. She is first-generation rather than immigrated. Since she uses similarly complicated methods of self-development as Abel and Maryna through renaming, she demonstrates that these immigrants do possess and enact USonian traits. Florentyna's navigation of USonian identity provides the most relational example of US character of these texts (and therefore the strongest development of fabulous ordinariness). Her character demonstrates within text fabulous ordinariness by identifying and belonging to various communities through name, social/occupational skills, and appearance/fashion. In US circles, these identity traits have likely served as markers of community in- or ex- clusion for many readers (they're ordinary and familiar). These characters harbor individual names and identities, yet they claim and receive US identities through their renamings (however, Florentyna's use of these ordinary identity makers is fabulous). In the same way that the behaviors of Abel, Florentyna, and Maryna demonstrate this paradox of US nationalism and fabulous ordinariness, their adoption of names as distinctive and yet of belonging to the US repeat it.

Even as cases such as these refute them, stereotypes play an important role in constructing how citizens develop themselves and view others. These characters perform common behaviors such as engaging in familial conflicts, attempting to fit into social circles, and being subject to political circumstances, all situations with which US readers can identify. As Halberstam explained earlier, categorization is key to understanding and relating to reality. Stereotypes and catagorizations are how these characters model reasoning and coping with various situations. People and characters are not essentialized stereotypes, but sometimes those roles foster communal ties, expections of representatives, and/or useful individualism. For example, Eliza, in *In America*, deals with her life circumstances and others' reactions to them by becoming a storyteller. Eliza balances some of the comments and biased perceptions about her lifestyle by telling Maryna and her family about Miss Eulalia who has lived to be one hundred and twenty-five (Sontag 192-93). The point of the story comes about when Ryzsard says, "She just doesn't know how to die." Eliza responds, "An inspiration to us all" (Sontag 193). While Eliza's adventurous and somewhat eccentric lifestyle results in judgments about her gender, this story and the characters' reflections on it temper that. They emphasize that the lifestyle Eliza lives should be inspirational for its "in the moment" traits. However, it should not be seen as masculine, this story suggests instead that Eliza's lifestyle should be judged similar to Miss Eulalia's life, an inspiration to males and females.

Erving Goffman in his work on discourse communities theorizes on the social contexts that permit such connections between one's life circumstances and a more accepted set of conditions. He offers this concept:

> A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing, to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well

> articulated. Performed with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good faith, it is none the less something that must be enacted and portrayed, something that must be realized. (Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* 75)

The position or status Eliza holds develops not from herself alone but from her actions along with the contexts she lives in. The positions of others (such as Maryna, Ryszard, etc.) around Eliza are as deterministic on Eliza's relative status as her "objective" being is. Eliza's storytelling attempts to moderate what some perceive as shocking and masculine, also characterized traditionally as distinctly USonian personality traits. The way that Eliza manipulates the situation, by storytelling, harkens back to US conventions of storytelling to construct, cope with, and challenge social circumstances (demonstrated in Twain's writing). Such reality management is especially USonian and effectively enacted in light of Hayden White's conception of overlaps between narratives and histories. It is in this way that fabulous ordinariness arises. Readers and characters bridge the gap that separates fictional reality from historical society as it encompasses ways that readers know and engage reality. Furthermore, reaching back to comments on American autobiography, USonians know and understand their realities through stories. In this moment, Eliza provides an opportunity for the characters around her, as well as her readers to more fully comprehend their realities.

Self-presentation becomes a key element of the comprehension of reality and consideration in determining one's Americanness. Florentyna finds her identity as a USonian through self-presentation in the form of appearance concerns. She identifies with USonians, particularly in terms of fashion. On her first European trip, she is concerned that she will wear clothes that will mark her as USonian. Abel concurs and tells her, "You'll stick out, all right, my darling—anyone would with your taste" (Archer 380). Abel views Florentyna just as he sees

himself. They are part of the US community, yet still individually exceptional. Florentyna has US tastes, but, according to Abel, they are different enough to be remarkable. This is one of the best demonstrations of USonian communal yet independent identity. Goffman describes such circumstances. In evaluating self- and community performance, he writes, there is an expectation of "a confirming consistency between appearance and manner" (Goffman, *Presentation* 24). What one manifests in presentation and performance should align with how one identifies and how the self/community perceives him or her. Florentyna's style confirms her communal membership since, even if Florentyna possesses distinct tastes, she does demonstrate US preferences. Perhaps most significant is the way Florentyna's anxiety embodies concerns of socialization, particularly as USonians experience them. What is important, as Goffman points out, is not just how one looks nor solely one's behavior and thought processes. Instead, the combination becomes crucial to self- and other constructed perceptions. While readers may not be venturing to Paris or Britain to rub elbows with elite crowds, most may be capable of finding recognizable anxieties in this moment of fabulous ordinariness. The experience of being an outsider, of not belonging, to an extent of being an immigrant (a native of one community entering another), finds expression in Florentyna's anxieties. Her fears are ones that many have encountered in one way or another. In addition to presenting the flexible nature of self-creation within a community, this incident also negotiates the ways recognition networks are developed.

Maryna's story of becoming a USonian demonstrates a balance between self-made identity and imposed norms. Maryna's audience first affirms her US identity. One admirer writes a poem to Maryna directing her to "*Keep Polish memories in your heart alone,/America now claims you for her own*" (267). American audience members then, despite Maryna's actions, her performances of pieces from other nationalities, and the personal history she provides, claim that

she is American. Throughout the rest of the poem, the traits that mark Maryna as USonian are her work as an artist and her success. Such criteria reinvoke the paradox of individuality with the repetitious mimicry required by performance. Rather than the traditional value of performance landing in the originality of the created self (an artwork), Maryna's repetitious performances of stereotypes are praised. However, as Minnie's comment that Maryna makes one "feel" how her characters do, her performances are paradoxically not reenactments of roles. Instead, the combination of repeated roles with Maryna's influence of her individuality on them is prized. In USonian circles where Maryna's effect develops from her characters' situations, actions, and reactions, her performances foster audience connections with emotional states. Doing so prioritizes human experience over social constraints.

The balance between the other- and self- affirmed nature of identity manifests a few pages later for Maryna as her friends prompt her to give a toast. She raises her glass, calling for health, "To my new country!" (276). While among her native countrymen and new countrymen, Maryna verbally affirms her US identity. Not only does she belong to the US, as the previously mentioned poet asserts, but Maryna also claims the US as her own. Maryna's case is particularly important as it shows not only an immigrant claiming affiliation with US identity, but also displays the nation identifying with an immigrant. She never gives up her foreign identity. Even as she possesses a USonian identity, her name is intentionally foreign and Miss Collingridge as well as Maryna's theatrical reviews assess her continuing accent as endearing and charming. Accommodation occurs in some ways, but assimilation is never complete. Maryna takes US identity and forces it to be as flexible as it claims to be. Maryna's asserting an identity and being claimed by US citizens reflects the way nationality works on a larger scale. As one sociological study examining US nationhood asserts:

> This ability to recreate and refashion one's identity many times over is arguably at its extreme in contemporary American society. . . This refashioning of identity goes hand-in-hand with the modern desire for authenticity and external recognition--finding one's true self and having it acknowledged by others. (Huddy 138-39)

One can choose to identify in a particular way and as long as society recognizes it, then it is a sanctified identity. In Maryna's case, she is first recognized then claims US identity for herself. She enacts US traits, as do Abel and Florentyna, but most importantly, the US claims her for its own. Maryna becomes USonian by fulfilling characteristics, being named American, and calling for the US to be hers. She becomes USonian, but in doing so she also requires USonian identity to do what its ideologies promote.

Each of these characters enact fabulous ordinariness as a practice of the experience of US nationality. The ways US nationhood develops here is intentionally vague. In part that is due to the US's "[p]ublic opinion [, which] endorses the importance of a common national identity without insisting on a forced march to cultural conformity" (Citrin et al. 82). Based upon this sociological observation, as long as those determining who belongs to a particular nationality are open-minded, a nation (here the US) could be extremely diverse. The similar experiences these immigrants encounter of communal belonging and assertions of agency reflect a balance that must be struck to uphold a consistent idea of a nation without complicit self-surrender.

Fabulous ordinariness occurs individually in the earlier example of Kennedy's speech to represent how USonians engage with and develop history by intertwining it with the self and one's perceptions of reality. In Huntington's sociological study of America, he explains how these traits and circumstances are uniquely USonian. This era developed USonians and

Americanness by creating "The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 [to] expressly . . . make American reality reflect American principles" (Huntington 147). US notions of equality and opportunity, as well as democracy, were concerns during this era because of the "war" and "bitter peace" that US citizens had been enduring. The changes occurring at the time reflected by the President's inaugural speech (historically and in this fiction) worked to highlight what a USonian was and how to become one. Kimmel, in his work on the development and adaptations of US masculinity, takes Huntington's claim to a potential logical historical end. Kimmel explains, "the women's movement, the civil rights movement, and the gay liberation movement--all offered scathing critiques of traditional masculinity and demanded inclusion and equality in the public arena" (179). He then concludes by asserting, "No longer could the marketplace and the political arena be the preserve of heterosexual white men. The very groups who had been so long excluded from American life were making their own claims for identity. And for manhood" (Kimmel 179). Because these war-torn and strained peaceful citizens could claim universal experiences and community contributions (i.e. many ethnicities fought in US wars on our "side"), they felt, as Kimmel claims, entitled to socially recognized agency. Kimmel's comment that these various communities sought recognition of their "manhood" is not necessarily accurate. The earlier case of critiques concerning Eliza's character and Hillary Clinton's identity reflects how a masculine codification of types of success may not be desired in feminine versions of success. Instead, the experience of connection, of identification, and belonging could be privileged more usefully. This is illustrated in Abel's reflection on the emotions evoked by Kennedy's speech when Abel establishes his feelings as universal, and yet, as belonging particularly to him.

While many nations strive to enforce conformity, the US has always engaged the paradoxes inherent in *e pluribus unum* in a variety of ways. These characters demonstrate US characteristics as often paradoxical in connecting individuals with communities and having representative individuals as members of communities. Furthermore, the acts and theory on names and languages reflect the language and name changes some of these immigrants encounter in self-constructing ways. The manners these tropes engage reflect ways that fabulous ordinariness is inherently a trait of USonian texts and livelihoods. The individual is part of a community and distinct. Readers are contained within texts, without actually appearing in them. Christopher Looby in his book *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States* reflects on the importance of language in US environments:

> In America, by contrast, racial and ethnic diversity, religious heterogeneity, population dispersal, geographical unboundedness, practical innovation, and exile from historical precedent all contributed to problematize (if not demolish) traditional notions of nationality. Language, and languages, remained to negotiate the differences and establish a minimum of social connection. (14)

Language is a necessary glue for US self-construction. While it is not the only common denominator, it is a tool used often and, as these texts begin to show, by many. In addition, as Saussure's linguistic model demonstrates, language is an arbitrary system to communicate and recognize realities. This results in an inexact way to comprehend and negotiate selves and social circles. It allows for ambiguous connections with others as well as for vague definitions of communities. The paradox enacted by self-making immigrating USonians, while specific to those minorities, can also be generalized to all those who use that language or identify as that

particular nationality. Fabulous ordinariness, then, is part of how US natives and immigrants experience similar nationhoods.

Immigration and gender push US nationality to reconsider processes of self-making, sexual awakenings, sensual development, and sexual awareness. Furthermore, they question normed models of US self-making. The sexual awakenings Abel, William, and Florentyna experience relate to a larger trope of sexual awareness as part of a self-developing USonian model. Maryna and her husband, Bogdan, provide models of sexual awareness in a non-heteronormative manner. These characters, perhaps most importantly, recognize their feelings as distinctly USonian. Bogdan explains his distinctly USonian associations with his sexual "deviance." He writes about it in his journal, "This is America, where nothing is permanent. Nothing supposed to have fixed, unalterable consequences. Everything supposed to move, change, be torn down, mix" (Sontag 210). Bogdan explores his hetero- and homo- sexual desires, which are a crucial element of his self-formation. He sees this part of himself as permanent, yet fleeting. He codes his sexual self in similar ways to his self as a USonian. As Maryna's claiming of US identity displays it is as important to feel belonging as it is for a community to claim the individual. Bogdan puts her thought into practice observing the lack of a consequence for his social variance as distinctly USonian. His preferences do not impact his masculinity in the US in the same ways it would have in Poland. Furthermore, Maryna later makes a metatextual comment to highlight the fabulous ordinariness these characters contain for readers in regards to their sexual explorations as well as to their experiences in general. During a discussion of a play Bogdan and Maryna debate whether it should end in a divorce or a continued marriage. Maryna asks Bogdan if he thinks about life without their marriage to which he replies that he thought they were discussing the play. Maryna in turn retorts "we're always talking about ourselves when

we talk of anything else" (Sontag 363). Maryna and Bogdan's discussion applies to artists and intellectuals as well as readers.

What Maryna really explicates here though is the connection between art and reality. However, in light of new historical and cultural studies, the connection between art and life holds its own as an argument here. Shannon Jackson's history of theatre and its connections to other disciplines draws attention to the same artistic critiques in *Professing Performance: Performance in the Academy from Philology to Performativity*. She explains that much art often comments on and critiques in creative ways its cultural and social situations, often without needing to be explicit in its assertions (116). Sontag's creative critique and Jackson's theoretical analysis display how social critiques and connections manifest through art in meaningful ways for audiences. Fabulous ordinariness is enacted within the text as it was earlier in Maryna and Abel's renamings. Bogdan's exploration of sexuality as distinctly USonian shows his self-creation as part of US national narratives, self-making, and representative of larger cultural conditions.

In post-Civil War America, Twain's writings were influential in establishing who USonians were: what did they desire? Tom wanted action and wealth, Jim wanted freedom, and Huck wanted to be a good man. Universal ideals are noticeable in his characters and fabulous ordinariness came about through their interactions with each other and the world. Their moments of exasperation, friendship, and self-reflection invited readers to identify with them and model their thought processes in similar patterns. The works of Archer and Sontag ask USonians to repeat the same process while reconsidering how US citizens are made, recognize, and support one another. Authors invite readers to see their own self-awareness and individuality in communally national ways. Reality is translated into a text while that textual construction reinvents reality.

Conclusion

> *. . . one apprehends reality only through*
> *representations of reality, through texts,*
> *discourse, images; there is no such thing*
> *as unmediated access to reality. (Dyer, 3)*

Literature, particularly historical fiction, creates representations of reality. These representations are part of the way readers know and cope with their worlds. It is part of what makes fabulous ordinariness work. Recognizable places and spaces appear as characters establish careers, claim US nationality, and explore emotions and sexualities. Figures such as William Kane, Abel, Florentyna, Maryna, and Bogdan represent common ways USonians negotiate identities varying from the development of identity with names to the realization of the self in decentered norms of sexuality. The idea of fabulous ordinariness is ingrained in US self-perceptions: How is one like others and how is one special? Maryna's and Abel's stories specifically demonstrate samples of self- and communal identification through the USonian paradox of collective individualism. The US is a nation of self-constructed, individualistic citizens who believe in an equal opportunity environment where people can transform themselves at will. Abel, Maryna, William, Florentyna, and the many other characters analyzed here draw attention to the various ways US citizens construct their identities. They use paradoxical tropes such as communal individualism, which is recognized as a useful identification tool for USonians in studies of American (auto)biographies (Casper 210; see also the work of Paul John Eakin). As such, many of these pieces push against masculinist associations with original versions of self-making. Female characters in both texts self-make in ways that are not binary oppositions to masculine self-formations. Furthermore, they emphasize

the democratic perspective of self-making in the US. Self-making, in a nation that supports variety, needs to promote diversity. Literature features US national characters who are mirrors of its citizens. The realities these characters engage with can no longer be ignored as the workings of an individual's imagination. Instead, models of citizenship and the criteria of successful personhood require continual revision with these cultural representations in mind.

CHAPTER TWO

RECKONING ROLE MODELS AND COMMUNAL IDENTITIES IN PHILIP ROTH'S TEXTS

"You aim," Mr. Cucuzza explained to my father,
using a thumb to demonstrate, "and uhyou
shoot. You aim and uhyou shoot and that's it."
-Philip Roth, The Plot Against America, 180

Introduction

Chapter Overview & Purpose

In the World-War-II America Philip Roth creates in *The Plot Against America,* Jewish Americans are living in anticipation of being hunted and persecuted in the same ways Hitler was doing in Europe. Jewish families are either fleeing to Canada or being relocated selectively. When an Italian family, the Cucuzzas, moves into one of the vacated apartments next to the young Jewish American character Phillip, the Italian family takes an interest in keeping Philip's family safe. They make this especially apparent during what Roth describes as a US *Kristallnacht*. On this night, Mr. Cucuzza lends Philip's father, Herman, a pistol. Mr. Cucuzza insists that, rather than becoming a victim, Herman arm himself and protect his family. Cucuzza explains his gift (of this pistol) by asserting that he hates fascists, especially Mussolini. By association, then, Cucuzza identifies with Herman in an US/us versus them way. His "us" is defined distinctly by USonian ideals of democracy, inclusion, and community membership (as he protects his community) extending definitions of the USonian self-made man. Cucuzza, Herman, and the non-anti-semitic USonians (like the Mawhinny farming family Phil's brother spends the summer with as part of an "occupational training" program) create a USonian community that

accepts USonian paradoxes (individuality and community as well as acceptance and difference existing simultaneously in harmony). Despite the text's peaceful resolution of US identity conflict, Mr. Cucuzza's directions to Herman allude to a deeper message in Roth's historical fictions. Roth's creative interrogations "aim and . . . shoot" at USonian myths, exclusions, and characters capable of USonian representation. As Michael Elliot claims, "Roth is offering his readers not therapy, but the wound" (153). Readers are encouraged to examine and reflect on the creation and enactment of USonian identities, particularly the role communal construction and participation plays. Roth's work envisions national and individual conflicts and crises in representative and relatable ways. These representative and communal events enact fabulous ordinariness. Depending on their circumstances, readers are familiar and/or distant from these events and characters. The story contains people who represent daily USonian lives and histories which have resulted in contemporary cultural conditions. Furthermore, Roth's novels explore the pain induced by exclusionary and paradoxical national identities and politics.

The last chapter discussed different classifications of USonians developing through immigration, gender, and sexual identities. When and where one becomes a USonian is one influential factor in considering USonian identifications. These issues also reflect gradations of USonian definitions that were formerly rejected as non-native/alien identities. However, non-native and alien USonians do participate and influence national identity construction and representations. Both texts in Chapters One and Three emphasize that USonian identities are more complicated than traditional white, male exclusionary stereotypes as well as being developed through diverse perceptions of the self and other. US character is highly contested; no one group is the sole owner of US representation. Immigrants and minorities often find themselves marginalized in USonian circles. However, self-making, democratic ideals, and

communal identities, all important elements of USonian models, are not restricted to one particular group or method. Roth's texts look to alter USonian successes such as the Mundys, who achieve success on a national level in a less than ideal American dream, and as Alvin similarly does by becoming a war hero, albeit a one-legged one. Furthermore, to do the work of challenging perceptions of USonian meaning, readers must be capable of finding moments of estrangement (Alvin's wound) as well as empathetic identification. Once premises of USonian characterizations have been shaken, exploring the ways those notions are frustrated is necessary. Two of Philip Roth's novels investigate the ways US identity is constructed and maintained. *The Great American Novel* uses baseball, America's greatest pastime, to question and reimagine what USonian identity means, while in *The Plot Against America,* Roth's characters explore what being a US citizen during WWII and in the 21st century means. These texts interrogate the meaning of USonian belonging within historical moments by rewriting those events. Reinventing USonian history draws attention to differences and similarities between ideologies. The focus on national history is just as prominent as the growth of today's US community. These pieces serve as significant records of USonian belonging, rejection, and the fluidity between the two.

Roth's works examine two different and equally defining US structures: World War II and baseball. In *The Plot Against America,* Roth writes the story of Philip, a pre-adolescent Jewish boy in WWII America where Charles Lindbergh (a Nazi sympathizer) has become president. Roth traces the effects of the war on Herman and Bessie (Phil's parents) as well as Sandy (Phil's brother) and Alvin (Phil's cousin/adopted brother). Phil narrates the effects of WWII on Jewish US citizens as a community (Jewish and USonian) and individually. Roth's *The Great American Novel* explores communal and individual tensions. While *The Plot Against America* is centered on more familial and individual concerns of political structures, *The Great*

American Novel explores the impacts of political circumstances (particularly WWII and the Cold War) on US institutions and individuals. This work invites these explorations through various players, such as the "midget" Bob Yamm and transplanted Canadian Frenchy, as they develop and undermine USonian ideals. Furthermore, both works feature depictions of US models and representatives, as well as manipulations of those characters, such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Roth uses this work to question how USonian identity is defined and enacted. Both works question simple depictions of USonians, stock narratives, and enactments of identities textually and in reality.

These novels fictionalize history to reveal how imperfect some USonian ideals such as democracy, brotherhood, and gender equality are. In "Stretching the Truth" Bruce Holsinger, a historical novelist, explains, "Stretching the truth is not the same thing as violating it . . . historical fiction bends the minds of its authors and its readers in strange and unpredictable ways— and therein, I think, lies its greatest reward" (38). Historical fiction is not reporting, but it is also not a strictly imaginary world. As such, useful paradoxes like immigrants (Abel), second generation citizens (Jessie), and Richard Kane representing USonians provide a text that explores self-making without an explicit agenda. Likewise, Roth's experiments with communism and fascism in USonian characters question the US's relationship with those ideologies. Perhaps most importantly, these types of creative intellectual activities inform ways that selves and communities, specifically USonian ones, are both created and perceived without straightforward moralizing or propagandizing an ideology. These historically fictive texts subtly ask the reader to experience the works and allow his/her thought processes to consider deeper meanings of ideological structures and realities. In *The Great American Novel*, notions of individualism and exceptionalism are frustrated. Similarly, in *The Plot Against America* the separation of American

Jews and other US citizens does not neatly occur. Through their creative historical rewritings, these texts display how complicated USonian identities and realities are.

In addition, these novels reflect potential USonian categorizations. Roth's pieces keep some elements of USonian tradition, such as self-making and communal belonging, while still managing to set the reader at a distance, if not offending him or her. He plays with notions of US inclusion and distinction in different ways than works do within the first chapter, yet he still uses the mechanism of fabulous ordinariness to do so. Characters often experience unique and specific moments of trauma and community that could alienate the reader. However, Roth elicits reader recognition by grounding his plots within historically USonian cultural markers. Roth's depictions of characters' emotional reactions to historical and personal events invoke empathetic responses that readers may be able to connect with. His works re-envision the ways US history, culture, and narratives are constructed, used, and understood. Roth's works reflect how US history is "what happens in his house to an ordinary man" (*The Plot* 180).

The Great American Novel and *The Plot Against America* manipulate the idea of USonian culture and history. They focus on varied representatives of USonians and their social behaviors (i.e., these texts implicitly analyze history-altering individuals and communities). Both texts invent and critique portrayals of US icons Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his wife, Eleanor. Traditional and revised examples of self-makers such as baseball players, politicians, and everyday US citizens act as varied models to identify with via fabulous ordinariness. Fabulous ordinariness works in four ways in the novels analyzed in this chapter: 1. As readers identify with characters through similarities in daily life, 2. As characters look to emulate other (representative) characters, 3. As characters recognize diverse USonians as US members, and 4. As characters recognize other characters as more humane than a single role or title can (i.e., a

father is more than just a male parent; he is also a US citizen, a husband, a coworker, etc.). Readers identify with characters via daily life.[1] These novels' characters provide the stimulus for fabulous ordinariness by inviting the reader to feel akin to them. This is similar to characterizations of fabulous ordinariness described in the first chapter. Fabulous ordinariness appears within the stories as the characters identify with other representative USonian figures. Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the Mundys are role models of self-making USonians by main characters. These representative characters produce models for USonians, in addition to these representations, characters show a desire to emulate figures like Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the Mundys. Bob Yamm and his admirers are indicative of this. Fabulous ordinariness appears in the unification of diverse individuals as they hail and recognize one another as members of a similar identity group.[2] The friendship of Herman, Phil's Jewish-USonian father, and Mr. Cucuzza, his Italian-USonian neighbor, provides daily events for readers to establish connections with. This friendship also shows ways that diverse Usonian communities are developed and maintained. Finally, fabulous ordinariness is cultivated as characters identify with one another as USonians within a human community and as human role models. Phil (from *The Plot Against America*) identifies with his father, while Roland (from *The Great American Novel*) feels connected to Franklin Delano Roosevelt at crucial moments of self-development. These situations foster the recognition of others and themselves as human (in terms of mortal, morally motivated beings). In general, fabulous ordinariness appears with a stress on the development of characteristics and representative figures that pattern their behavior on other USonians or demonstrate patterned behavior of the mass of USonians.

[1] The following examples will be expanded in the chapter later.

[2] This method of recognizing one and other is based on Louis Althusser's work on identification within society.

Precedence for Fabulous Ordinariness & USonian Paradoxes

Philip Roth's texts work exceptionally well to demonstrate USonian development. In the same way that Mark Twain's works had similarities to texts and tropes in Chapter One, fabulous ordinariness is developed fictionally in these texts as well. Twain and Roth's works entertain readers through their commentary on social conditions and historical developments. As they directly examine the physical and social environments of the US relative to the central characters, these pieces, perhaps more importantly, reflect on the state of conditions contemporary US reader's experience. These works use fabulous ordinariness to translate personal and individual experiences of characters to nationally representative experiences. As much as Tom, Huck, and Jim's adventures are about a white supremacist, patriarchal society, they are just as much about a subgroup of that society that does not solely reflect that value system.[3] In one of Twain's lesser studied works, *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, Tom Sawyer dismisses the concerns of racism and discrimination as problematic social constructions. As Twain's characters float above Africa and Europe in a hot-air balloon, Tom, Huck, and Jim have a debate concerning discrimination and whether or not God ordains it. Tom concludes the argument, explaining, "this case HERE ain't no discrimination of his, it's man's. The Lord made the day, and he made the night; but he didn't invent the hours, and he didn't distribute them around. Man did that" (Twain 15). Metaphorically, Tom is stating that the distinctions between races (globally, but particularly in the US) are the creation of man. In doing so, rather than

[3] Research considering Huck's ethnicity and the influence of the Sandwich Isles trip on Twain gesture towards contradictions within USonian structures. Twain's concerns about imperialism, his development of regionalism, and his personal experience with class and race social restrictions are explored in useful, and complicated, ways in his buildingsroman characters (developing both US youth stories and US national narratives). See Amy Kaplan "Imperial Triangles: Mark Twain's Foreign Affairs" *Modern Fiction Studies* 43.1 (1997) and Shelley Fisher Fishkin's *Was Huck Black* ? Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1994 for further reading.

essentializing, Tom alludes to the ways that USonians, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or gender, are all equal except for restrictions men (according to Tom, but all humans in my reading) force on each other. Individuals and individualist USonian narratives articulate the experiences of various USonians, as Tom explains here. His assertion alludes to the mechanisms of fabulous ordinariness. The experiences of USonians require diverse representatives to communicate it. However, I have found that they tend to focus on smaller daily events and reflect on quotidian connections rather than distinctions.

Roth's novels present anti-Semitic, often offensively masculine, and largely white-privileged storylines; his work also presents moments where that vision of US society is frustrated. Doing so provides a parallel to the complexities of daily USonian social experiences. In *The Great American Novel*, for instance, the owner of the Tri-City Tycoons (the American League's most successful team), Angela Whittling Trust, asserts her individuality and degradation by professing that she is just a "slit. . . And whoever heard of the President being married to a wayward woman? It isn't done that way in America" (Roth, *The Great* 270). Angela explains how she simultaneously averts and adheres to USonian standards for public women. She appears to be an attentive wife yet she is reputed for her promiscuity. While a publicly good wife, Angela finds gratification in her extramarital exploits. Her wealth protects her from malicious labels outside her home. Her reputation reflects offensive stereotypes, as well as how they can be advantageous when used subversively. Angela is a "slit" due to her promiscuous behavior. However, she is not a "slit" due to her wealth and powerful social position. Angela's story and Tom's assertion demonstrate how USonian paradoxes of social positions are communal, individual, offensive, and defeated. It is in those spaces, in the deeper readings of texts, where audiences find connections and significant commentary about how complex US

society, identity, and enactment truly are. Here, fabulous ordinariness works in the first way introducing readers to characters and texts they can identify with.

Attempting to develop a totalizing sense and experience of USonian identity is problematic. In eras when history and the present blend to form cultural experiences the recognition of the amalgamation of diverse yet unifying individual experiences is crucial to conceptions of nationality. Identity demarcations such as gender, ethnicity, religion, etc. deserve acknowledgement, but not privileging, when considering their impact on the experience of US nationality. Roth says he looked at texts such as *1984* as models of historical fiction of the future. But he says he was trying to do something different. He wanted to rewrite US history between 1940-42 to capture the sentiments of US citizens. He writes, "Some readers are going to want to take this book as a roman a clef to the present moment in America. That would be a mistake. I set out to do exactly what I've done: reconstruct the years 1940-42 as they might have been if Lindbergh, instead of Roosevelt, had been elected president in the 1940 election" ("The Story Behind 'The Plot Against America,'" *n.p.*). It seems I am arguing exactly what Roth fears "some readers" will. However, it is more complicated. History, fiction, and culture reflect on one another most often in a funhouse-mirror manner. Roth's text is not about the present. It is about the past, about what the past could have been, and what the past felt like. His works invoke daily experiences such as watching baseball games or listening to the radio with anticipation, as well as more anxiety-inducing events like participating in major political events or waiting for a loved one to return from war. Roth captures sentiments he intends to be true to the USonian experience in the presence of fear, oppression, and exclusion. As such, his work is just as much about the USonian community today as it is about 1940-42. Roth's imagined US taps into USonian experiences in ways historical tellings do not. The sentiments Roth invokes through events and

characters are certainly comparable to some of those invoked by the political situations and characters appearing in the 2016 presidential primaries and global political events.

Homi Bhabha in "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation" addresses how literature informs and is informed by history and culture. He specifically discusses how the constructed definitions of people as

> the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin *in the past*; the people are also the subjects of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as that sign of the *present* through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process. (Bhabha 145)

Bhabha's argument is that the people are constructions of history but push against it to recreate themselves and their nations. Similarly, in rewriting history, Roth inherently rewrites USonians, both then and today. The historical experience that Roth set out to preserve is part of a national history that informs the conception of USonians today. In writing a text centered purposefully on that, he writes a piece concerned with and representing the past and the present.

Historical circumstances within USonian literary frameworks are important to the study of texts. As in the works and characters emphasized in Chapter One, USonian definitions are developed within literature as it challenges and extends ways that self-making, community, and democracy are understood culturally and by its audience. Philip Roth's works represent and explore history in order to reveal nuances and concealed but connecting elements of an often differentiated national identification system. Roth's narratives show a disjointed US community

as well as individual USonians struggling to come together and hail one another as USonian. Using a methodology that examines characters, their actions, and their contexts rather than the portrayal of historical events results in an analysis of USonian ideologies more aware of the ways USonians have traditionally been developed and depicted through cultural productions.

Irvin Wyllie addresses this in his study of US character development through the tool of self-made narratives (*The Self-Made Man in America: The Myth of Rags to Riches).* He writes, "Considering the moral foundations of the success cult, concentration on character analysis was almost an obligation" (130-31). Morals were crucial throughout the development and maintenance of self-made characters. Chapter One explored the ways these moral foundations were challenged and changed as self-made rhetoric was still becoming a sociological and cultural trend to reflect past and contemporary circumstances. Eventually, as Chapter One evidences, principles began to replace morals. Those principles were both individualized and communally developed. They reflected individuals participating in the dialogue of national identity construction. Historical events and social circumstances influenced the ways those characters (and authors) understood and communicated USonian membership. As such, in the history of the US, social and cultural circumstances are important to consider. But what is particularly interesting here is the way those historical situations are communicated by way of characters who construct those social and cultural conditions (i.e., USonian history). All USonians to an extent present themselves as a character (according to different situations); therefore, the ways characters in literature communicate USonian selves individually and collectively reflects the complex paradoxes and slippages that USonians encounter on a regular basis. The difference is that literature records those variances, whereas citizens live them.

Fabulous Ordinariness Developing USonianism

Fabulous Ordinariness and Historical Communities

Representations of ethnicity in US literature are often rife with stereotypes. US literature assisted in developing the often very rigid and distinctive categories of USonian ethnic identities. However, closer analyses of seemingly exclusionary and discriminatory cultural works reveals crucial insights concerning US social construction and acceptance. Scholars have been reexamining cultural texts to reflect on the complex power plays surrounding minority and subgroup depictions and identifications.[4] Eric Lott addresses such concerns in *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. He explains that cultural analyses must reflect on performances of identities not as sanctioned social constructions but as "a distorted mirror, reflecting displacements and condensations and discontinuities between which [the cultural performance] and the social field there exist lags, unevennesses, multiple determinations" (8). Lott's point here, and his work in general, reflects on the potentially contradictory images of African-American culture juxtaposed with authentic lifestyles. Blackface minstrelsy developed into a cultural expression of stereotypes, authenticity, and (mis)representations. In similar ways, Philip Roth depicts traditionally non-USonian members (or at least devalued ones), such as American Italians and Canadian Americans, American Jews, Mexicans, immigrants, women, and USonians with communist or socialist tendencies, as crucial parts of the US nation. His work uses these characters and social categories to question what "All-American" means. In a nuanced way, his characterizations push readers to reconsider that perhaps All-American exists but that is it not the story of the white boy boot-strapping himself

[4] See Eric Lott's *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, Richard Dyer's *The Matter of Images*, and John Beckman's *Four Centuries of Joyous Revolt* (Vintage Books: New York, 2014).

into a successful capitalist. Roth's revisions to this model result in presentations of multiple role models. Moments of fabulous ordinariness associated with these models foster more attainable success stories and more realistic versions of USonian self-making through community building.

Roth's narratives stress the need to accept and articulate diversity to create accurate cultural representations. US masculinity is both emphasized and undermined when Herman accepts Cucuzza's pistol in the scene outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Philip's father is now presuming the role of family protector. He is not looking to law enforcement (arguably a way to feminize a patriarch). However, he has to be told, "You pulla the trig" when he tells Mr. Cucuzza that he does not know how to shoot a pistol (Roth, *The Plot* 180). In this way, Herman functions as a representation of the depictions of USonians in general. In the traditional self-made USonian story, Herman, as the male head of the household, is required to keep his family safe. In order to do so, he acquires a safe hiding spot (with another male) and a tool to protect his family (the gun). This appears simple on the surface, perhaps even oversimplified. But Mr. Cucuzza and Herman as national representatives are more complex.

Herman is portrayed as capable of protection with a pistol, yet were he to need to use it, he would be, at best, clumsy about it. USonian definitions are often more complex, or at least more paradoxical, than they appear, as this example illustrates. However, in reality, USonian belonging fails to be seen as contradictory, nor is it truly experienced as such. Rather, USonian communities and selves are diverse and complexly created. Similar to the ways that figures were discussed in Chapter One such as Minnie and Eliza who complicate notions of femininity, Herman and Mr. Cucuzza modify presentations of masculinity. In moderating US masculinity from independent gung-ho manliness to communal and concerned brotherhood, Herman and Cucuzza alter masculinity and USonian characterizations based on it. Rather than traditional

representational types of characters, Mr. Cucuzza and Herman's complexities posit them as more complex human characters. Instead of being this or that (i.e., Italian/Jewish), they are both/and (Italian, Jewish, and USonian). Together, they fear and react to an overarching political threat. Their depictions result in more empathetic characters who seem more USonian, more human, than ethnic or subgroup representatives.

Roth's work features ways stereotypes are ingrained in (ordinary) and changed with (fabulous) culture. He explains in *The New York Times*, "History claims everybody, whether they know it or not and whether they like it or not" ("The Story…," *n.p.*). Just as with history, culture also claims everyone. These USonian characters channel fabulous ordinariness to challenge cultural groupings. Categorizations are clumsy and restrictive in the face of characters who dwell in paradoxes and complicate simplifications of personhoods. Historical or at least traditional biases are the foundation for social identity categories. These inherited ideologies will necessarily be apparent even as norms change. The stereotypes about Philip's father as a USonian are frustrated to reposition him as a US representative principled on democratic and familial ideals. Constance Rourke's study of literary characters discusses how influential types have been on USonian ideals and identity. In tracing the development of USonian character(s) throughout US literature, Rourke attends to how US types influence one another. She claims, "The backwoodsman conquered the Indian, but the Indian also conquered him. He ravaged the land and was ravaged in turn" (40). At a time when society, particularly the frontier, was essentially split into Cowboys (white, wealthy males) and Indians (anyone non-white and non-wealthy), with anyone who did not strictly fall into those categories being defined through their relation to one or the other, Rourke's point comes close to Roth's: history (or its present formation) claims everyone in a categorical manner. However, Roth's works show how USonian concepts push this

thought process farther. His novels reflect beyond the reciprocally defined relationship Rourke asserts. People/characters are more than just typecasts.

As US society and self-definition evolved to consider class, gender, and race more conscientiously, these two categories (Cowboys/Indians) were minoritized in favor of more diverse others. However, children growing up today still play Cowboys and Indians. The definitions of those identities might be more complex and complicated, but they still surface, and one's relationship to those roles as a USonian can often still be definitive moments of identity formation. Just as in Roth's work, defining oneself as Italian or Jewish might be useful, but it does not exclude *self*-definitions of US membership. One can come to understand such nuances, but the relevance develops out of what a character does with the recognition of the impact of historical categorizations.

USonian traits appear in the actions and motivations of Mr. Cucuzza's and Herman's exchange. He does not offer the pistol simply to demonstrate neighborly behavior or out of concern for the protection of life regardless of identity category. Mr. Cucuzza expresses his disgust concerning Mussolini and his actions, leading into Philip's father's monologue on what being an American means to him. Herman identifies with Mr. Cucuzza as a fellow American while they listen to a bulletin announcing a reclusive Franklin Delano Roosevelt's return to politics. Mr. Cucuzza confirms Philip's father's affirmation of their US identities (connected by Roosevelt's return and contingent on his success): "*We* need him bad" [my emphasis] (Roth 286). Mr. Cucuzza's "we" is not just concerning their families here: he is constructing a cohesive, while still diverse, USonian we. Standing in the kitchen discussing politics and listening to the radio, two minority group representatives assert themselves as part of the USonian "we."

The ways "we, the people" are created (in other words, national community construction) and maintained is a much studied topic. Ernest Gellner in *Nations and Nationalism* examines the connections between the development of nationalities as communities. His work is particularly relevant for a reflection on US nationality as influenced by versions of self-makers. The traditional definitions of self-makers in the US (as capitalists) align well with Gellner's conclusions concerning nationalism. While Gellner discusses the influences of occupations on and within national conceptions, the points he raises also reflect how community constructions work. In addition, his argument reveals how national unity can be potentially frustrated. Nations, as communities, are similar to armies. Citizens of a nation undergo a "generic training" to understand what fellow members of a nation look and act like (Gellner 27). They then are subjected to more specialized training; in Gellner's metaphor, the more specialized training refers to ways that individuals are groomed to understand and participate in the division of labor. However, his metaphor is applicable to considerations of how subcommunities develop within nationalities (and in this case, the US). Citizens of the US develop a broad understanding of what being a USonian means. American bifurcations result in multicultural divides and marginalization of subcultures. There is nothing inherently wrong with those subcommunities, and at times they can be advantageous. However, as Cucuzza and Herman demonstrate, it is sometimes crucial to prioritize a larger national identity over a sub-pocket of USonians: a "we." The focus on connecting identities in a historical framework of distinction displays the need for accepting versions of nationalism in US history and in today's moments.

Furthermore, Mr. Cucuzza's pistol remains a gift throughout the remainder of the text as a reminder of security provided by the community rather than the individual (regardless of whether or not it actually would guarantee safety). When Herman and Sandy drive down to Kentucky to

bring the newly orphaned Seldon (Phil's neighborhood friend) back to New Jersey, Mr. Cucuzza's pistol accompanies them. Whenever Herman feels he is driving through a town that might be dangerous, he "asked Sandy to open the glove compartment and pass him Mr. Cucuzza's spare pistol to hold in his lap while he drove, and each time sounding as though he, who'd never fired a shot in his life, wouldn't hesitate, if he had to, to pulla the trig'" (Roth, *The Plot* 360). Superficially, the pistol is a literal representation of force and the ability to protect oneself. On a deeper level, the pistol as a representation of a bond of communal safety reinforces the development of a US-based relationship between Mr. Cucuzza and Herman. In addition to developing a diverse USonian community, these characters establish not how they were a minority, othered USonian community, but how they were USonians dedicated to USonian ideals. USonian communities are not just white and wealthy—they are diverse and conflict-ridden. Sometimes peace is loaded (unstable), but more often than not, an open-mindedness and reflection on the right of all US citizens to security and happiness results in a community, such as the apartment building of Phil's childhood, where USonians connect amidst their differences; a place where USonians self-make by developing and protecting their communities. *The Plot Against America* largely concerns itself with the inclusion (and exclusion) of the US Jewish population in social life, but paired with *The Great American Novel*, various other subgroups begin addressing US communal identities.

Communal identification as USonians occurs through very specific figures and variations on USonian realities in *The Great American Novel* as well. In this novel, many baseball players are either drafted or wounded in World War II, but USonians need baseball to distract them from the war and to serve as a metaphorical narrative of the US in the war. This idea refers to the much propagandized notion that WWII was a war on all fronts; victory could

only result from a team effort. Throughout the novel, a variety of unusual ballplayers are drafted into the professional league, including players with one arm or one leg and those as young as fourteen or as old as fifty, among other anomalies. Bob Yamm, a pitcher who is a "midget," is drafted and becomes an USonian hero. He claims a communal US representative identity when he reflects for the public on his opportunity (to play professional baseball). He writes about getting to play a game many Americans could only dream of. He continues, "I have even received letters from nonmidgets, from full-grown baseball fans, who write to wish me well, and to say that the presence of a midget in the batter's box may well be what is necessary to prevent big league pitching from deteriorating any further" (Roth, *The Great* 211). His closing comment significantly reflects the paradox of USonian identity. At first, it seems he will reinforce categorical separations referencing his individuality by emphasizing the normed positions of his letter writers. However, he wraps up by reflecting on his usefulness to the league (a metaphor for the US). Not only does Yamm bring up his potential usefulness for the larger community, but his comments also address the role he assumes in maintaining a literal commonwealth. His point alludes to both his being a "bad" batter as well as to the difficulty for pitchers to hit his strike zone (due to his size). His small stature (i.e., his non-normativity) is exactly what makes him successful in his distinctly USonian venture. Furthermore, in this team-centered metaphor, his batting statistics aid his teammates. The community requires his diversity, not his accommodation into a predetermined system.

Bob Yamm's communal identification as well as Mr. Cucuzza and Herman's inclusion of one another as USonians reflects a paradox of the USonian community that scholars of the self- made mention but have not explicitly explored yet. Wilkinson writes:

> Americans have been pulled toward conformity and toward joining as a reaction against the potential for anarchy and isolation in their individualist traditions. This notion supports Richard Hofstadter's idea of compensatory swings in American history between creative individualism and group adjustment, but it lays more stress on the coexistence of the two impulses, even if historical pendulum awards the upper hand first to one and then the other. (*The Pursuit* 70)

The "impulse" to simultaneously be an individual and part of a community is represented here as even more urgent in times of crisis. Mr. Cucuzza's actions have the potential to position him as a savior to a Jewish USonian family, and Yamm's actions provide a national narrative of the successful underdog and acceptance of individual attributes in USonian circles. This drive becomes embodied as self-made rhetoric evolves to become more communal. Despite the opportunities for individual reputation growth, both characters only attend to self-development so long as it helps his community. Those cultural evolutions mirror changes arising in US social conditions, even as bifurcations of multiculturalism occur. Sub-communities exist and provide benefits, but moments of unification and national identification have advantages as well.

Mr. Cucuzza, Philip's father, and Bob Yamm all demonstrate the desire for communal identity within USonian circles. They do so by enacting it: Mr. Cucuzza and Philip identify as USonians rather than Jewish American or Italian American, and Bob Yamm does so by connecting to USonians at large by identifying himself and others as dreamers of the achievable. They participate in moments of fabulous ordinariness within Roth's texts by constructing identities coded as universally USonian. One of the key elements of fabulous ordinariness that occurs in USonian writing is the ability of both characters and readers to recognize themselves or the possibility of themselves in certain moments, places, or as other characters. Importantly, both

plots incorporate times of crisis in US history. As many psychological theories of identity development demonstrate, times of crisis are crucial to forming one's personalities, ideologies, and sense of self. Applied to these national circumstances, minorities become crucial community members in times of crisis recognizing the validity of alternative national narratives and ways of self-making to achieve success as other than white, individual, capitalist, and masculine. National narratives and characters challenge stereotypes of historical self-makers and self-making. Self-making no longer solely refers to the initiator of or reactor to social circumstances achieving financial wealth. Instead, successful self-makers invest in and foster the growth of US communal circles. Mr. Cucuzza and Philip's performance of identity choice and Yamm's self-inclusion in US identification provides space for readers to empathize with similar experiences. In "From Social to Political Identity: A Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory," Leonie Huddy analyzes how cultural identities are developed. Huddy asserts, "[S]ocial identities are adopted by degrees and represent something intermediate between an all-encompassing group identity and a distinctively unique persona" (145). These characters demonstrate the give-and-take between individual and communal identity as they assert USonian identities. Just as importantly, their potential for connecting the reader with an individual character and a larger national identity surfaces as the characters manipulate moments to create fabulous ordinariness with their storylines. Striving for USonian connections in eras of great diversity and difference reinforces the need to strengthen those connected identities in the US in times of lesser crisis.

The concern and potential paradox of individual and communal identities within US contexts, most apparent in Chapter One in Maryna's and Abel's identities, surface again with characters such as Herman and Mr. Cucuzza. The complex ways group identities work within US frameworks is a topic of interest in a variety of disciplines. Jack Citrin, Cara Wong, and Brian

Duff studied how group identities work within US frameworks theoretically as well as by surveying USonians in their study “The Meaning of American National Identity.” They write, "[Identity] is an assertion of both sameness and difference. . . This entails drawing boundaries: one is the same as some others and different from everyone else. For this reason, a social identity both integrates and divides" (Citrin et al. 73). The literary examples above demonstrate the significance of reflecting on the inclusive elements of identification. Similar to how the gender and sexuality analyses in Chapter One worked to recognize how difference promotes inclusive identities in US frameworks, the next two analyses of characters will address inclusion resulting from difference. Roth's works contain many seemingly contradictory characters; however, they often are complex so as to be more human as opposed to character types. These characters simultaneously assert "sameness and difference," this dialectical unity, to epitomize and demonstrate how USonian identity works within literature and society.

In *The Great American Novel* Roth uses a section to characterize the Mundys ball team. It introduces his characters as well as provides a metaphorical history of the US to promote reader connections. In this part, the reader learns of a seemingly international shortstop, Frenchy Astarte. His lack of a self-asserted national identity is what also allows him to be USonian. He describes himself as both self (USonian) and other (Canadian, Communist, etc.). Scott Casper's description of USonian tendencies to see history in and through biography manifests strongly here. Astarte is described as someone who "had dreams (what Canadian doesn't) of the great stadiums to the south, dreams of American fame and American dollars" (Roth, *The Great* 100). However, rather than being drafted into American leagues, he is sent to play in Tokyo. Eventually Astarte is given the opportunity to play with the Mundys when the war starts, and his experience is described as follows: "here in the Big American leagues of his dreams, he was even

more of a foreigner than he had been in Tokyo, Japan" (Roth, *The Great* 100). Here, Astarte's emotions position him as an outsider. He feels like a non-American despite playing the All-American game and later being labeled as a representative of the USonian community. He works in subversively inclusive ways similar to Bob Yamm's role on the team.

As the novel progresses, Astarte's supposedly communist motivated behaviors seem to exclude him from US identification; however, the narrative goes on to explain that Astarte's actions actually cause the recognition of the Mundys as an All-American (representative) team. At the close of Roth's text the investigation into communist activity within the league determines that Astarte "dropped the pop fly in the last of the ninth of the last game of the '42 season . . . and set the stage for the expulsion from Port Ruppert" (Roth, *The Great* 367). Reflected upon in surface level ways, Astarte's mistake lays the work for what is supposedly a communist undermining of the league. However, earlier in the text the homeless Mundys serve as the team of the "entire nation" because their home field is every field and no field simultaneously (Roth, *The Great* 327). The point is that even as Astarte is a (non)USonian, his story develops as representative of USonians. The Mundys lack of home field advantage and Astarte's role on the team is also distinctly (non)USonian (and indicative of WWII/Cold War USonian positions).

Astarte is an outsider as well as a team member. However, his isolated, yet representative status on a team that is the epitome of the underdog reflects ways people are included by self-identifying as USonians, but also by being identified as USonians by others. His difference (his supposed communistic deviance) is also what results in the Mundys being an All-American team, literally. Astarte's equal failure and success highlights the ambivalence between the individual and the community in USonian identities. The borders that Citrin et al. observe as a necessary part of identity manifest here as key elements of USonian identity. They allow

individuals and communities to be both USonian and non-USonian. Astarte, as a dual citizen, who stimulates the Mundys' underdog status and is accused of being the starter for their communism, reflects the both/and paradox of USonian membership and fabulous ordinariness. Astarte then becomes representative of individuals and communities who find themselves to be part of the USonian community and excluded from it.

In *The Plot Against America* paradox and irony reveal a similar situation of in- and ex-clusion in First Lady Anne Morrow Lindbergh's telegraph to Evelyn and Rabbi Bengelsdorf at their wedding. Rabbi Bengelsdorf and his new wife receive a telegram from the First Lady Anne Morrow Lindbergh at their wedding. It commends them for participating in nation-building social activities. Their participation is praiseworthy in Mrs. Lindbergh's opinion due to their Jewish heritage. In the same way that Astarte is a USonian by being a non-USonian, so too are the Bengelsdorfs. The First Lady commends Evelyn and the Rabbi for their work for the Office of American Absorption (Roth, *The Plot* 249). Ironically, this organization, which the Jewish Evelyn and Rabbi work in, "relocates" (persecutes) Jews in America. It moves Jews to farmlands and low income housing, simultaneously segregating and dispersing middle class communities. Evelyn and the Rabbi precariously define themselves as both Jewish and USonian through their participation with this agency. Once again, as with Astarte, they are identified by others as USonian and non. The First Lady closes her telegram, "Of the many blessings bestowed upon our nation by God, none is more valuable than our having among us citizens like yourselves, proud, vital champions of an indomitable race whose ancient concepts of justice and freedom have sustained our American democracy since 1776" (Roth, *The Plot* 249). While her assertion here can be considered political slick-talking, it also reveals an important lack of differentiation in US politics. In one way, she others Evelyn and the Rabbi without necessarily defining that

difference as their Jewish heritage. However, she also attends to their "sameness," their USonian belonging, referencing a non-secular God as well as labeling democracy as "American." She references what Samuel P. Huntington calls the (distinctly Protestant) "American Creed" (183); however, she does so without singling out the ideology as Christian. Instead, her USonian character and definition is an inclusive, morally informed system, while still paradoxically persecuting subgroups.

Important to evaluating First Lady Lindbergh's comments is the statement she later makes in the book calling the friendly affairs with Axis forces wrong following President Lindbergh's vanishing and Franklin Delano Roosevelt resurfacing. First Lady Lindbergh's telegram provides the reader the opportunity to experience fabulous ordinariness ambivalently through the Rabbi and Evelyn as she recognizes them as USonian members, but also distinguishes them as representatives of subgroups. This recognition of the Rabbi and Evelyn emphasizes the problem with including while marginalizing individuals within a community. USonian citizens deserve to be recognized fully as well as (rather than solely as) belonging to another identity group. The Rabbi and Evelyn (as well as the Jewish community they are stand-ins for) are simultaneously insiders and aliens in US society. Imperfect representations of USonians demonstrate how the only way to truly depict US identity is to display its simultaneous internal conflicts and unifications. In a US split into subdivisions, as sociologists Citrin, Huddy, and Wilkinson observe, reflecting on mechanisms that promote those classifications as well as the implications of those segregations is crucial to understanding the history and present state of USonian inclusion.

The corollary of the paradox of being individual and communal (dialectical unity), that of being (re)presented and absent, arises in a second character's storyline: Alvin's post-war

experience in *The Plot Against America*. Alvin's (non)recovery invokes notions concerning absence and presence in individual and representative ways for readers. Alvin is Philip's older cousin who joins the (Canadian) service in order to participate as a soldier in World War II (because under Lindbergh the US is not participating in the war). Alvin loses a leg in a battle when he is deployed. He returns home to convalesce. Philip helps with the bandages when Alvin lets him. Eventually they have a brief conversation symbolic of the stasis of conflict between communal and individual existence in the US. Philip asks if Alvin's stump is healed and Alvin replies, "Not yet" (Roth, *The Plot* 136). Philip then asks, "How long will it take?" to which Alvin responds "Forever" (Roth, *The Plot* 137). Alvin's stump will never heal because it is as much a psychological wound as it is a physical wound. Alvin's wounded leg is simultaneously absent (it has been amputated), yet it is also always present (in that the trauma of the ordeal remains). This exemplifies how Alvin's leg represents the way history impacts the present without apparent (or tangible) influence. When interpreting Roth's work with an eye to national cohesiveness, Alvin's leg could metaphorically represent the idea that traditionally marginalized communities in the US are simultaneously reject or absent USonians. The in- and ex- clusion addressed here are reminiscent of Lady Lindbergh's more explicit in- and ex- clusion of the Rabbi, Evelyn, and the broader Jewish population.

Alvin refers to his amputated leg explaining this idea of simultaneous absence and presence, saying, "There's pain where you are [. . .] and there's pain where you ain't" (Roth, *The Plot* 154). His comment stresses the idea that what is "absent" is as impactful upon reality as what is there. The problem with US identity is the effects of exclusions of various peoples. There is a need to recognize the impact of absence on identities and selves, specifically in US circles. In addition, what has often been ignored is acknowledging what or perhaps who is absent (and

why).[5] Recognizing the impact various communities have on the representations and manifestations of USonians and USonian characters require addressing, as well as recognizing ways of achieving USonian belonging and success by those groups.

Most readers have likely not lost a limb. But the emotive experience of Alvin and those around him may be familiar to readers and enables fabulous ordinariness here on personal and USonian levels. Most readers can identify with a feeling of absence, presence through absence, and a lack of closure. USonian readers can identify with Alvin's self-construction by way of past events, particularly of patriotic past events. While opposed to historical nationalism, Homi Bhabha proposes an alternative way to conceive of nation and nationalism. Rather than studying the nation as a historicized body, there is value to reflecting upon what Bhabha calls the power of national narratives. He explains how national narratives frustrate "the linear equivalence of event and idea that historicism proposes, most commonly signifies a people, a nation, or a national culture as an empirical sociological category or a holistic cultural entity" (140). Bhabha explains that as political entities nations most often must engage empiricism and power models; i.e., nations have or tell the histories of victors. However, the individual reconciling his/her status as an insider within a community requires empirical elements to fall to the background, making way for the rise of stand-in narratives to assist identity formation. Alvin is a USonian because he has experienced a national trauma *and* an individual loss. The Rabbi and Evelyn are both USonian and excluded by Lady Lindbergh's and their own assertions. These characters inhabit a liminal space enacting the complex state of in and out side positioning of USonians.

[5] This reading implies that traditionally othered/ignored USonians are amputated and replaced with a prosthetic. The prosthethic has allowed US society to continue functioning under the guise of normalcy (in this case a white, male, individual, democratic society). However, by amputating those communities and their alternate narratives USonian history ignored the reciprocal influence Rourke discussed as well as the in- and ex- clusionary position of USonian identities that Citrin et. al. discuss.

Bhabha's point and Alvin's story allude to an important attribute concerning fiction and history that Roth raises in his works, similar to that which has been raised by fictions discussed in Chapter One and those that will be analyzed in Chapter Three. Bhabha's assertion identifies the need to recognize what cultural myths fail to do that representative national narratives (stories of or told by characters that audiences identify with) do. Hayden White's claim that fiction and history are more closely related than often credited is important to recall (6-7). These narratives studied here blur the lines between fiction and history. Character's experiences provide models for understanding and coping with harsh realities and ways to be successful under pressing circumstances. Moments of self- and national development are often momentous and apparent as well as individual and personally meaningful. Phil and Alvin's struggle with his leg amputation and America's deep interest in the Mundys' storyline demonstrate the connection between individual and community or national narratives.

Roth's narrator in *The Great American Novel* references the racial integration of baseball as "the greatest advancement for the colored people to take place in America since the Emancipation Proclamation" (Roth 152). The event that causes such a momentous change is a disguised white team owner going to the "colored" leagues to cull players. Roth analyzes the turn of events by explaining, "the turning points in our history are not always so grand as they are cracked up to be in the murals on your post office walls" (Roth, *The Great* 152). Part of the purpose of the storyline is to assert how the integration of this ball league occurs not based on some liberal ideal. Instead, it is a result of a capitalist manager who desires to have the best players at the lowest prices and have the most sensational team to draw in the most fans. As in the other cases mentioned here, perspective on a situation is as important as the situation itself. The characters and groups could easily be differentiated, but taking alternate perspectives

acknowledges participation in a larger USonian community not always reflective of the USonian narrative historically established.

Furthermore, rather than highlighting momentous accomplishments, the stories about the US show how USonians connect with national history and nationalism. Without fabulous ordinariness these narratives are just stories inspired by non-fiction; however, with the personal emotions and national storyline these narratives represent ways of understanding the self and others within the US community. As White and Bhabha have explained, ideologically informed constructs groom history and nationalism. History and nationalism happen to individuals who construct and uphold those narratives and myths. As such, different elements of identities are emphasized in histories and national narratives. Alvin's sense of loss and presence, Evelyn and the Rabbi's praise, Astarte's actions and the league's attempt at integration, and Mr. Cucuzza and Philip's father's communal recognition of one another all reflect ambivalent elements of USonian identity and community. They foster the contentious position of being an in- and outsider in the US. The paradoxical position of belonging and exclusion as well as that of differentiation and unification which characterizes political and social existences of USonians manifests in ways that readers can identify and empathize with. Readers can participate with characters through moments of fabulous ordinariness as the characters and stories articulate the conditions of USonian cultural and self existence.

Political Models of USonians: Franklin Delano and Eleanor Roosevelt

The identification of USonians with representative figures is well documented and is more often explored in studies of celebrity personas. As the characters discussed in Chapter One display, the idea of American exceptionalism exists in translated ways today. Unique figures are exceptional, but they are also representative of who USonians can be. Wilkinson reflects on

narratives of American characters and socially developed American character by comparing models of US character to those of European character. US character requires the idea that "Americans might become great engineers or shrewd politicians, but deep down their strength drew upon the nature within them and about them" (Wilkinson, *The Pursuit,* 96-7). USonians look to models who exude the ideology of "you can be (fill in the blank)" to explain national identity and achievability. In political, literary, and cultural USonian circles, FDR and Eleanor Roosevelt are positioned as representatives of the "strength. . .within them and about them" (them being USonians). The Roosevelts perform the function of subversive self-making USonians such as those examined in the beginning of this chapter and in Chapter One. In addition, they also explicitly recognize other self-makers and changers. While the political, literary, and "real-life" Roosevelts could be differentiated, they do all carry an investment in the promotion of a USonian community based on ideals of equal opportunity and self-making. The Roosevelts are characters who reflect USonian thoughts and embody USonian traits as it morphed into a more inclusive identity in the early twentieth century. They continue to serve as models of change and challenge as well as of unification that are pertinent to contemporary social and cultural circumstances in the US.

Two much-cherished models of USonian traits in the twentieth century in political, cultural, and literary works are Franklin Delano and Eleanor Roosevelt. Kenneth Burke in his work *A Grammar of Motives and A Rhetoric of Motives* uses the Roosevelts as a case study demonstrating the power of paradoxes. He asserts that Roosevelt's illness may have been a strength rather than a paralyzing weakness. While on one hand the President required leg braces and assistance, and occasionally trickery to present himself as strong, it is exactly this paradox that helps make him the epitome of a USonian (Burke 391-394). He is both more and less than

what he appears. Roosevelt manifested himself as a living paradox. He represents USonians by exemplifying key traits of US citizens. His paralysis is acknowledged, incorporated into his identity, and rather than destabilizing him is used to his advantage. In similar ways, the absence and presence of various populations is not detrimental requiring separation and categories. Instead, it adds variety and strength to USonian narratives in unique ways. His public character reflects and refracts the masculine success story as a recognized, rather than achieved, role.

Roth's *The Plot Against America* describes Roosevelt in terms equal to other legendary USonian products: "There was Roosevelt, there was the U.S. Constitution, there was the Bill of Rights, and there were the papers, America's free press" (18). Roosevelt is listed among a variety of well-known institutions that are demonstrative of US beliefs. Most importantly, his place among these USonian and democratic institutions emphasizes how he and those systems are as much about regulation as they are about freedom. The Constitution and varied interpretations of its intent and applicability to contemporary circumstances are the basis of Supreme Court rulings on the legalities of a variety of daily life circumstances from integration to birth control to climate control issues. The Bill of Rights and freedom of the press are as much about guaranteeing freedoms as they are about preventing harm to others. In similar ways, Roosevelt is as much a symbol of USonian strength and manhood as he is of USonian intellectual ability and feminine forces (aided by Eleanor's activism and political presence).

Richard Hofstadter reflects on the ways Roosevelt fostered his USonian identity. Of particular interest is the use of the radio as a way to address US citizens on both a personal and mass level (228). Perhaps most importantly, at a time of great consternation, preservation, and reservation, Roosevelt's use of the radio was progressive. Furthermore, as examples in both of Roth's texts the radio was crucial to individual and communal constructions of USonian

communities. Roth's portrayal of Roosevelt's relationship with the public is apparent in the President's actual fireside chats. In one of his better known chats, Roosevelt announces the Declaration of War with Japan on December 9, 1941. In this talk, he reaches out to the audience individually as well as collectively. At one point Roosevelt asserts, "We are now in this war. We are all in it—all the way. Every single man, woman, and child is a partner in the most tremendous undertaking of our American history" (Roosevelt). Roosevelt emphasizes one's individuality (age and gender specifically) while still highlighting one's belonging to a group (everyone is a member of this larger American community). Furthermore, as Roth's narrative demonstrates, families and neighbors listened to these addresses together. Philip remembers:

> Because it was the first muggy evening of the summer, the windows were open in every room and Sandy and I couldn't help but continue to follow from bed the proceedings being aired over our own living room radio and the radio playing in the flat downstairs and . . . the radios of our neighbors to either side and across the way. (Roth 15)

In addition to drawing attention to this isolating, yet unifying broadcasting tool, Roth allows his character to observe the way that this medium connects the community. Roosevelt's use of radio to address the US emphasized growth in the face of reservations and challenges to US ideals of success and freedom. By melding ideas of individuality and community belonging, Roosevelt contested overt US character narratives and privileged less explicit US social trends. He worked to define what was (and by way of ideology still is) USonian.

The Roosevelts' representative power as well as their balance of characteristics surfaces in *The Great American Novel* when they comment on America's greatest pastime. When the Mundys go from a losing record to a winning one, Roosevelt sends a telegram declaring:

> I firmly believe that the farmers and the factory workers, the children in our schools and the women who keep the home fires burning, and above all, our brave fighting men around the globe, cannot but draw inspiration from the 'Never Say Die' spirit of these illustrious men. (Roth, *The Great* 329)

Roosevelt addresses the variety of USonians that the Mundys are representing. His comment explains that although the USonians he describes are not ballplayers and might not even be fans, the ball team that gave up its home stadium for government use embodies a metaphorical experience of the war effort for the US population at large. Roosevelt's translation of a sports team's existence to the national symbol is not a unique rhetorical device. Huntington observes:

> No nation exists in the absense of a national history enshrining in the minds of its people common memories of their travails and triumphs, heroes and villains, enemies and wars, defeat and victories. . . Scholars who wished to turn to the national past wrote biographies of local heroes promoting them as national heroes. (116)

While Roosevelt is not necessarily writing the biography of the Mundys, Roth is. Roosevelt's comments within this "biography" connect USonians with their representatives. Their characters and travails are both more and less familiar to USonians. Furthermore, in a war where the initial effort resulted in defeat more often than victory having a model underdog would be inspirational to USonians at the time and those recounting the history today. Roosevelt uses himself as a representative and aligns himself with the mass of cultural citizens to have the most effective connection and representational position.

Eleanor surfaces as an important part of this representative work. Roosevelt explains that he is not able to attend the Mundys' final game of the season, but will be listening to live

updates. In his stead Eleanor will be "accepting your most kind and thoughtful invitation. . . a baseball fan in her own right, and one who has seen in the resurgence of the team everyone had counted out, a stirring example for all underdogs everywhere" (Roth, *The Great* 329). The nation is connected with the experiences of the Mundys by the President and now by his wife as well. These representative USonians have sanctioned the representative power of this baseball team. Furthermore, as Huntington claims, biography (the lived experiences of remarkable USonians) becomes a vehicle to reflect on the daily lives of the mass of USonians. Fabulous ordinariness is part of what makes these comparisons not only possible but impactful. A sense of pride or disappointment associated with a sports team reflects on the nation's sense of self here and in reality; therefore the individual's sense of self and community is in some ways invested in sport/national success as well.

Eleanor is remarkable but still a salt-of-the-Earth personality in her attendance at the game. The start of the game "was delayed thirty minutes while Mrs. Roosevelt went down into the visitors' dugout to shake the hands of the players and ask them what states they were from" (Roth, *The Great* 329). Mrs. Roosevelt once again enacts the fabulous ordinariness of many USonian models. She is remarkable enough that she greets each player on the Mundys individually (or perhaps the Mundys are so remarkable that Mrs. Roosevelt is afforded the opportunity to meet them). However, their conversations are of the ordinary variety. She does not gush over their sportsmanship, and they do not ramble about politics. Fabulous ordinariness draws attention to the humanity of role models creating characters that are easier to relate to. Eleanor's presence reinforces herself and Roosevelt as people among the people as well as elevated USonian models.

Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt differ from models of self-making and fabulous ordinariness discussed in Chapter One such as Abel, Kane, and Maryna in significant ways. The most notable difference is that the characters described in Chapter One provide examples of modifications of USonian self-making whereas Roosevelt and Eleanor do more to enact and sanction USonian self-making standards on individual and national levels. Chapter One's characters performed and revised USonian self-making on individual levels with national implications. The ways autobiography uses literary tools is important to analyzing how characters become role model figures in these texts. In his study of autobiography, Stone asserts, "Characterization and dialogue are equally common devices for treating actual persons as literary figures" (105). Roosevelt used these tools in his use of radio broadcasts to establish his character. Roth also uses these devices to develop both Roosevelt's and Eleanor's characters as realistic individuals and characters within a story whose politics support USonians beliefs that one can be whoever s/he desires to be. Figures such as Roosevelt and Eleanor present USonian self-making models through their politics and their own public self-constructions.

Roosevelt's character development makes him a USonian worthy of admiration. In politics and literature, Roosevelt manifests as an individual embodying paradoxes indicative of fabulous ordinariness. His character accomplishes this by exploring reinventions of self-making, negotiating various contradictory elements, and becoming a human role model in addition to a cultural hero. In *The American Political Tradition and the Men who Made it* Richard Hofstadter analyzes Roosevelt's character. He explains:

> To be sick and helpless is a humiliating experience. . . . It would have been easy for Roosevelt to give up his political aspirations and retire to the comfortable

> privacy of Hyde Park. That he refused to relinquish his normal life was testimony to his courage and determination, and also to the strength of his ambition. (318)

He continues on to discuss how Roosevelt not only overcomes his personal physical challenges, but also finds ways to appear strong and healthy. In other words, Roosevelt portrays himself as a man possessing strength and a vigorous physical presence despite actually having a compromised frame. His fabulous ordinariness surfaces in this paradox of character.

Roosevelt is not infallible; he is human. He is heroic not because of or in spite of his challenges. Instead, his attendance to his personal issues as acknowledged, not ignored, makes him recognizably like the masses and simultaneously set apart from them.[6] Additionally, his attention to self-development reinforces his awareness of the history of self-making and the need for the twentieth century to reconsider how one is successfully self-made. While many scholars of self-making assert that males were forced out of the domestic sphere in the process of self-making, Roosevelt works against such exclusionary and individualized ideals. His fireside chats and place within USonian homes emphasize alternative versions of self-creation successfully frustrating social norms. Both of Roth's novels portray these broadcasts as well attended and enrapturing. Roosevelt's disabilities and his handling of them as well as his interactions with the US public promote notions of embrasure and acceptance rather than dominance and defiance.

Hofstadter's reflections on Roosevelt's character also find a narrative voice in Roth's *The Plot Against America*. While serving as President, Charles Lindbergh has dinner with Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, a senior advisor of Adolf Hitler's. In a "neutral" US where Lindbergh has already begun relocating Jewish communities and reassigning occupations to that

[6] To clarify, the Roosevelt discussed here is a combination of the historical and literary figure as well as a character informed by his contemporary peers' view of him combined with a hindsight look at his figure from today's world.

population, a friendly dinner with a highly ranked Nazi official alludes to a much more friendly than neutral political relationship. Roosevelt responds at a rally. He significantly uses "we" repeatedly to refer to himself as a citizen of the differentiated US *and* to emphasize his self-inclusion with his varied constituents. Roth's portrayal of Roosevelt's speech demonstrates his character construction and identification with USonians: "The moment compels my stating with candor they cannot misunderstand that it is we, and not they, who are the masters of America's destiny" (Roth, *The Plot* 177-78). Roosevelt asserts his own political power and presence here, but also addresses the masses as well by invoking the notion of a USonian "we." Furthermore, Phil reflects on Roosevelt's speech: "words so stirring and dramatic that every human being in that crowd (and in our living room and in the living rooms up and down our street) was swept away by the joyous illusion that the nation's redemption was at hand" (Roth, *The Plot* 177-78). Roosevelt does not only speak for the USonian population, he is one of them as he challenges USonians to be assertive and to question norms.[7] Roosevelt's place within the home is referenced here. Furthermore, he finds acceptance in the home as a welcome presence; his insertion is not as an authority figure. Such positioning challenges the male placement outside the domestic sphere. In doing so such roles of self-making are expanded beyond typical monetary based models.

Methods of self- and community-making are manipulated in Roosevelt, Eleanor, and other representative characters such as Bob Yamm. Often in *The Plot Against America*, Roosevelt is positioned as a war president. In *The Great American Novel*, he maintains a similar position, but his character often appears in the text only through speeches and telegrams (as a

[7] Lindbergh fails to be a role model in the same way for a variety of reasons. Roosevelt works to be an empathetic, downhome character. He wants to be one of the US people. Lindbergh works to be remarked upon. He is an emblem of US spirit, but not one of the people. Lindbergh is a celebrity and admired but not loved and identified with as Roosevelt is.

verbal presence). Roosevelt rarely appears physically; instead, he shows how powerful words can be by being a verbal presence and stimulating activities through orations. Roosevelt's power develops through his words and verbal presence as much as it derives from his involvement as a director of the war effort of the US and the Western world. Bob Yamm is invited via telegram to chair a March of Dimes drive with Roosevelt (by Eleanor Roosevelt) (Roth, *The Great* 219). Roosevelt's participation in the March of Dimes drive and his partnering with Bob Yamm (another figure who is representative and uniquely USonian, as discussed above) emphasizes his self-awareness and both characters' connection with USonians and their causes. Furthermore, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's presence via telegram reinforces how his words can stand in for him (i.e., how his words lead to actions). Finally, Eleanor draws attention to the tag-team method that Eleanor and Roosevelt use to fully play politics and participate in US culture. Bob Yamm, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Roosevelt's connections display the close relationship between USonian identities and fabulously ordinary USonians concerned with communal success and alternative methods of self-making.

Roosevelt's and Eleanor's characters in many ways bridge fiction (literature) and history; USonian national representatives and idealized individual identities; as well as the gap between past and contemporary cultural conditions. Mr. Cucuzza, Herman, the Rabbi and Evelyn, as well as Alvin, all provide models of traditionally othered self-making USonians reminiscent of the types in the first chapter. However, their purpose is to display ways USonian self-making engages the community. Roosevelt and Eleanor do the same, but they also serve as cultural icons who look to and acknowledge other entities (such as the Mundys) who revise USonian self-making. Figures who perform self-making in traditional and altered ways are as necessary as representative characters who do so *and* recognize explicitly ways that USonian society and self-

making are changing as Roosevelt and Eleanor do. As Eakin observes in his work on US autobiographies, "Although the idea of an American self was sufficiently coherent to be perceived by aspiring immigrants as specifiable and hence available for imitation, it was nonetheless scarcely a stable concept" (9). The idea of a USonian (i.e. the "American self") is addressed both by character performances and recognitions by representative characters. Fabulous ordinariness surfaces for readers to identify with characters as well as serving as a tool to promote the recognition of human characters as role models. Characters that perform identities as well as those who recognize them are important to articulations of USonian character. The political and literary presence of FDR and Eleanor demonstrates perceptions of USonians as well as who determines them: USonians develop and respond to character models that reflect USonians.

USonians, Fabulous Ordinariness, and Cultural Definitions

Roth uses moments of mundane USonian existence to establish examples of self-making USonians. In *The Plot Against America* and *The Great American Novel*, Roth features characters experiencing self-developing moments in the context of national construction to redefine methods of self-making as well as to invite elements of fabulous ordinariness. His characters produce complex and personal histories of the US and its citizens. The idea of individually significant events within national discourse systems as impactful comes from a twist of Homi Bhabha's discussion of cultural difference. He claims that "cultural difference interpellate[s] forms of identity which, because of their continual implication in other symbolic systems, are always ‘incomplete’ or open to cultural translation" (162-63). Bhabha concludes that it results in identities "which are both *at once ours and other*" (163, Bhabha's emphasis). Individual

experiences of reality accumulate as people relate to one another. Individual differences then become community narratives. Those communal stories translate into cultural differences. Eventually literature, film, and politics communicate cultural differences. Philip Roth's works use examples of these individual USonian experiences to display cultural differences on an individual scale and communal level in order to establish a paradox of individual and communal existence as a crucial element to USonian identity and USonian self-making.

Phil, in *The Plot Against America,* and Roland, in *The Great American Novel*, both experience moments of personal growth that contribute to their self-making as USonians. Furthermore, both instances of self-development also serve as connection points between their characters and USonian readers to evoke fabulous ordinariness. Phil's father serves as the stimulus for Phil's growth, and Roosevelt motivates Roland's maturity. These role models foster growth through their use of fabulous ordinariness in the eyes of Phil and Roland. Phil sees his father be simultaneously a model USonian and a human emotionally reacting. In a similar experience, Roland comes to understand Roosevelt as a role model USonian but also realizes his USonian humanity as it manifests in behaviors concerning daily experiences during WWII. Roosevelt and Phil's father are grand men, but they are also real USonians. They feel (or at least Roland and Phil understand them to). Phil and Roland recognize Roosevelt and Herman's fabulous ordinariness spurring their own self-recognition as USonians. In doing so, Roosevelt and Herman provide samples of how USonians relate to cultural icons and how they impact self and national conceptions as well as how individuals influence them.

Alvin, again, serves as the stimulus for a connecting point for making history tangible as well as individual experiences communal. Phil's father drives to Canada to visit Alvin after Alvin's lost his leg. When he returns home at dinner on Monday night, Herman discusses the

depressed state Alvin is in, and Herman begins to cry. Phil reflects that it was "[a] childhood milestone, when another's tears are more unbearable than one's own" (Roth, *The Plot* 113). Phil reflects on a human experience and a realization of one's connection with others. However, he continues on to explain that now that he has empathized and identified with his father (as an adult), he is inhabiting "a new life" where the enemies "blew his [Alvin's] leg off" (Roth 113). Phil rationalizes his personal maturation by explaining it in a national framework. Phil attributes his father's sobbing to an inability to control the future and navigating with uncertainty a world commanded by ideological systems and institutions. However, as Herman and Cucuzza's earlier discussion shows, Herman is not as hopeless as that. Herman still believes in the US system of voting and USonian democracy. The challenges of life are compounded by one's nationality and vice versa. The experience of being a USonian becomes emotional here for both Phil and Herman. While Phil's new life prevents his "return to the same childhood," he has now entered an adulthood by recognizing the ways national and individual concerns intertwine.

Watching his father cry provides an experience that is the reader's both "ours and other." It serves as a fabulously ordinary moment where readers can identify with a character's realization of his father as more and less than that (as with Roosevelt's complex representative character). Phil's moment of growth is one encountered in aging as people become describable rather than classifiable (i.e., that man is my father versus that man does things that make him my father). Phil's empathy with his father, due in part to national concerns, raises communal and individual concerns of USonians within the text. As readers also engage with these characters, the loss and lack of closure that Alvin, Phil, and Herman experience push readers to associate feelings from similar experiences. In those realizations of humans, yet still role models, fabulous

ordinariness allows nationally entrenched circumstances to invoke relationships by way of similar emotional situations.

A combination of emotional and national sentiment, reminiscent of Alvin's and Phil's loss, manifests in Roland's self-recognition as a significant figure and one of the masses of USonians. Roland refuses to continue sabotaging his team resulting in their loss of an important game. Isaac, an aspiring team manager, argues with Roland about why Roland has chosen to stop feeding his team laced Wheaties. Roland asserts that he has to discontinue the practice because of his respect "For the President of the United States! For--for the whole country" (Roth, *The Great* 332). Roland's assertion touches on USonian models of recognition and representation. As Alvin's model uses the military and democratic sacrifice to invoke USonian identity, Roland uses Roosevelt (the president) to exemplify honor and pride. Part of his self-worth appears through his connection with the president. Roland feels a personal responsibility towards Roosevelt also because he is a remarkably personal and representative president. Roland's position addresses the rewriting of US self-making within the twentieth century as simultaneously more personal and more communally concerned. That paradox continues as he displays elements of fabulous ordinariness by providing a model for readers. Roland's actions and assertions demonstrate a point about US individuality and communal existence that Huntington's work addresses. He writes:

> people are not likely to find in political principles the deep emotional content and meaning provided by kith and kin, blood and belonging, culture and nationality. These attachments may have little or no basis in fact but they do satisfy a deep human longing for meaningful community. (339)

Roland feels a personal responsibility towards his community as well as his community's responsibility towards him. In addition, as with Phil's case, their connections with the US community are emotional, "meaningful" relationships. These literary depictions display how average USonians can also be remarkable. Furthermore, their connections with USonian events reflect ways that typical USonians relate to their culture as they impact and are impacted by it. The notion of USonian communal belonging rises throughout these works.

The connection between concerns of US definition and communal self-definition is apparent in Roth's works. Phil reflects upon the communal role USonians play in each other's lives when he considers Seldon's emotional recovery from national events. After Seldon's father passes away, the government relocates Seldon and his mother. One night Seldon's mother is killed on her way home from her newly assigned position, leaving Seldon orphaned and states away from any friends or family. Herman retrieves Seldon, and he lives with Phil's family for the next few months. Phil reflects upon Seldon and the events he has endured: "There was no stump for me to care for this time. The boy himself was the stump, and until he was taken to live with his mother's married sister in Brooklyn ten months later, I was the prosthesis" (Roth, *The Plot* 362). Philip's reference here reminds the reader of Alvin's loss only this time it is not just a loss of a quality of life, but it is also the robbing of a life itself. Phil's acquiescence to be Seldon's prosthesis promotes the notion of communal maintenance in the face of fractured USonian identities. The lack of completed self-made USonian individualities is tailored by other community members participating in the development of such identities as Phil does for Seldon and Alvin.

In a way nationalism has always engaged such concerns. One definition of nationalism considers it to be "an integrating ideology that overrides the claims of less comprehensive group

loyalties" (Citrin et al. 87). Phil's concerns, his desire for the wellbeing of his cousin as well as his neighbor (whom he repeatedly expresses ambivalent feelings about), reflects a concern for those within his community. Phil cares for Alvin and Seldon because they are Jewish, but he is concerned with ways that their USonian environment impacts them. He works to grasp its impact on their lives as well as their influence on his definition of USonians. Rather than implying a cohesive, happy community, the USonian character may be more readily understood as an aggregate of moments of selflessness and caring for the community over the self, as Phil demonstrates. Perhaps it is not simply a collection of wealthy, white, self-made capitalists, but instead includes a variety of races, genders, and classes with varying definitions of success. Perhaps USonian success and self-making is concerned with communal and individual growth rather than only individual and economic gains.

Like Roland and Phil's concerns of US identity and community, Mike "The Ghost" Rama demonstrates a similar selflessness privileging communal concerns in *The Great American Novel*. Rama explicitly states his objective: his purpose is to catch balls (seemingly an individual goal). This is in contrast with the implied communal goal of Phil: figuring out what being USonian means and participating in the betterment of that community. However, Rama does state that his recklessness developed only after becoming a member of his baseball community. This is when catching balls becomes important to him. It is necessary for his teammates, therefore it is an important goal of his own. Rama's nickname is "The Ghost" because he knocks himself out often by fielding balls so doggedly that he runs into the outfield walls, hard. In an interview, a journalist pokes some fun at him, asking if he has run into walls since he was a child. Rama responds, "nope. But then a' course I wasn't chasin' nothin' then" (Roth, *The Great* 118). Rama is just "chasin'" balls, but he is also doing more than that. He is enacting a

philosophy of USonians to keep running after what one desires without regard for obstacles. His ambition and desire to achieve his goal for himself and his community (his team) reflect ways that self-making in US circles has developed into a desire to satisfy both the self and the community. Furthermore, his drive to be his personal best derives from also being a role model to his USonian community. As such Phil, Roland, Alvin, and Mike serve as models of USonians who challenge traditional conceptions featuring individualism and monetary success.

The paradoxical relationship of individuality and community inherent in USonian existence arises repeatedly in Roth's works. In addition to its appearance in the ways President Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt self-present, figures such as Roland, Phil, and Rama display how daily life contains moments of fabulous ordinariness. Roth's texts demonstrate the importance of recognizing the self that is both "*ours and other*" in the self-construction of USonians (Bhabha, emphasis his 163). The balance between representative USonian characters and remarkable figures worthy of being featured in literature (fabulously ordinary characters) is struck by figures in the texts discussed in Chapter One as well as in Roth's pieces. The difference lies in the ways self-construction occurs. Chapter One was invested in analyzing self-making in US circumstances; this chapter has explored the construction of the US self by way of US communities considering representative capabilities of US characters.

Conclusion

It has been a bracing experience for me,
as for my fellow Americans, to watch the
Ruppert Mundys turn a season of seeming
catastrophe into a gallant triumph.
-FDR to Judge Landis (Roth, The Great 320)

Roosevelt is a representative voice for US citizens in Roth's work. His assertions demonstrate USonian characteristics as well as where to look to find exemplifications of them. While Roth's communities are largely white and male, and often derogatory and racist, his works do offer rhetoric and circumstances fostering closer considerations of what belonging to a US community means. Herman, Astarte, and the Rabbi are examples of what USonians can be through rationalizations as opposed to essentialist or biological assignment. Models of USonians such as Eleanor and Franklin Delano Roosevelt emphasize ways that literary and cultural figures are simultaneously more and less USonian than ordinary individuals. Their placement by and within USonian populations emphasizes how such characters negotiate American exceptionalism in new ways to ensure its continuation within USonian characteristics. Finally, models of self-makers invested in communal and self-development such as Phil and Rama expose ways that twentieth century USonian self-making is as much about concern for the community as it is for growth and gain of the self. While this argument dances close to what Mary Carden worked to avoid in her study of "verify[ing] or reify[ing] a homogenous, exceptionalist model of national identity" it does not (12). Instead, this work prioritizes the place of the community within USonian models of identity and self-development. An awareness of community and the differentiated selves placed within it calls for a more self-aware sense of cohesive USonian

identity and social consciousness.

Roth's "Epilogue" to *The Great American Novel* addresses issues of history and culture metatextually exploring their formation and effects. Roth raises concerns about history and narrative. The frame story of Mr. Fairsmith, a blacklisted journalist covering the demise of the Mundys and their ball league, displays thematics of the overall work. He explains that Mr. Fairsmith's work is rejected "[b]ecause I have written a historical novel that does not accord with the American history with which they brainwash our little children in the schools" (Roth, *The Great* 399). Fairsmith addresses the creation and bias of history. In addition, he highlights the taboo of alternate versions of history. Authority figures approve the retelling of history significantly affecting the ways those histories enter institutions and ideologies. Supposedly histories are events that have "factually" occurred; however, history needs to consider how developing narratives reflect and engender emotional states incurred by historical events. In this way, Roth's novels are as historical as textbooks. Furthermore, his character's emotions and struggles concerning US identity, individuality, and community are as real as biographical depictions of social figures. Fabulous ordinariness bridges the gap between history, fiction, and the reader. Representatives, readers, and characters identify with and introduce analyses and critiques concerning the development and maintenance of culture individually and communally in the US. Fiction can be as just as much of an avenue for the articulation of social selves and reflections on reality similar to textbooks and journalism. As Roth's Fairsmith articulates here, it is time to consider how those cultural works are important refractions of reality and impact cultural development tools.

CHAPTER THREE

PERFORMING US SELF-MAKING: DRAMA AND DREAMS IN *CLYBOURNE PARK* AND *HAMILTON*

"Who tells your story?"

"Time…"

(Miranda)

Introduction

Edward Delman's interview with Lin-Manuel Miranda answers the question of why works about USonian identities, particularly deviant ones, are common in the twenty-first century. Miranda explains that works like his (that revise what USonian means) are:

> a particularly nice reminder at this point in our politics…when immigrant is used as a dirty word…that three of the biggest heroes of our revolutionary war for independence were a Scotsman from the West Indies, named Alexander Hamilton; a Frenchman, named Lafayette; and a gay German, named Friedrich von Steuben, who organized our army and taught us how to do drills. Immigrants have been present and necessary since the founding of our country. I think it's also a nice reminder that any fight we're having right now, politically, we already had it 200-some odd years ago. (qtd. in Delman *n.p.*)

Miranda seems to support the idea of a circular history or the cliché that history repeats itself. He also alludes to what USonian belonging is, or at least how USonian identity has been established. However, his statement that "[t]his is a story about America then, told by America now…and we want to eliminate any distance between a contemporary audience and this story" seems to contradict traditionally independent notions of USonian identity (qtd. in Delman *n.p.*). *Hamilton*

does invite its audience to learn and interpret USonian history and representation in a fresh and more open-minded light. This more inclusive US identity provides a cultural space for readers and viewers to relate critically to their social and interpersonal circumstances. Certain identity categories become more included in USonian history and USonian culture today, and the narrative of USonian construction itself becomes more significant to diverse USonian communities. When studied alongside a work like *Clybourne Park*, these twenty-first century texts question the purpose and result of USonian identity categories and invite considerations of what happens when those separations gain acknowledgment but fail to be criteria for acceptance within a community.

Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton* narrates a history often ignored. This musical revives the story of a crucial founding father retold to include women and diverse ethnicities to reshape history with music inspired by contemporary artists. All of these "changes" to this historical account reflect a more accepting diversity of today's US, past and present. Ironically, the audience for this musical is largely middle class to well-off white individuals.[1] My personal experience of sitting in the theatre in which actors are performing USonian narratives in innovative ways with the audience reacting in gentrified manners was slightly bewildering. It resulted in me feeling that the innovative, rule-bending Cause seemed to be lost. The motivational energies of the cast, story, and presentation methods fade. After rap battles, R&B histories, and striking visual performances, the silence or applause greeting them seems oddly out of place. The narrative, in this instance, becomes reinvented and restrained by white,

[1] Ticket prices further limit the availability of the media particularly by class. Despite the attempt at some equal opportunity with the ticket lottery, even the "nosebleed" mezzanine start at around $200 after taxes. As the dates move close to productions, some of these tickets are purchased for as much as $800. Moreover, statistics from The Broadway League show that approximately 8 in 10 viewers of Broadway in '14-'15 were white and in their mid-40s, 80% had college degrees, and 40% had graduate degrees (Demby).

masculine placidity. However, when introduced to USonians of various educational, racial, and gendered backgrounds (through the internet, YouTube, a forthcoming text version, mainstream media, etc.) the message becomes accessible to a variety of identities under a larger national identity. The audience's responses through the sales of the soundtrack, the inherent emphasis (via medium choice) on the power of words in a musical, and the receptions of the rap battles importantly involve past and contemporary US figures and problems to reframe history in an up-to-date manner. Such a response is demonstrative of one of the veins of fabulous ordinariness. The sales and reception of this piece reflect an investment in the representative characters and their stories. Furthermore, as Miranda explained, this work invites audiences to identify with a national identity through characters struggling to build a nation as well as maintain their personal lives.

Miranda's *Hamilton* emphasizes that "Time" will tell a person's (and a nation's) story, as the above quote indicates. Time is complex. It includes people(s), places, and histories. While the actors' and story's characteristics might prompt perspective-altering thought processes when fully acknowledged, the history of texts challenging single perspectives on US social issues opposes such simplification. In other words, these works force an awareness of the complexity of USonian identity and society through what appears to be oversimplifications, paradoxes, and exaggerations. For example, Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1958) and George Takei's *Allegiance* (2012) display social injustice like racial discrimination in more multidimensional ways by considering cross-sections with class, gender, or heteronormativity. Works like these alter audiences' perspectives on social issues and challenge society as a whole to reconsider its actions and histories. Furthermore, another off-Broadway production, Bruce Norris's *Clybourne Park* (2011), demonstrates that such concerns and rejections of the status quo are not isolated

incidents or moments of individual expressions of US interaction and history. Norris' work riffs on Hansberry's themes of racial examination, segregation, and discrimination as significant parts of US identity today. He introduces concerns of mental health/illness, sexuality/orientation, and class and racial discrimination. The characters' interactions with one another through plot and their verbal exchanges establish as well as undermine notions of USonian identity. Perhaps more importantly, these literary events keep audiences entertained and offer criticism of traditional classifications of self-makers and US successful characters as well as their problematics within USonian generalized categories.

An important part of all these works is that they take into consideration the space, place, people, and time in which USonian character and representation develop. They prominently question and redefine USonian identity by breaking down stereotypes and asking audiences to examine themselves and their communities. Bruce Norris' *Clybourne Park* and Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton* critique the ideologies of USonian identity as manifested in self-made models and rhetoric. These works analyze, both covertly and explicitly, the cultural past and present, and the relationship between the two. Significantly, they ask audiences to do the same post-consumption. In other words, these works perform their own social critiques and analyses. Then they ask audiences to be self-reflective in conducting their own by conscientiously using familiar USonian spaces, characters, and tropes. They reinvent self-makers as more communal, more diverse, and more easily open through characters such as Russ and Eliza (*Clybourne Park* and *Hamilton*, respectively). In this process, USonian representatives question past USonian beliefs and foster more critical identities for today's USonians. These two works are characteristic of the trend over the last 150 years of USonian literature. The US constantly reimagines its USonian past; in doing so, it does the same with USonian characters,

representatives, and citizens. These changes occur alongside social developments. The individuals change within the community as does the community itself. Fabulous ordinariness manifests as these texts produce and promote evaluations of the relationships between communities, models, and the self. Cultural works initiate, reflect, and refract the changes in communities and individuals that society and time observe. Additionally, these pieces also explore the implications of those changes. In doing so, these texts provide newer, progressive models of USonian identities, ways to develop them, and reflections on why such identity considerations are highly relevant today.

US readers have the opportunity to identify elements of their national and individual identity with pieces invested in preserving and manipulating US norms and circumstances. For example, Eliza and Hamilton provide models of characters, domestically and nationally centered, for the audience to identify with. In an exchange between the two of them during "That Would Be Enough," Eliza admits her satisfaction with her domestic situation while Hamilton expresses his ambitious desires. Hamilton questions, "Will you relish being a poor man's wife,/unable to provide for your life?" He insinuates his connection to the traditional version of self-making; It is apparent that he desires to be successful economically and within his domestic realm. Eliza retorts, "I relish being your wife. . . . We don't need a legacy./We don't need money." Eliza appears to be the contented homemaker. However, her expressed displeasure with Hamilton's self-encompassing ambition frustrates that conventional female role. The representative characters are both familiar and manipulated here. Due to Hamilton's need to more fully consider the domestic sphere to be successful, he challenges perceptions about US self-making requirements. In addition, Eliza's conflicted concerns allow her character development to become more complex than a housewife. She desires to support her husband but also wishes his

public reputation and success to be less consuming (a stark contrast to US self-making models). The complexities of these characters allow fabulous ordinariness to occur as audiences find ways to empathize and recognize similarities between themselves and these characters.

As these characters become more complex and less like types by dealing with realities complicated by concerns privy to US households and political circles, readers are provided spaces to envision themselves, or at the very least some of their traits, that are reminiscent of real experiences. This empathetic identification harkens back to the types of fabulous ordinariness identified in Chapter Two. Readers get examples of daily, real-life experiences as characters participate in everyday activities (in this case, a dispute about relationship circumstances). These models of events as well as the characters within them complicate character types to allow more humane models of US individuals and communities.

The changes to these type-cast characters is part of what allows fabulous ordinariness to take place within these texts concerning US character and construction. Rather than perpetuating stereotypes of US self-makers and their companions, the meaning of self-making is contested and remade to invite readers (who are more complex than stereotypes) to identify with and feel empathetic towards characters within the stories. These storylines and challenges to conventional US identifiers offer more diverse recognitions of US social members and individuals. John Cawelti addresses the importance of recognizing the cross communication that occurs between society and literature in *Apostles of the Self-Made Man*. He explains:

> The advantages of fictional materials in the study of social attitudes are twofold: because the novelist must create a world in which to set his characters and actions, the novel enables us to see how the writer places character types like the self-made man and themes like success in a context of political and philosophical

> belief. In addition, the novel is a work of fantasy and imagination as well as an imitation of reality; its patterns of action often reveal covert attitudes or judgments which significantly qualify the explicit positions taken by the writer. (Cawelti viii-ix)

Cawelti's comment is important here in two ways. It introduces a precedent for studying culture through literary works, particular fiction. Second, it emphasizes the ways that works are representative of both the personal beliefs of the author, and also the political and ideological environment s/he is groomed in. Fiction, then, provides a space for the manipulation of reality as well as of representatives. Following along with such an approach, *Clybourne Park*, *Hamilton*, and their characters challenge and reinforce US ideals to give diverse readers more open ideas of US membership, participation and success.

USonian Acceptance, Rejection, and Amendments

Hamilton and *Clybourne Park* both include a variety of identifying characteristics of USonians and USonian subgroups and examine USonian ideals and self-making roots of US identity. Furthermore, they introduce characters and plot events that interrogate the meanings of nationalism and community. Self-making traits connect closely to USonian characteristics, both past and present. Although not always privileged, self-making is crucial to USonian identities and histories, as observed by some Americanists. Jim Cullen observes in his article "Problems and Promises of the Self-Made Myth" that "[i]t is all the more ironic that the self-made man largely fell off the national radar after the 1960s when one considers how crucial self-making, and the rejection of institutional authority, have been to all social movements that followed the counterculture" (12). The self-made man and his tenets are neither neglected nor completely rejected by society. Rather, with his proximity to USonian values, the self-made man and his

principles evolved with USonian society to embody more diverse USonian beliefs of equality and democracy.

Clybourne Park interrogates the meaning of community and USonian identity. The first act is set in 1959 with a focus on the effects of the Korean War. The plot centers on Russ and Bev, who are moving after their son, Kenneth, returned from the war and committed suicide. They are moving out of their house and community, selling their home to an African-American family in the process (the reversal of the plot of *A Raisin in the Sun*). Karl (Russ and Bev's white neighbor) strives to define what community means and who counts in USonian society. However, the characters' treatment of Bess (Karl's wife), Russ, and Kenneth displays the contradictions of USonian beliefs and behaviors on equality and community. The other characters' treatments of Bess as an invalid due to her being deaf and pregnant displays the gap between USonian ideals and practices. Similarly, Russ and Kenneth's narratives depict the misrepresentations and inappropriate handling of mentally ill individuals. When Kenneth returns from war, his community refuses to recognize the trauma he has experienced. Furthermore, his neighbors prevent him from acquiring a job or accepting him in other social venues. Eventually, Kenneth commits suicide. His father, Russ, has a difficult time dealing with it. Rather than offer him support, his friends tell him to get over the loss and move on with his life. Their community refuses to acknowledge Kenneth's need to cope with a war-ravaged USonian identity and history. They also refuse to allow Russ to mourn the loss of his son, his innocence, and simplicity. Through the depictions of Russ's grieving and Kenneth's botched re-immersion into society, ideas of USonian identity become conflicted. The contradictions emphasize the gaps in representations. The inconsistencies themselves are less significant than their portrayals. Notably, their absurdity is apparent and commented upon overtly by the playwright and in more

nuanced ways by the characters. Furthermore, the explicit discussion of race and community lays bare the racism undermining much of the US's supposed democratic and libertarian ideals.

The inability of Kenneth and Russ to navigate social conventions of the time for masculine behavior contradicts familiar versions of self-made USonian males (lack of fabulous ordinariness). However, the lack of acceptance by the community is the predominant element of the textual environment. Highly relevant, also, is the perception the text itself introduces to the reader of alternate but equally acceptable and misunderstood personas. In doing so, the text demonstrates the ways that USonian communities are both inclusive and exclusive. One of Bev's comments illustrates this within the text, as well as Kenneth's social positioning (analyzed later on). When Karl is addressing the sensitive subject of Kenneth's suicide, Bev exclaims, "Well, maybe if you had known my son a little better. If anyone had taken the time, the way Francine took the time—" (Norris 89). Bev's retort explicitly demonstrates the ways exclusion and inclusion affect USonian community members. In one way she lumps together two of the "social outcasts" (PTSD victim Kenneth and African-American female Francine); alternately, she alludes to the contradictory nature of mainstream society that stigmatizes and ignores these groups but still uses them to produce a unified self-image. In other words, Bev's comment points out the irony of a society that excludes people into inclusive groups in order to perpetuate a larger unified narrative. Those groups (wounded soldiers and minority laborers) are crucial to maintaining the status quo of USonian society. Their narratives allow the larger one to exist. Their representation is marginalized, as are the groups. However, both the narratives and the groups need acknowledgement for the establishment and maintenance of a whole USonian identity.

Russ's repeatedly rejected mourning draws attention to the problems of a divided community as well as to the damage rigid representational structures inflict on the self and community. Russ attempts to begin reading Kenneth's suicide letter twice, beginning "Dear Mom and Dad" (Norris 90-1). The first time, Bev yells at him to "*Stop it!!!*" and the second time, Jim tells Russ that he "[n]eed[s] . . . to calm down" (Norris 90-1). Here, Bev denies Russ the ability to mourn and process Kenneth's death. Literally and, figuratively, then Kenneth (who, as Bev established, violated social norms) and Russ (who, by mourning, is deviating from the calculating and resilient male USonian) are silenced. This incident, like Alvin's missing leg discussed in Chapter two, recognizes the irony of silenced groups that deserve attention in order to attain a representative and accurate identity. Russ explicitly lays it out this time, exclaiming, "*What do you think happens in a goddamn war?* They told him to *secure the territory*, not go knocking on doors asking *permission*. And if he was man enough to admit what he did, maybe you oughta have the decency to do the same damn thing" (Norris 88-9). Russ's accusatory statements reveal a few things. First, he addresses the reality of war, as well as the consequences of war, which often lack acknowledgment in patriotic rhetoric and ideologies. This displays contradictions within national rhetoric beyond just national identity. Second, Russ emphasizes the need for the community to take responsibility for what individuals do. This second feature draws attention to how the individual and community connect. This relationship depicts fabulous ordinariness working or breaking down in a text. The individual and community intertwine in complex ways. Those connections need acknowledgement and attention to develop the healthiest environment for the community's inhabitants. Recognizing how those relationships work could be the first step to developing models that accurately and appropriately reflect the community and its individuals.

The second act highlights the problematics of categories in USonian society. It more fully introduces class, gender, and sexual orientation as identifying factors that require recognition but should not result in discrimination or division. Lindsey and Steve desire to move into a renovated home in a neighborhood that Russ and Bev moved out of many decades prior. The problem occurs when Lindsey and Steve want to tear down the building and construct a three-story building. Lena and Kevin argue that doing so ignores the history of the region and reappropriates the space and community (an action that has already occurred once).[2] In this second act, USonian definitions and division offensively demonstrate and appear as proclamations of self-identity. These moments serve to demonstrate how identities have the potential to be self-affirming or isolating depending upon their use. It leads to considerations of ways communities identify with one another.

Hypocrisies in the original definition of self-making USonians and the moral definitions associated with it are also central to *Hamilton*. The musical introduces characters such as Hamilton (a complex character who has an affair and engages in duels), Eliza (a loving, forgiving wife and mother and a very public figure), and Angelica (an adoring older sister who also reveals the cost such an identity requires). Hamilton, according to traditional self-made virtues, would be a failure, as Wyllie explains: "The good wife enriched her husband by bringing profitable qualities of character" (30-1). While Eliza does this, the ideal is that both partners will have, share, and transfer those profitable traits with one another as well as with their children.

[2] Race and class play an important part in this second storyline in which Kevin and Lena are living in a regenerating African-American "ghetto" that is up and coming. Middle to upper class white USonians have previously left the neighborhood (Act I), so having them return and "reclaim" the community would again disrupt the USonian lifestyle established since they choose to leave last. Kevin and Lena are open to "integration," but not "reappropriation."

Although Hamilton fails his wife by having an affair, he does later succeed in possessing a strong character and passing it onto his son as he instructs him to be honorable while dueling.

Similarly, neither Eliza nor Angelica could be traditionally self-made characters due to their gender, along with the roles they adopt. Eliza represents, to an extent, the potential power of women that arose in the US, particularly as social workers. However, she continues to balance her public role with her domestic life. One of her final works is to "establish the first private orphanage in New York City" (Miranda). Her social work connects with her domestic role and success as a mother, but her character is not solely defined by that role. Finally, Angelica's depiction is as a strong, independent female character. However, her success story is more complex than that as her weaker side is introduced. She takes on an empowered victim status, as she explains her "only job is to marry rich," as she is the "oldest and the wittiest" (Miranda). She is a victim of circumstances, but she empowers herself by allowing her sister to choose her husband and a loving domestic situation. Angelica's success involves sacrifice but centers on the idea of allowing people to find love and happiness within a society still somewhat focuses on economic engagements.

These three characters question fundamental understandings of the history and social norms of the US. This presentation of US life questions and manipulates self-making and success standards in this presentation of US life. Furthermore, the interpretation of the issues of race, gender, nationality, and class is left to the audiences. *Hamilton*, from the very first introduction of Alexander Hamilton to the ending scene featuring Eliza, questions USonian identity as strictly defined. As Carden explains about self-making, "The ideology of self-making thus underwrites hope and assurance in some kinds of American futures as it enables dismissal of others" (16). Traditionally, US definitions feature masculine, independent, middle-class narratives. Rather

than continuing to privilege this national success story, writers such as those discussed in this work encourage questioning identity constructions, definitions of success, and traditional national narratives. These writers feature self-makers of various genders, potential sexualities, and diverse classes. While still featuring traditional self-making stereotypes, the variety of USonians self-making questions the rigidity of those requirements.

Clybourne Park and *Hamilton*'s interrogations of USonian society and history allow for USonian readers to consider the past, the present, and the connections between the two. As Miranda's work explicitly points out and as Norris's drama implicitly encourages, examinations of time (and its perception and construction) are crucial to individuals, representatives, and communities. More importantly, the ways literary depictions, representatives, and cultural signifiers impact understandings of present social constructions in USonian environments become more apparent. US identities form and enact considering in part constructions of USonians as literary and historical figures, as the works and characters in this and the past two chapters demonstrate. The ways one learns to understand one's nationality comes from history, literature, and representative cultural figures. Representative characters are varied and diverse, encompassing USonian reality, and manipulating the strict and discriminatory (white, male, middle-upper class) representations of past and global USonians.

USonian Varieties

Usonian representatives, identity formations, and audiences are re-envisioned in unique ways in Miranda's and Norris's works. Whereas the analyses in Chapters One and Two are invested in the idea of expanding USonian membership and affiliation through literary works, the texts studied in this chapter strive to challenge perceptions, representations, and methods of membership of USonians and their identity categories. Citrin et al. write that, "the political

relevance of social identities rests partly on how they influence attitudes and behavior towards one's own and other groups" (87). In saying so, they emphasize how notions of USonian traits and US identities have the potential to be useful as well as hinder. The "political relevance" of US identities becomes apparent in relation to these works when examining the characters featured within them as well as the audience consuming the literature. *Hamilton* is rife with US political figureheads and includes patriotic characters. The playwright manipulates these past cultural figures to engender USonian values more accurately. In addition, the cultural activities (rapping), appearances (ethnicities in casting and gender priority in plot), and mannerisms (the slang and body language used as reference points for today in an unfamiliar past) draw attention to the differences between the US then and now. However, the musical also portrays how they are similar by situating the contrasts as paradigms that need deeper inquiries to become more clearly understood. The major characters, cast to incorporate alternate ethnicities into USonian narratives, exude elements of American identity subcategories in their rapping and mannerisms. Significantly, the female characters introduced become subject to gentle stereotyping, then they are filled out to more human-like complexity. Such character constructions invite questions of identity completeness, stability, and communal influence. USonian subgroups are central to USonian history and society today through its use of feminized and racialized characters and mannerisms.

Perhaps one of the most important incidents of combining traditional self-making rhetoric with contemporary diversity concerns occurs in *Hamilton*'s Aaron Burr's assertion that "I am the one thing in life. I can control. I am an original" (Miranda). Here an African-American Burr delivers these lines to the audience. The dynamics of a non-white male feeding these lines to the audience reflects white, self-making US rhetoric in a new direction. Multiple audiences are

addressed by this line and allows one to see the exceptional aspects of this character. He is a driving force and will accomplish his goals. He also recognizes that he may need to overcome difficulties by explaining "I am an original" (Miranda). This provides an opportunity for fabulous ordinariness to arise for the audience in multiple ways. Burr's character is exceptional. He is remarkable for his contributions to US history and by being featured within a major cultural text. He is also ordinary enough that many audience members can recognize similarities with him. In addition, Miranda's work sets Burr's character up to expand traditional perceptions of US character and self-making.

Importantly, this alternative presentation of USonian character does not exist to alienate the audience, accuse past histories of injustice, or emphasize differences. Instead, it offers a message of inclusion, acceptance, and forgiveness. *Clybourne Park* broaches the same types of questions with its characterizations. This piece addresses the need to reject classifications by emphasizing interactions with characters who have handicaps, mental illnesses, and categorized identities that are used to discriminate even if they are not always legally recognized (such as homosexuality). These works do not just ask audiences/readers to consider the consequences of social conditioning and categories; they place readers/audiences in the room with these characters, draw attention to the ways they are treated and treat others, and invite the audience/readers to react (within and outside of the text) to those behaviors. Work focusing on the development of antitheatricality in contemporary Western theatre more fully explains this audience-performance relationship. Martin Puchner asserts in his work *Stage Fright* that:

> every act of parodying a scripted, normative act is also a repetition of that normative act and thus participates in forming, rather than abolishing or overcoming the norm that it governs. Theatrical estrangements of norms are

> dependent upon and therefore involved in producing the norms that they might seek to subvert. (17)

The plays are mimetic enough that audiences relate to them as "repetition[s] of normative act[s]." However, they feature contradictions and changes to norms and narratives to challenge traditional stereotypes and conceptions about character types, histories, and ideologies. The theatre is working to draw attention to its presentation methods as well as the inconsistencies (and their purposes). The stereotypes, such as other characters' reactions to Bess's so-called conditions, are intended to draw attention to their absurdity and the time period's problematic paradigms. Furthermore, these plot events facilitate a potential contrast with ones that continue to exist today. Similar to earlier texts discussed, USonian principles require a more careful examination to provide an accurate depiction and understanding of how cultural representations play roles in socially constructed selves and communities.

In a particularly normative exchange, Lindsey and Lena demonstrate their representative capabilities as well as their ordinary traits allowing for audience members to recognize some of their similar characteristics. During one of their discussions during the exchange about altering the architecture of Lindsey and Steve's house, Lena says to Lindsey "I'm sorry you're upset" (Norris 175). Lindsey responds, "I'm not upset. I'm not" (Norris 175). Both of these women have the potential to have a major impact on the neighborhood: one (Lindsey) by potentially altering it, the other (Lena) by preserving it. These characters desire to acknowledge one another, even when division becomes apparent in this moment as Lena displays concern for Lindsey. In addition, Lindsey's response is an attempt to deflect any resemblance of offense towards Lena. They become characters that the viewer may identify with as both have the potential to become

very important to the neighborhood, but they also display a localized concern for the people most immediately present around them.

The variety and manner in which these texts portray their characters invite inquiries about dominant perspectives. Alexander Hamilton, considered by many today to be "white" and American, is repeatedly identified as an “other” in *Hamilton*. He even appears as an “other” by being played by markedly Latino/Hispanic actors. Burr often refers to Hamilton as a "bastard, orphan, son of a whore" (Miranda). This explicitly positions Hamilton as a self-made man who was not inherently privileged into his position *and* (as with some characters in Chapters One and Two) emphasizes throughout the story how others were necessary in his self-making. His character challenges two important tenets of USonian self-making classification today: 1. Do USonians need to be born in country to be USonian?, and 2. How important is the community in the construction of USonians? Speaking to inquiries about community formation and enactment, Richard Dyer proposes a theory on stereotypes that can play an important role in terms of ways that communities are formed and individuals perceive each other. He analyzes stereotypes’ social and cultural damage and value in *The Matter of Images*. In the introduction to his text he comments, "[I]t is not stereotypes, as an aspect of human thought and representation, that are wrong, but who controls and defines them, what interest they serve" (12). Articulating recognizable or distinguishing traits is not necessarily problematic behavior in and of itself. Stereotypes or identity referents become an issue when derogatory or damaging associations connect with negative identity traits, often becoming part of a definition. For example, it is not a problem that Alexander Hamilton is an immigrant without parenting or class. It becomes a disadvantage for Hamilton in New York when Burr frames it in terms that are insulting and intended to degrade him. Burr's description of Hamilton is intended to reinforce a social structure

somewhat mimicking Britain's hierarchical structures. Such a social stratum has characterized and still does characterize USonian social circles. Discrimination based on possession of money and social prestige is crucial to the self-made man and USonian contemporary social narratives for working and middle class USonians today. USonians identify with Hamilton because he is a character who possesses traits signifying yet manipulating typically representative USonian self-makers. He is not quite an underdog, but he is a figure who rises through the ranks with the help of mentors and family (Eliza namely). His story represents one depicted in a plethora of cultural representations today and ingrained into many USonians.

Hypocrisies inherent in USonian identity are also a concern in Norris's work. Betsy in *Clybourne Park* draws attention to the absurd way others construct identity categories. Her character is deaf and pregnant; however, the stereotypes enacted within this text position her as handicapped and fragile. Betsy is drinking some tea in Act One when Karl (her husband) becomes panicked, instructing her to take "[s]low sips. Small sips" as if all of a sudden she has lost her ability to drink beverages without choking (Norris 55). Furthermore, upon Karl and Betsy's arrival at Russ and Bev's home, Karl asks whether Russ is contagious (he is mourning the suicide of his son, but this is coded as his being "indisposed") (Norris 55). Russ explains he's "[n]ot contagious," as if his condition would impact Betsy's in a negative manner (Norris 55). Russ is positioned as one who cannot cope with reality when he is actually quite adept at recognizing how society is working and is flawed. In the same way that Russ' identity is scripted onto him, Betsy receives similar treatment by those who choose to posit her as defenseless, requiring attendance and special care. Just like Hamilton, neither Betsy nor Russ is weak or incapable. However, others' descriptions and treatments of them, based upon the stereotypes associated with their current states of being, negatively impact their social experiences. Betsy's

condition should not relate to her status as a USonian; neither should Russ's. However, her marginalized experience is a consequence of a reality founded in unfair gender presumptions that result in a lack of agency and a predetermined social experience based upon perception. The inappropriate representation of a pregnant, disabled individual within this context emphasizes the ways that these people are treated, revealing how much and little today's treatment of those peoples have changed. Rather than recognizing Betsy's ability to bring another living being into the world after harboring it in her body (an impressive feat of self- and other- making), the focus is placed on the peril that could be associated with such a self-change. This reduces Betsy's action to a potential handicap or fatality. Similarly, rather than focusing on Russ's accusations of the problems society possesses, the focus becomes his abnormal behavior. The change he could stimulate in society is rejected in favor of attempting to "normalize" his emasculated social self.

All of these examples emphasize ways that subgroups create and interact (as a community and within larger USonian social structures). Furthermore, they demonstrate the importance of perspective within society and the literary work's interpretations. These plays offer identifying factors (the places where audiences can identify through fabulous ordinariness) in the characters' potentials, not with their weaknesses. Hamilton's potential (as he rises from the bottom), Betsy's ability to self- and other- produce (by becoming a mother), and Russ's potential to enact change (at least in thought processes if not in larger social categories) are situations audiences may identify with in a society that still often divides and damns actions and behaviors. Just as Roth's previously examined texts, these works are about pointing out the flaws in divided USonian identities. However, these works are also just as concerned with offering solutions for audiences to enact individually and collectively, even if it is as simple as altering perspectives.

Both Hamilton and Russ experience entrancement and paralysis by family circumstances. Furthermore, after experiencing devastations in their home lives, it becomes crucial to them to have content, peaceful domestic settings. Such actions demonstrate the significant role domestic circumstances play in self-making narratives and self-made characters. Hamilton is painted as being a successful self-maker in traditional ways: He becomes well-known and reputed in the public sphere and has powerful allies there. What causes his "downfall" (the area of his life that requires attention for him to be "satisfied") is his home life. He publishes the Reynolds pamphlet to save his political image. Soon after his son Philip dies during a duel, but does so in the manner in which Hamilton advises him to (honorably, shooting at the sky instead of his opponent). Two important realizations come about at this point in Hamilton's narrative: 1. The role of the father is important to himself and his son (or child) in ways that when those responsibilities are neglected the child is driven to desperation for affection (Philip dies trying to gain his father's admiration, approval, and affection in his duel), and 2. Turmoil at home leads to discord within oneself and in the community (i.e., the private reacts and encompasses the public and vice versa). Russ's mourning of his son draws attention to these issues as well. His familial concerns go one step further, as his mourning is both for his son and for society. His grief reflects his desire for a change in society, but also recognizes the changes that will be painful for the US to go through in order to become more accepting and more forgiving.

Hamilton and Russ demonstrate the importance of being a significant presence in their children's lives. In *Hamilton*, Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton share a scene devoted to revealing how being a father is crucial to their self-confidence and identities. In a ballad dedicated to his illegitimate offspring, Burr expresses that "I'm dedicating every day to you./ Domestic life was never quite my style" (Miranda). Even while Burr may not be the actual father

figure in his child's life, he asserts the importance of assuming that role. To him it is not enough to be a successful lawyer and politician, he also needs to be a successful provider and domestic role model (in terms of how to take care of one's child). In the same song, Hamilton discusses his newly found significant domestic role. He addresses his son, explaining, "Look at my son. Pride is not the word I'm looking for./ There is so much more inside me now" (Miranda). The reimagination of father figures raised in the works previously analyzed in this dissertation is rewritten once again here. The prideful father still exists, but as Hamilton explains, there are more to his interactions with his child than just being a proud father. Finally, in *Clybourne Park*, Russ explicitly demonstrates how impactful the emotional connection a father has with his child is. When Francine and Albert drop Ken's (Russ's son's) chest down the stairs accidentally, Russ has an outburst. He gets frustrated with his wife and blurts, "I *told* you I'd do it. You heard me plain as day" (Norris 68). While moving a trunk does not seem like it should affect someone so much, when it is all that is left of a loved one who experienced ostracism and committed suicide, those belongings take on a symbolism and character that makes them almost sacred. Russ is not angry that someone dropped a trunk down the stairs. He is pissed (vocabulary choice is appropriate to reflect the text) due to the disrespect shown to his son (via his belongings) and himself (as someone else is touching what remains of his family member). What is important to Russ as a father is the same emotional connection that Hamilton and Burr are both expressing. He needs to be there for his son in ways that are more significant than simply being a prideful father.

These fatherly roles demonstrate a shift in familial construction and expression that departs from traditional structures and gendered guidelines. There is a change in what formerly made fathers: focus on pride at birth, participation in career construction, and distanced

emotional relationships. Contemporary characterizations of fatherly roles contrast with these traditional markers of fathers' roles as and in USonian self-makers. In addition to his work concerning frontier ideologies influencing USonian manhood, Kimmel studies fathers' roles in USonian self-making stories. He compares "fatherless" self-makers to sons rebelling from their fathers. Instead of focusing on being a distanced role model that exists for one's child to seek approval from, these examples portray loving fathers, full of emotion, striving to connect with their children in meaningful ways. In this sense, these characters have become representatives of the ways that fathers live in the United States today, largely. Similar to the complex characters developed in texts like *Kane and Abel* and *The Plot against America,* father figures are becoming less like types. Rather, they are more complex depictions of male characters with families. They are characters that a father may choose to emulate (emotionally) or a child might recognize traits of his/her father in. Fabulous ordinariness becomes a feature of these texts as readers may connect, empathize, or desire to imitate some of these father's mindsets and behaviors. Russ's fierce protectiveness of his son (or his remains/memories), Hamilton's loving gaze on his son (perhaps indicative of that on all of his children), and Burr's desire to be more than just an illegitimate reproducer can reflect the nature of a variety of relationships one might have with his/her father or child. Such opportunity for identification motivates interrogations into traditional roles of masculinity, male USonian self-making, and fathers' social and cultural roles in domesticity.

In addition to the newfound prioritization of an involved fatherly role, the condition of home life becomes more important to these representative USonian male characters. Part of Burr's characterization throughout is that he is never involved enough in anything. Hamilton at one point highlights this problem asking "If you stand for nothing, Burr, what'll you fall for?"

(Miranda). Burr's lack of definitively supporting a particular political standpoint is a point of contention between Hamilton and himself. Furthermore, this demonstrates Hamilton's belief that Burr fails to be involved in developing US national government and politics. Later on, Burr laments his own lack of a role in US formation. When Hamilton gets Madison and Jefferson to agree to some of his financial ideas for the nation, Burr has a number devoted to his lack of involvement. This song goes even farther in explaining his failure to be involved more completely as well as articulating his own recognition of this lack announcing "I wanna be in the room where it happens" (Miranda). While his desire to be more active in political circles explicitly appears repeatedly, it reflects his brief commentary on his desire for more domestic participation. Furthermore, this combination reflects his failure to partake as a characteristic of his entire life. This desire to be more involved in life in general is symbolized in his relationship with his mistress as well as in his role as an illegitimate father. When describing the restrictions on his relationship he tells Alexander, "it's unlawful, sir…/She's married to a British officer" (Miranda). Burr's domestic life is essentially non-existent. Furthermore, what he does have is illegitimate. His problem continues, as he even partially recognizes, saying "I'll make a million mistakes" (Miranda). This general statement applies to his family life. He does not go get this girl, as Hamilton prompts him to do. So his domestic life is not what a good father or a successful self-maker possesses. Furthermore, as Burr opens the play, he introduces himself as "the damn fool that shot him" (Miranda). Burr recognizes here at the opening and with his later comment addressed to his child that he is not successful despite his surviving longer, physically and (arguably) culturally, than Hamilton. He is not a simple villain. Instead, he is an individual who has made some unfortunate mistakes and poor choices. However, there is value in his character and he is a USonian representative character in addition to Hamilton and Eliza's

successful ventures. Burr is self-making but less successfully than other models. His dubious success makes him easier to empathize with. By having self-recognized successes and failures, readers/viewers may feel Burr is a character more easily identified with. His use of fabulous ordinariness puts him closer to being more ordinary than fabulous (at least in Miranda's self-making US narrative).

Similarly, Hamilton only realizes how crazily his life is cartwheeling once his domestic situation is complicated. First, he loses his relationship with his wife with the publishing of the Reynold's Pamphlet. Next, Angelica returns from abroad exclaiming, "I'm not here for you" (Miranda). Finally, shortly after that Philip (Hamilton's son) is engaged in a duel. Beforehand Hamilton instructs him to aim for the sky because "your mother can't take another heartbreak" (Miranda). Philip follows those instructions, but dies anyway as alluded to earlier. Hamilton has up until this point been the quintessential USonian self-making figure: publicly oriented, successfully forming policies, and having a domestic life making others jealous (Angelica and Burr). However, once his family life becomes complicated, he resigns himself to living "uptown" and taking time to recover. A crumbling public reputation and domestic life results in Hamilton making decisions to become more commonplace. Rather than continuing on to engage in a frantic public life, he attempts to mend some bridges and repair his home life. His attention to his domestic environment and his wife's emotional well-being (albeit late in the game) sets a model for other self-makers and alters traditional conceptions of masculine, workforce oriented USonian success stories. Again, while he still remains a fantastic historical figure and is positioned as largely successful, some of his failures here might invoke fabulous ordinariness more easily.

Likewise, in *Clybourne Park* Russ exemplifies the results of distress in domestic life on a USonian's public position. His community and wife see him as combative and socially inappropriate. However, towards the end of the first act, Russ finds peace when he decides to bury his son's trunk underneath "the crepe myrtle" (Norris 97). This is an important act because his son has already been laid to rest. However, the discord he has inflicted upon the household as well as the cause of it (what is inside the trunk) has not been resolved. Russ's attention to his family reflects the need for self-making USonian males to participate in the construction and maintenance of their families in addition to their public lives. Altogether, these male characters provide models for how USonian father figures are re-envisioned in literary and cultural productions. Representative figures encompass some traditional elements of self-makers, but also engender more realistic, relatable traits to foster stronger reader connections.

The larger takeaway from this is the idea that this type of self-making is representative of the making of the US nation. In the same way these character constructions are moving to become more realistic and relatable, they reflect the ways that struggles for USonian identity are becoming less idealistic and more pragmatic today. Huntington remarks in his study on American society:

> Americans, it is often said, are a people defined by and united by their commitment to the political principles of liberty, equality, democracy, individualism, human rights, the rule of law, and private property embodied in the American Creed. Foreign observers from Crevecoeur to Tocqueville, Bryce, and Myrdal, to the present have pointed to this distinctive characteristic of America as a nation. American scholars have generally agreed. Richard Hofstadter provided

> the most succinct formulation: 'It has been our fate as a nation not to have ideologies, but to be one.' (46)

Huntington's point, while not directly referring to male roles in domestic spheres, does address how ideologies impact perceptions and enactments of USonian identity and its formation. Ideologies, stereotypes, and representations are the basis for social interactions and identities. However, the ways these beliefs of individualism, liberty, etc. appear in identities and USonian social circles evolve and will continue to do so. While they change, they more fully align and at times challenge the definitions of those beliefs and values. These complicated definitions appear as paradoxical and hypocritical when individuals enact them in diverse ways in social circles. Characters such as Hamilton, Russ, Laurens, and Eliza become models for self-making. These characters provide and narrate multiple versions of self-making to provide ample opportunity for audiences and readers to identify with and find fascinating ways to emulate them. It takes the paradoxical USonian narrative from self-making as a communal, stereotypical act to a more individualized and nuanced manner of identity. Stereotypes and representations evolve. As they change, they often foster new categories. While these can be useful, an alternative, more inclusive way of viewing the self and others is a significant result of the process of linguistic separation. A community (or home) may remain divided and compartmentalized; or it may be more accepting and offer diverse, fulfilling opportunities to all members sans restrictive identities.

Community and USonian Self-Making

Rarely is self-making solely an individual endeavor. Self-making often requires others and is informed by the perceptions of others as the last section of this chapter started to establish. The role of the self and others in identity making requires a closer reading to illuminate the

manipulations of power within identity creations. Hamilton's character demonstrates this idea to a vast extent. His story, as written by Miranda, emphasizes how his narrative has been manipulated and forgotten. Miranda's recovered narrative critiques traditions of the self-made man by substituting a diverse community of self-fashioners. Mary Carden's work on self-made narratives provides a model for the sort of analyses the self-made man would benefit from. She explains:

> So much of American literature is haunted, inhabited, or otherwise bedeviled by the self-made man in his incarnation as patriarch and owner, founder and father. Because his story comes to Americans every day in virtually all the spaces and places of the nation, we need what this literature provides: ways of negotiating his demands. (46)

While literature molds representatives and characters, the ideological underpinnings come from society and impact stereotypes that communities use. Characters in *Hamilton* and *Clybourne Park* use and challenge self-making traits. This section will focus on who possesses and uses agency as a result of the changes to self-makers within texts and as models for USonians. "Others" have been crucial in the story about Hamilton and his role in the US's construction. Similarly, Act II in *Clybourne Park* centers on the ways stereotypes and characters are constructed and manipulated in US culture. More importantly, this act focuses on what happens when people become perceptions rather than individuals. *Hamilton* brings a bit more light to how legacies can be an important element of self-construction powered by communities, while *Clybourne Park* examines the problems communal perceptions and representations can have when they self-construct others. Both works examine individual and communal identity negotiations from various pathways.

The characters in *Hamilton* emphasize the roles they play. They are not solely people in Hamilton's life, but they participate in *constructing* Hamilton himself. When the characters are first introduced at the beginning of the play they are described according to the way they influenced Hamilton's life as well as how history recognizes (or now does through Miranda's writing) their influence on Hamilton as a historical figure. Mulligan and Layfayette "fought with him;" Laurens "died for him;" Washington "trusted him;" Eliza, Angelica, and Maria "loved him;" and Burr "shot him" (Miranda). While one could interpret these descriptions as ways that these individuals participated in Hamilton's life, an alternate interpretation is to understand these characters and their actions as crucial to the ways Hamilton perceived himself, Hamilton's public portrayal, and how it is recorded in history. In the same way that the male figures discussed in earlier chapters as representative and communal figures foster national identity development, the characters in this script, as well as their historical counterparts, participate in the construction of Hamilton as both a character and a historical figure. Hamilton becomes a character in the same way that JFK and FDR have been discussed as in Chapters One and Two. More importantly, two later moments in the play are particularly indicative of the ways others self-made Hamilton.

Laurens is a prominent figure in Hamilton's self-construction. Hamilton serves as Laurens' second in a duel that results in part from Laurens' desire to see Hamilton succeed (Miranda). Laurens tells Hamilton, "you're the closest friend I've got" right before the duel commences (Miranda). Historically speaking, Laurens is rumored to be at least an erotic figure in Hamilton's life, potentially a romantic partner: at the very least they had an extremely close homosocial relationship (Hamilton). Such intimacy lends itself to suggestions of influence in Hamilton's politics. Laurens was an early activist for the emancipation of slaves, historically and in Miranda's work. He was even involved in recruiting and directing a regiment of slaves who

enlisted for the price of their freedom at the close of the war.[3] The musical emphasizes this, as well as its influence on Hamilton, particularly at the point of Laurens' death. It is insinuated that Laurens' mission will die with him. However, at the close of the musical Eliza contradicts this statement. Alexander's death inspires Eliza to narrate to the audience while also addressing Alexander Hamilton directly. She tells the story of how she becomes a relevant historical figure by fostering the legacy of two important USonian idealists (Laurens and Hamilton). She is crucial to the self-making of the men as well as to herself. Eliza explains, "I speak out against slavery. You could have done so much more" (Miranda). Her comment serves to demonstrate two points: 1) it emphasizes the influence Laurens' vision had on Hamilton, and 2) it draws attention to the way relationships (communities) are crucial to self-making models in the US (historically and contemporarily). Laurens and his beliefs then become just as important to Hamilton as Hamilton's beliefs themselves.

In addition, Hamilton's participation in advocacy for emancipation is an important element of his nation building and representation. As Michael Kimmel observes:

> some of its [the self-made man's] most important characteristics owe their existence to the timing of the Revolution—the emergence of the Self-Made Man at that time and their great success in the new American democracy have a lot to do with what it is that defines a “real” man even today. (13-14)

Some of the traits that Kimmel addresses here are no doubt the white-washed independence mindset (of white US men seeking autonomy from Britain) with the idea of protecting oppressed individuals (such as religious minorities, although again they would be white). In addition, one of the crucial ideas of the American democracy and the Revolution centers around the right to

[3] See Gregory Massey's work on John Laurens's life: *John Laurens and the American Revolution*.

participate in government and representation rights, they were again largely concerned with the rights of whites. However, while these ideas were still mainly restrictive to a particular demographic, they have and are still working to be more inclusive. Today's USonian identity still holds in high regard the ideas of independence, participation in government, and representation rights (in government as well as in one's culture). While the self-made man can be characterized as masculine and independent, he is also distinctly USonian. He strives for equality of opportunity, which is a characteristic of self-makers and USonians.[4] Self-constructing individuals deviate from stereotypes but still hold identifiable characteristics. In similar ways, these traits could be the foundation for the representative power of a character such as Hamilton. In a 2000s culture where many are involved with causes for equality (such as erasing student loan debt or the wage gap), helping the downtrodden (such as the homeless or veterans struggling after returning from war), or more humane treatment of marginalized groups (such as sex workers), Hamilton (and Eliza) provide character types that are both inspirational and identifiable with. Their causes invoke fabulous ordinariness by giving readers/viewers pause to consider how s/he could contribute to activism today. They both fight for important causes, but just like many USonians, neither is infallible. Both struggle with real world circumstances while trying to achieve goals, and neither feels they have ever done enough. By experiencing these everyday emotions of irrelevancy and insufficiency these characters become more ordinary, despite their extraordinary achievements. All of these circumstances work to provide elements for fabulous ordinariness for contemporary audiences watching these nationally founding characters.

[4] In this notion of equality, every individual who works hard should have the same opportunity to achieve his/her goals regardless of his/her starting identifying characteristics (gender, race, class, etc.).

Eliza's closing speech reflects the way that she constructs Hamilton as much as he did himself. She does not just create his legacy, but builds up what he was striving to do. So in contributing to his Causes, Eliza makes a name, character, and national force within herself. Significantly, Eliza explains that she "interview[s] every soldier who fought by your side," and "tr[ies] to make sense of your thousands of pages of writings" (Miranda). Her work incorporates what Hamilton started. She is not creating something of her own or branching off of what he originated. She is continuing it. Much of what she does either lacks full recognition or gets explained by her connection with Hamilton. However, Miranda's writing of Eliza's role demonstrates her agency as a self-maker and the agency society has over who receives recognition as a self-maker. Eliza is changing social circumstances and forming history with her actions *inspired* by Hamilton. The speculations on Eliza's reactions to the Reynold's pamphlet and the fallout from Philip's duel construct a strong female figure. Most importantly, this character development allows Eliza to expand Hamilton's work as his *and hers* by already having established herself as a strong figure in her own way (although previously unrecognized by USonian self-making standards). Miranda's featuring Eliza and the manner in which he does allows Eliza to be an acknowledged self-maker and significant contributor to USonian culture. Eliza facilitates the existence of a particular version of Hamilton as well as his legacy and in turn, she self-makes herself as a significant contributor to USonian identity.

The problem is that those connected with self-makers often become forgotten. As Eliza explains, she had to work to "put myself back in the narrative" (Miranda). While self-makers are an important element of USonian narratives, the ways people self-make, particularly representatives, need to be more fully recognized. Partners in self-making, such as Eliza and Laurens, deserve fuller recognition for their influence and participation in creating a

representative figure and national climate. Allowing for these individuals to be recognized fosters a more diverse understanding of USonian communities, foundational beliefs, and combats the idea of a reinforced white patriarchy from the start of the nation. Furthermore, revising history in these ways promotes a more diverse history and invites more relational connections with history versus a list of names, dates, and places. Audiences can come to question the veracity of history books and narratives along with understanding history as what it is- a story or a version of facts rather than a recounting of events without doubt. When history is demystified, audiences may find the stories more ordinary. The events that unfolded are not unthinkable. They just happened to be ordinary moments that changed national circumstances. It becomes easier to envision one's own story resulting in a happenstance event that could someday be speculated upon and important to a larger historical circle.

Clybourne Park's second act contains a very diverse cast of characters. Act II introduces characters who are white, middle to upper class; African-American, working to middle class; gay middle to upper class; and a career woman, middle to upper class. These individuals are then stereotyped. Their identities are not self-made, but are collectively self-made by the community around them. While *Hamilton*'s self-making was beneficial and provided a useful model to base one's ideals on, the identifiers used in these instances serve to separate these individuals rather than connect the community more strongly. For example, Steve tells an off-color joke that plays on race, incarceration, gender roles, and sexual consent. In doing so, his comment can only work (either as humor or offense) when it engages with presuppositions about certain groups of people. While *Hamilton*'s co-developed self-construction emphasizes ways groups and individuals ought to be recognized, *Clybourne Park's* character development illustrates the ways

it can be detrimental to individuals and communities when individuals are not seen within communities.

The crucial debate in the second act is whether or not Lindsey and Steve should be allowed to demolish a standing home and create a three-story house in its place. During one of the heated discussions, the characters explain that the city council is opposed to the planned home because the neighborhood is a "collection of *low-rise single-family homes--intended to house a community of working class families*" (Norris 175, my emphasis). Lindsey retorts, "Communities change" (Norris 175). These comments highlight two important points about representatives of US communities: stereotypes play a role in constructing representatives and communities and USonians interact with representatives and stereotypical beliefs in complex ways. Lindsey's comment draws attention to the democratic ideals US identity is founded upon: that "working class" can mean closer to "middle class" (as she wants to live in the neighborhood). It also signals how she feels either the neighborhood will be coopted by other bourgeois members or that working class families can enter that social strata. Conflation often occurs between class and geographic communities in today's USonian considerations. Homi Bhabha studied the ways nations develop, particularly concerning classifications of people and the ways they interact. He explains, "The language of culture and community is poised on the fissures of the present becoming the rhetorical figures of a national past" (142). His conjecture refers to how representative figures and stereotypes become crucial to identities and socializations. Bhabha points out that the past and present are inherently linked as they form social structures and spur changes. What belonged to the present is already part of the past as society's and the community's ideologies evolve. Lindsey's comment implies that while communities may change, definitions of selves and communities, such as the self-made man in

the US, are still important identity components. Lena's response to Lindsey emphasizes this point, as well as the need to analyze closely such changes. Lena requests, "I'm asking you to think about the motivation behind the long-range political initiative to change the face of this neighborhood" (Norris 175). She wants people to think critically about both how communities and individuals have been and are continuing to be perceived. Furthermore, she asks those present (the audience included) to reflect on the effects resulting from politically motivated actions and communal representations.

Just as the self-made man is becoming more well-rounded as a character throughout twentieth and twenty-first century cultural and literary productions, he is also becoming more invested in and created by his environment. While the former is seemingly a benefit to both the self-made USonian male and those surrounding him, the latter is a double-edged sword. As the self-made man becomes more involved in domestic circumstances, female characters are more likely to be recognized as alternative self-makers.[5] However, as surroundings and circumstances influence the construction and accomplishments of self-makers, stereotypes will also play a crucial, at times detrimental, role. For example, Lena and Kevin's attempt to revise Lindsey and Steve's house plans is connected to the ways that their (Lena and Kevin's) community importantly reflects who they are, who they have self-constructed themselves as, and who their community consists of. Both the place and space, as Lena's earlier community centered comment shows, are crucial to its preservation and development. However, Lindsey and Steve construct their home as what they consider to be a "single, working class family," which is what the law has described the community as. Kevin and Lena are fighting to demonstrate that there is

[5] By alternative self-makers I mean self-makers in alternative ways. These characters are not females being successful in masculine, traditionally self-made ways.

more behind that language than just a class difference. This demarcation significantly promotes one ideal community of USonians, while also demonstrating the rift between those who live within that communal identity and those who wish to inhabit that space, but only by modifying it. Perhaps what is revealed is, as Lindsey says, "Communities change." The USonian self-made man may have been perpetuated as a particular set of characteristics, but maybe he was never as solidly defined as it seems.

Both plays examined in this chapter explore how time influences community within a larger framework. They also critique the ways realities, identities, and communities are dependent on being constructed through word usage and labels. Frannie Kelley, a journalist for *NPR,* reflects on the contradictions that creative works can introduce. She explains, "*Hamilton* raids almost everything and in so doing acknowledges a few other silent majorities" (*n.p.*). She says that one of these silent majorities is individuals who cannot afford tickets to see *Hamilton* but who assert a "rousing whoop for the home team when Alexander Hamilton and the Marquis de Lafayette look to the crowd and say, "Immigrants: We get the job done"" (*n.p.*). What Kelley raises as most significant in her review is that *Hamilton* recognizes the history that USonians are familiar with. It observes the ways that representatives have developed and manifested. However, as her second comment concerning the reaction of groups normally excluded from or ignored by Broadway demonstrates, it also asks audiences and scholars to consider who sanctions stories as authoritative and why those histories and representatives receive attention. Those groups find access to the ideas featured in *Hamilton* often when encountering numbers on news programs, the Grammys, and even at NBA basketball games. Once introduced to the musical, the internet provides some more background and information as to who Hamilton was and how Miranda constructs him within his history in *Hamilton*. Perhaps more significantly, we

speculate on what fails to be included or remains unacknowledged by past selective history, terminology, and community formation. Finally, when other twenty-first century works such as *Clybourne Park* ask similar questions, investigations of the comprehensions of the self and the community occur. In these works, the power of words and representations of cultures raise issues about how USonians identify themselves and others, historically and today. *Hamilton* uses these characters and narratives to demonstrate the ways that individuals, particularly role models, are developed. It invites communal construction and disbursement of an individual's story and values. In contrast, *Clybourne Park* features characters who question the validity of communal construction of generalized identities, particularly when those identifying trademarks are placed on individuals. In other words, both works toy with the notion of fabulous ordinariness where representatives become individualized and communal spokespersons simultaneously. Whereas *Hamilton* reflects on the good that can come of manipulating communities, *Clybourne Park* recognizes the need to understand individuals instead of stereotypes in communities.

Developing USonian Identity: Who We Are and How We Are Made

These pieces' portrayals of self-mades through genres and in the selection of who relates these representative stories significantly influences the perception of USonians, self-makers, and their place in a more global community. This chapter shifts the focus of cultural communication in two important ways: it focuses on performed pieces, and within those pieces, it focuses on the power words play in constructing and communicating ideals and beliefs. *Hamilton* invests in this idea by using rap to communicate history. Similarly, *Clybourne Park* uses its performative genre that focuses on labels and stereotypes (words) to demonstrate how they can frustrate communication and unity within a community. The takeaway from these pieces, in this manner, is to understand how they enact a theory of influence. Stephen Bottoms' study of off-off

Broadway productions observes aesthetic and theoretic trends. Bottoms writes, "their [off Broadway productions] objective, which again set important precedents for off-off-Broadway, was to mount collaborative, multidimensional events with the playwright's texts functioning as a starting point in the creation of productions that belonged, to their participants" (24). The obvious takeaway is that plays are evolving to incorporate places and spaces differently. The just as significant but less emphasized point Bottoms is making about participants refers to audiences and actors. Furthermore, Bottoms is asserting that agency over artistic and cultural representations balances between playwrights, actors, and audiences. Words influence audiences, words influence reality, and history is formed from words. All of this focus on the construction method of reality requires a deeper analysis of how such mechanisms work, which is what these pieces are demonstrating.

The cultural products playwrights and actors are presenting reflect and refract audience's realities. For example, in Norris's drama when the characters in the second act are discussing perceptions of Clybourne Park, the power of labels becomes apparent in their reality as well as the audiences. Kathy, Lindsey, and Kevin are discussing the violence of the Clybourne Park area in the recent past. Kevin makes a crack: "'Cuz ya know, the two of us wuz both crackheads" (Norris 153). Specific race, class, and cultural stereotypes are brought to mind by this mimicked representation. In addition, by being set within a conflicted conversation about who belongs to a particular community, this type of characterization emphasizes the problematics of classifying individuals and communities. By pairing "crackheads" with a stereotypical performance of its connotations, Kevin's act raises the audience's awareness of the issues within the text as one makes those generalizations as well as the potential real-world consequences of such behavior. While audiences are not explicit participants in these pieces as in some experimental theater

projects, the ways the works manipulate words invites audiences to apply concepts from these works to reality at large. These plays can serve as symbolic critiques of USonian identity and history.

In an article about *Hamilton's* musical success, such cultural critiques are addressed directly. The CEO of the company that won the rights to produce *Hamilton's* soundtrack explains that recording the soundtrack required an extensive period of time: “Much more time was used than is typical for cast albums” (Atkinson *n.p.*). He explains that the reason is that *Hamilton's* soundtrack is "a *compelling* work of art in its own right" (Atkinson, my emphasis). Yes, *Hamilton* has multiple plots, even romantic and action motivated ones that draw audiences into the work. However, it is also "compelling" in its retelling and examination of USonian history, revising who tells that history, and what constitutes history and representation. Atkinson points out the artistic and emotional value of the soundtrack. However, the other significant thought highlighted here is that this art appeals to one’s emotion as well as one’s logic (in revising a known history). It is this pathological appeal that significantly emphasizes the message of the work. In these ways, it is "compelling" because it recognizes previously silenced voices.

The second duel scene is particularly indicative of the rewriting of history, as well as the influence art has on life. In the first duel scene the characters rap "Ten Duel Commandments." Dueling is somewhat romanticized and masculinity is paraded (a maschismo sort of ideal). However, in this second scene, dueling is revealed as an uncivilized, unnecessary activity divested of its romanticism. Hamilton tells Philip (his son) to shoot at the sky rather than his opponent. He explains, "He'll follow suit if he's truly a man of honor./ To take someone's life, that is something you can't shake" (Miranda). Hamilton's comments frustrate a popular vein of USonian identity: that of the macho self-maker who wins duels in a David versus Goliath sort of

narrative (which was set up in this case where Philip and Hamilton are talking about duel conduct due to Philip's admitted inexperience).

Furthermore, this scene focuses on honor: a highly contested term much associated with USonian ideals. Philip is the underdog, and more importantly, he is defeated. Rather than continue on to "blow us all away" as his previous number sets him up to do, he is literally blown away. The irony is intentional and the focus on word choice is once again a crucial component of the dramatic elements implemented. The work is compelling by way of its lyrical choice, frustration of typical plotlines, and rewriting of history (history here is not the story of the victor). As with *Clybourne Park*, the word uses and plot events invoke thoughts on identity and community paradoxes. They are compelling moments because they stimulate thought processes around ideas that are often ingrained passively within USonians or serve as cultural reference points. To manipulate those established ideas in contentious terms forces oneself and one's community to becomes estranged, sometimes beneficially, other times maliciously: either way, these conditions result in compelling artworks asking audiences to reconsider familiar US based gender, race, and class stereotypes.

The association between masculine behavior and honor is frustrated here. In this case, it is not quite rewarding. Perhaps in some ways it is: Philip is an honorable figure because he chose not to murder. However, he also fails to be traditionally successful or conventionally self-made, because he consciously chooses an alternate behavior. His death is not romanticized as that of a too-young man losing his life. Instead, he represents a son who obeyed his father's advice, resulting in his honor remaining intact, but his body and spirit splitting. When he passes away, his dying words are the French counting refrain from his childhood "Un, duex, trois…" further clarifying his symbolism. His youthfulness is emphasized, but his bond with his mother and

father is prioritized (as this was a happy memory and an intentionally focused upon scene). This complex construction of Philip changes the ways USonian representatives appear and how comprehensions of US history and society happen.

It asks the audience to reflect on how masculinity is constructed, why its definition is maintained, and what happens when it becomes altered in US narratives. Masculine versions of success and USonian notions of honor are subverted. Philip's scenes are particularly "compelling." This story recrafts the ways interpretations of USonian individual and collective identity develop. The way his story is written and presented posits multiple ways to identify with the characters: one may identify with Hamilton advocating for a new sort of moralism; Philip, who wants to be successful by blazing his own trail; or Eliza, who negotiates political and social scenes without receiving due credit (until now). These changes in traditional USonian construction invite more diverse representations, a deeper understanding of the development of social and individual identities, and the complex ways moral systems are enacted. Most importantly, it is aesthetics, the plot, the characterizations, the musical expositions, and the renderings of historical events that together motivate these types of thought processes.

Hamilton emphasizes national identity concerns in characterizations, dramatic plot points, and refrained musical elements highlighting ways that the presentation of self-makers is as important as the construction of self-makers and USonians. *Clybourne Park* uses jokes as its "compelling" artwork. This technique serves to emphasize the ways that words and ideologies are powerful as does *Hamilton*. Yet, it also uses jokes to demonstrate ways that words contain possibilities for dismissal and uncritical espousal. *Hamilton* plays with conventional perceptions of USonians, while *Clybourne Park* gets more specific by directly addressing contemporary perceptions of USonians. *Hamilton* interrogates USonian positions on racialized and gendered

issues and bodies (largely indirectly). *Clybourne Park* brings these conflicts to the forefront and discusses them explicitly. *Clybourne Park* adds class and sexuality to the list of conflicting identity values. It then shows the problems with maintaining those divisions by using jokes as a medium to deliver the message.

Clybourne Park uses jokes and an elongated telling of them to emphasize the effect that labels and perceptions have on USonians. As Steve stalls when telling his joke about incarcerated gender roles and race, Lena emphasizes the presuppositions the joke requires. While waiting for him to get on with the joke, she reiterates, "Little white man…Big black man" (Norris 189). She is referring to their physique in more ways than one. Lena is playing on USonian jokes and stereotypes rooted in fear of the sensuality of black males. The biggest irony of this passage comes from Lena's delivery of these lines. She is an African American woman: one of the most minoritized and marginalized demographics in the twentieth century US. Considering the delivery of these lines, her exaggeration or repetition of the distinctions can point out their absurdity or their potential validity. If she is making a joke of the joke then the absurdity of both the joke and the offense at it become apparent.

Lena serves as an example of stereotypes and the problems with those misrepresentations. She trumps Steve's racially offensive joke by playing on gender and race as well. She asks, "Why is a white woman like a tampon?" (Norris 194). Her punchline: "Because they're both stuck up cunts" (Norris 195). On the surface, this joke can seem simply offensive and rude (as can Steve's). However, closer examination reveals a deeper meaning and cultural commentary. Omozé Idehenre, an actor, who plays Lena in the A.C.T.'s production of *Clybourne Park*, addresses this issue. She explains that during rehearsals she asked Bruce Norris why Lena tells the joke. She recounts Norris's reply that the motivation behind Lena's comment is to get

under Steve's skin by making a joke about his wife (since he is an "infallible" white male to insult him one must insult his wife) (*The Bay Citizen*). This reveals a problematic assumption. Once again for Steve to get offended he must have a somewhat machismo attitude, particularly concerning his wife's honor. He also retorts that he "find[s] it funny" (Norris 196). Whether or not he legitimately means his response, his behavior marks him as in conflict with what have traditionally been expectations of USonian male behavior.

What individuals are getting offended at in *Clybourne Park* is words; what individuals, particularly *Hamilton,* find empowering is words. In *Clybourne Park*, words represent ideas. Those ideas, to these characters, are offensive in the ways that they negatively create connotations and misrepresentations of certain identity categories. The ways that pregnant, mentally ill, and racialized as well as gendered bodies are created, maintained, and treated all occur in words here and in reality. A particularly useful illustration is when Russ becomes extremely agitated in his discussion with Karl. He yells, "Murray Gelman even goes and hires a goddamn *retarded* kid, but *my* boy? Sorry. No work for *you*" (Norris 88). The importance of Russ's frustration lies in his anger about labels and their power. The boy with an intellectual disability he refers to has a label. He is abnormal, but can still be classified. PTSD was not legitimately recognized in the mainstream at the time when Russ's son came home from war. As such Russ questions what people were scared of asking, "He was gonna *snap*? Gonna go and kill another bunch of people?" (Norris 88). In addition to inquiring about the unreasonable fear some individuals possessed because they could not put a label on what Kenneth was suffering from, Russ makes another crucial point. He finishes, "Send him off to defend the goddamn country, he does like he's *told* only to find out the kinda sons-of-bitches he's defending" (Norris 88). Russ explains the impact words have on realities and communities. Being a soldier means defending

one's country, but it also can mean mental complications and social challenges resulting from words commanding soldiers' actions. Labels can be deceptive. Deeper interrogations need to be conducted to more appropriately define identities. Similarly, in *Hamilton,* words find power too. In the same vein, both plays use words to develop a "blend of an inclusive present with a historical past that is rooted in fact" (Freeman *n.p.*).

The past (and present) created in *Clybourne Park* appears in interactions where representative characters make discriminations about identities in both acts. Betsy in the first act serves as a representative for pregnant women and those with disabilities. She is pregnant and deaf. Karl describes his wife as having a "condition," but it is unclear as to whether he is referring to her pregnancy, her inability to speak, or to her previous miscarriage (Norris 59). While these assumptions are specific to Betsy, they are also generalizable to women who have been denied opportunities or restricted from activities based upon their gender as well as to individuals who cope with disabilities and have been denied the same. In both cases it is words and associations that limit and shape realities. Similarly, reinforcing how past perceptions influence contemporary conditions, after Lindsey finds out about the suicide in her potential new home, she gets extremely aggressive. She tells the other characters she finds it extremely disturbing that there was not any obligation to inform her of the past. However, she eventually says, "I'm sorry I lost my shit" (Norris 173). This reinforces the contemporary way pregnant women are perceived: that they are crazy, hormonal, fly off the handle at the smallest things, etc. Perhaps in part some of these associations are true. There are extra hormones floating around, there are body- and mind-altering circumstances the woman is placed in, and it is a different life experience. However, that does not mean that every action a pregnant woman has should be perceived as a result of her "condition," as Karl and many others today would still characterize it.

While being pregnant is not an identity marker, per se, in other ways it is. It is defining a person based upon her body presentation similar to that of race and derived from her gender. When it becomes the basis for assumptions it is problematic. Those assumptions being communicated and resulting circumstances arising from words is what is crucially important to this section. These texts and examples show why works attending to the power of words in reality deserve attention and analysis.

In contrast, Hamilton's actions reveal how words can construct reality. Hamilton writes his way out of his biggest dilemmas rather than allowing his challenges to bog him down. He recaps the many times he "wrote his way out":

> I wrote my way out of hell./ I wrote my way to revolution . . . I wrote Eliza love letters until she fell./I wrote about The Constitution and defended it well./And in the face of ignorance and resistance,/I wrote financial systems into existence./And when my prayers to God were met with indifference,/ I picked up a pen, I wrote my own deliverance. (Miranda)

Hamilton explains the power words have to sway people and opinions. His art medium is words. They compel understanding and emotions. The words chosen and used within *Hamilton* and *Clybourne Park* intentionally do the same. Furthermore, they make a case for the consideration of how daily word choices might be compelling or otherwise effective. The work these pieces do allows my own recognition of the power they give to words. Words construct representatives, words build associations, and words connect as well as separate people particularly socially and culturally. In turn, these ideas are the foundation for fabulous ordinariness. Audiences recognize themselves, or elements of themselves, within characters and situations. More importantly by

feeling themselves to be part of a piece's cultural work they gain a more critical consciousness in examining social and cultural issues.

Both performance pieces emphasize the connection and influence between life and art, specifically spoken art. Christopher Looby discusses the importance of considering how powerful words and literature are in cultural conditioning. He writes, "Language provided a medium which established, at least formally, a common ground where opposed parties could meet. They might meet there only to disagree, but they were joined there at least the minimal sense of confronting one another" (Looby 82). The works studied in this dissertation function as forums for discussions about how language and ideologies connect in USonian social and literary circles. Character types and stereotypes are introduced, broached, and then distorted. Where other social forums and confrontations of stereotypes can often result in raised voices and emotionally geared responses, scripted ways of addressing labels, social roles, slurs, and stereotypes allows for the occurrence of developed conversations. While the audience may choose to respond in a variety of ways, the text will offer the same evidence for interrogation. Offense could still be taken. However, there is opportunity for analytical, rational responses in addition to emotional reactions.

Historical and Contemporary USonian Models

The biggest problem with defining the self-making USonian as male, democratic, and public arises as these descriptions prioritize some individuals and divide communities. This is evident in characters such as Eliza (*Hamilton*), Angelica (*Hamilton*), and Kevin (*Clybourne Park*). All of these characters demonstrate social alienation and typecasting based upon what society perceives as their identifying characteristics. Angelica is a female character, juxtaposed with her more "domestic" counterpart Eliza and aligned more fully with Hamilton. She meets a

broader definition of USonian self-making, but not the traditional version. Kevin also misses the mark for being a typical self-maker. First, he is non-white and not macho. Instead, he is laidback and reserved, speaking only at times of utmost importance to him. According to conventional representations of USonians, none of these characters should serve as representative of USonians. However, they participate in their communities and foster connections with the audiences assuming positions that alter the way self-makers ought to be defined.

Eliza is a character founded in stereotypes who begins moving beyond them. She is a character who is a romantic, enraptured with Hamilton, and working to develop a domestic environment where her children can thrive. However, her character is exemplified and attended to in order to make her stand out as not just a strong female character nor as simply a loving wife and attentive mother. Instead, she portrays a complex combination of the two female character types to become an evolving female character. After Hamilton's publication of his affair and Philip's death by participation in a duel that Hamilton knew about, Eliza forgives him. The cast emphasizes this in a refrain "Forgiveness. Can you even imagine?" (Miranda). Her strength is emphasized in a way that is different from stereotypes of female characters. Yes, in some ways Eliza's strength comes in and through her marriage, through surviving her marriage, and defining herself as a loving and devoted wife.

However, contrary to traditional depictions of female figures of the early US (republic), Eliza also makes herself by encompassing parts of her marriage, her partner, and shaping them in a new direction. Alexander is always “writ[ing] like [he’s] running out of time” (Miranda). Eventually his time is cut short in a conventional sense. Eliza does pick up strings that are left unwoven. It is possible to argue that all Eliza does is a continuation of Alexander's work, an extension of himself. But Eliza does assert her own concern asking, “And when my time is up,

have I done enough?/Will they tell our story?" (Miranda). Her questions about her own efforts, as well as her recognition of "our" story dictates her thoughts on her own agency as well as to whose (hers and Hamilton's) legacy she is setting up. She explains how she participated in public conversations and works. Eliza established herself as much more than a wife and mother. Nor was she simply another female public figure immersed in social services. Eliza is not just a stereotypical female character. She is a complex woman encountering life obstacles. She provides a model for audiences and readers inhabiting a world of moral ambiguity and social nuances. Her efforts do benefit her US community. However, her comments and behavior here clearly mark a concern with her own legacy. She provides a model for young females who want to be successful as a domestic and public female figure.

Similarly, Angelica is cast as one who broaches, engages, and rejects some stereotypical characterization. She is the typical older sister: the one who "will choose her [Eliza's] happiness over mine every time" (Miranda). She also explains that she is "a girl in a world in which/my only job is to marry rich./ My father has no sons so I'm the one/ who has to social climb for one,/ so I'm the oldest and the wittiest" (Miranda). Angelica presumes a role promoted somewhat at the time (of Revolutionary/Early American Republic) as well as contemporarily where the eldest daughter (now either the male or female child) is cast in a responsible role for the rest of the family. However, Angelica becomes more than just this scripted character when she reveals how comprehensively she struggles with some of her life circumstances. In "Helpless" and "Satisfied," Eliza's introduction to Alexander replays emphasizing both Eliza and Angelica's perspectives on their meeting and courting. Angelica's stereotyped role juxtaposes her desires to more fully develop her character. Rather than being just the older sister, her internal conflicts humanize her in similar ways to how contemporary films neutralize villainous figures. Although

Angelica does play the typical role of an elder sister taking care of the family and self-sacrificing for the emotional and financial well-being of her sister, the articulation of her internal thoughts reveals how much of a struggle her decisions are as well as how much of a sacrifice she continues to make. In doing so, her humanization provides space for audiences to empathize and identify with her as it establishes her fabulous ordinariness.

Angelica addresses her continued longing for Alexander when she exchanges letters with him. She says when he addressed his letter, "I noticed a comma in the middle of a phrase./It changed the meaning/Did you intend this? . . . 'My dearest, Angelica.'/With a comma after 'dearest'" (Miranda). Angelica analyzes Hamilton's writings more fully to understand his emotional state as well as her own. She rationalizes (typically characterized as masculine) to gain a broader understanding of Hamilton's feelings for her as well as to experience a regeneration of her own for him. Just as Eliza becomes a more complicated character by acting in the public sphere in a variety of ways Angelica, to develop a more complex character, blends masculine behaviors (being a protector of her sister's heart) with a feminized understanding of the world (still struggling with her emotions regarding Hamilton) to fashion herself as more than a lovelorn woman. Angelica's character, by presenting these complexities, serves as an opportunity for fabulous ordinariness to take place. Just as human emotions are messy in reality, her depictions of them mirror and produce those situations artistically.

Kevin's character makes a comparable move appearing more human and multi-dimensional, rather than a more scripted, typed masculine figure in *Clybourne Park*. Steve makes a comment about how "assholes" that drive around with yellow ribbons on their "SUVs" offend him (Norris 198). Kevin and Steve quip back and forth for a bit to establish that Kevin has a ribbon on his car. In fact, he says, "I have three of 'em . . . One for each member of my family

serving overseas" (Norris 198). Kevin is representing himself as supportive of his family without having to sustain them financially or becoming particularly defensive about the issue. Where Steve's masculinity lies with his wife, according to Lena's remark (the tampon analysis), Kevin's masculinity resides in his family more fully. More significantly, Kevin identifies his family with his nation as well. He takes pride in the sacrifice his family makes as well as in what his family is doing (his sporting yellow ribbons supports this). Also, he does not particularly try to control Lena, per se. He tries to get her to think before she continues on with her joke, but she retorts telling him "-and please don't *baby* me. You've got three babies at *home*-" (Norris 194). Kevin ducks out of the confrontation saying "Good night. I wash my hands" (Norris 194). Kevin recognizes Lena's independence and lack of need for someone to defend her in confrontations. Kevin provides a model for males who both defend and are proud of their families as well as for those who are taking less stereotypical, less domineering roles within contemporary families.

All of these characters are modifying traditional US stereotypes. They particularly play with gendered stereotypes and self-making rules. Furthermore, they are molded into more human characters. This allows audiences to recognize them as model characters, to feel like they know them, but also to recognize that their (the characters') identities are more complex than simple stereotypes. As such, the audience can identify that people in their lives might be character types (on the surface), but they are more complicated than those generalizations. This is where fabulous ordinariness comes in. While some audience members might identify with the races and genders of varying characters, the important quality audiences could also latch onto with these characters is how complex they are. Models such as these provide representatives for audiences to recognize nuanced characters; they reflect elements of one's own identity. Boys can be masculine without being macho and successful without becoming wealthy. Women can

participate in the domestic and public circles in a variety of ways and make important changes that deserve recognition. Being a member of a national community means more than being a locally defined individual as well as more than a blind, fully supportive patriot.

Fabulous Ordinariness and Reinventing US Identities

Prior to this point, much of the analyses in this chapter have focused on the ways that these texts challenge and manipulate self-making and US ideologies. Significantly, they oppose and promote reflection on ways US communities form, in-/ex- clude members, and enable participation. The extension of the important work these pieces are doing manifests in the reflection and internalization of individual and national US traits by audiences. Fabulous ordinariness appears within these texts largely as readers identify with and come to analyze critically their own realities by way of those presented by the texts. Two examples of subtle choices intended to invoke those reactions are noted in "Act 2: CLYBOURNE PARK Annotated Scenes," discussing choices made in its Broadway staging. The video explains "As written by Bruce Norris and designed by Daniel Ostling, the Act 2 set is more open space that fills the entire stage," and "Pam MacKinnon placed all the characters in a semicircle. They have more casual, bolder, freer movement" (ClybourneParkBway's Channel). By making such staging choices, inferences about the relationship between the characters and their society become apparent. As opposed to the 1950's US, the characters are more open and bolder with one another. Their definitions of various social identities and appearance judgements are flawed (the open, abandoned space of Act 2 is extremely valuable despite its dilapidation and emptiness, which could be an apt metaphor for judgments about people). *Clybourne Park* and *Hamilton* provide moments to identify with societies and characters as well as space to reject it and recognize modifications that need to occur in US representatives and ideals.

Both of these pieces question solid identity categories, for characters and readers. These works question history itself and its retellings. Part of their commitment is to initiate skepticism within its audiences about the ways the US exists and conforms. These works do this by inviting readers to identify with its realities and see parts of themselves within the characters or their situations (fabulous ordinariness). Both *Clybourne Park* and *Hamilton* do this by rewriting history from alternative perspectives. *Clybourne Park* draws attention to often marginalized voices and contests traditionally white, masculine overarching narratives while *Hamilton* manipulates white, masculine, self-making foundational US stories to reveal complexities and hypocrisies.

As discussed earlier, Angelica could easily be seen as one of two types: the older sister martyr or the victim of an unrequited love. However, her character is denser. Her mixed feelings provide a moment of fabulous ordinariness for audiences. Perhaps readers have not given up a lover for a sibling to marry, but it is likely that at some point s/he has resigned themselves (or had a friend resign) from a potential love interest. Angelica's communication of her position demonstrates her ambivalence about it as well as her conflicted emotions. Her character fails to be a concrete type; She is not a love-crazed victim, nor is she a heroic self-sacrificer. She exemplifies this in her toast celebrating Alexander and Eliza's marriage "From your sister,/ who is always by your side./ To your union,/ and the hope that you provide./ May you always/ be satisfied." Angelica's story is one example of the way Miranda rewrites history to highlight various perspectives on US character as well as giving more human, more relatable US role model for readers to identify with.

Traditional US narratives of development and successful self-making change to invite readers to more fully connect with characters within *Clybourne Park* as well. Rather than a story

concerning the development of a neighborhood or a family, Act Two of *Clybourne Park* centers on the ways neighborhoods form and/or exclude people from US identities. During Act Two Lindsey expounds upon the horrific events of being raised in "the projects" (154). She explains that it hinders the "formation of *community*," and results in an "effect on children. . . on anyone" (154). Ironically, however, these characters articulate the epitome of a community when describing these types of neighborhoods. People raised in these (project) neighborhoods, as Lena explains, embody the meaning of community (159). Connections between families form, group identities develop, and people collectively look out for one another's well-being. As Norris' work highlights here, the definition of US membership and communities might not be as simplified as solely middle-upper class and white. Lena's fight to keep her community space aesthetically similar is "about the *principle*" (160). Her neighborhood space tells a story; serves as a place for people to identify with in some ways; and gives people a sense of a past, present, and future within or outside of it. Fabulous ordinariness invites the characters to use ideas of belonging and ownership to reflect US identity concerns. The space one comes from grounds the self and community, as one's identity is fully developed in these texts and in ways readers can identify with those developments. Readers may recognize both the nostalgic values of identity this piece is broaching as well as the practical ones (everyone has a past/roots).

Both of these examples are reflective of how alternative perspectives to the traditional US narrative invite elements of fabulous ordinariness to manifest within works. As these US characters and situations become more complicated, the relationship readers may have with them do as well. Bev, Russ and Ken all serve as characters that lie outside of traditional US narratives of belonging. All three characters inhabit a status of non-membership: Bev because she is female, pregnant, and deaf (handicapped); Russ because he questions the national response to

wounded veterans and mourns his son's death deeply and publically; and Ken due to his inability to continue functioning within a society that refuses him compassion and accommodations. Fabulous ordinariness becomes a feature of this piece as these motivating events occur. These characters refuse to accept a flawed reality. Bev questions Karl; Russ rejects social norms that stifle his need to acknowledge his loss; and Ken's actions, although tragic, prevent the possibility of society continuing to ignore him. These characters do not fit traditional US models of success, but they do create models of US citizens coping with complex realities. Furthermore, they provide models for readers to empathize and recognize that actions can lead to questions of ideologies and silenced voices becoming acknowledged. Fabulous ordinariness surfaces here to allow readers identification with characters, but also as a connection between stories and realities as readers navigate complex life events.

Historically approved (white, masculine, and wealthy) USonian versions of nation-building are refuted in *Hamilton* to provide moments of fabulous ordinariness as well. Lin-Manuel Miranda subverts conventional representative national stories by privileging female voices within his work along with casting ethnically diverse performers. Like Norris's demonstration of the need to become more inclusive, Miranda's narrative emphasizes how the US community will always be problematic when represented. It will include and privilege some, while dampening or silencing others. However, Miranda frustrates traditional history and invites considerations of complex social interactions by providing characters that the diverse audience of today may identify and empathize with, as these stereotypes from history become more human and complicated.

In doing so, viewers are given the opportunity to translate these individual stories into complex national narratives that challenge ways that history has been white-washed, gendered,

and classed. While the script and the playwright can offer events and social commentaries, audiences must interpret the events on the stage within the contexts of their own social environments. Dyer examines the connection between stereotypes and representatives (both well-meaning ones along with detrimental ones). In his work, he comments:

> In our society, it is the novelistic character that is privileged over the type, for the obvious reason that our society privileges- at any rate, at the level of social rhetoric- the individual over the collective or the mass. For this reason, the majority of fictions that address themselves to general social issues tend nevertheless to end up telling the story of a particular individual, hence returning social issues to purely personal and psychological ones. (Dyer 13)

Dyer's point supports the approach that I've taken to this project, to an extent. The works analyzed throughout this dissertation are social issues written as "personal and psychological ones;" However, they are not relegated to becoming "purely" that, nor are they as simplified as being individual narratives within a social circle. Instead, they are narratives of individuals that feature interpersonal and cultural interactions fostering critical consumptions of the literary products themselves as well as the larger social circumstances that promote their creation. Fabulous ordinariness then arises when readers can find moments of commonality. They may question the narratives of national, regional, or communal histories. Critiques of the traditional roles for genders and races may reveal impactful contributions to personal lives as well as national identity constructions. For example, without Eliza's continued works perhaps Hamilton would not have been as renowned as he was. Eliza supported her husband and his legacy in doing so. However, she was also a power in her own right. She was a true partner and as such serves as a model for USonians today working to develop healthy partnerships and beneficial

communities as well as determining how to build a strong self/character. Her representative character examines hypocrisies and gaps in traditional national identities as well as fosters feelings of belonging within contemporary ones.

As ideas of USonian identity have become more established they are seen as both more ambiguous as well as more rigidly defined. All three chapters have emphasized how US identity is more than traditionally independent, white, masculine, wealthy self-made narratives. However, in order to differ from those, that conventional version of USonian representation had to be established. The challenge now is not just to recognize alternative USonian representatives, but to accept and acknowledge them as valid and worthy of praise. Chapters One and Two featured characters who exemplified such roles (for example, Minnie and Florentyna were analyzed as successful female self-makers, and Herman and Bob Yamm were featured as males who deviated from traditional US identities). This chapter featured female characters who define success and self-making differently than typical US definitions as well as fathers who do the same. Consequently, the works discussed in this chapter recognize the need for the validation of alternative success paths in literature and in social circles at large. As Eliza and Angelica grapple with their decisions to commit themselves to serving others and one's family, respectively, their choices provide a moment for fabulous ordinariness to occur. All readers have experienced moments of life-altering decision-making. They may have been salient and obvious as Angelica's decision to match-make Hamilton and Eliza is, or they might be less obvious, as in Eliza's request for Hamilton to stop spending all his time working. Also, both moments of self-definition feature concerns for others, in doing so a privileging of one's community (or at least family) is raised, which many readers today can empathize, if not identify, with. These USonians

provide models that reject conventional US identity representations and substitute ones that can be more appropriate for today's social circles.

Fabulous ordinariness in these texts develops the reader's connection to the text. It is also indicative of how reader's social interactions manifest. USonian identity and USonian selves are encompassing concerns with the self and others more explicitly than ever before. In addition, the relationship between one's independent well-being and that of one's larger community is beginning to be explored more fully. Daniel Howe explores the consequences of such considerations in his work on US self-makers. He observes, "In a properly ordered society, there would be no conflict between individual and community; each existed to serve the other. A person with a properly balanced individual nature would live a socially useful life" (Howe 24). When a concern for the self and other, one that is depicted within these texts and fostered as a critical thought process by its consumers, is privileged, then greater social benefits, self-perceptions, and cultural production can result.

Conclusion

*"Okay. I'd like to add: I'm **gay**." (Norris 191)*

In *Clybourne Park* after Steve tells his off-color joke, Tom contributes this self-identifying statement. He claims a certain identity. Importantly, many of the other characters discussed within this chapter, more largely within this entire project, do not explicitly self-identify in the same way. Instead, they complicate their character traits and reject notions of explicit or exclusive identity categories. They reject simplified versions of characters, such as the self-made man, offering instead more complex and nuanced identities. As Miranda's opening comment implies USonians need to reconsider how peoples currently excluded or at least marginalized by USonian mainstream figureheads and sanctified/sanitized histories participate(d)

in making USonian communities what they are today. Going one step further, these works, in contrast with earlier ones discussed in this dissertation, ask readers to reflect on the effects of such categorizations and exclusions historically and contemporarily.

As USonian identities have evolved, so have the cultural representations of them. Hamilton and Russ provide important models of males embracing domesticity, multiple characters in *Hamilton* and *Clybourne Park* reject the traditionally independent notion of self-making and institute a community based approach, and finally all the characters discussed work to modify and alter stereotypical USonian cultural types. Fabulous ordinariness appears as a vital part of the formation and perpetuation of USonian identities. It repairs the rift created by paradoxical and divisive definitions of US identities. Characters like Angelica, Eliza, Hamilton, Russ, Betsy, and Lena challenge ideas of extraordinary individuals and representatives of communities. They enact and change key elements of USonian identity such as democratic ideals, strength, and communal belonging. In addition, the focus on words emphasizes the social differences the characters encompass. Words and realities interact to produce representations and provide models for audiences and readers alike. Works like these are the start to ideas that mold larger cultural environments and understandings. These works prompt reconsiderations of what audiences know about USonian identity in multiple dimensions of form, content, and character development.

These two works complement each other well. *Hamilton* focuses specifically on unification and directly considers nationalism and national identity. *Clybourne Park* is less directly about national identity, but focuses heavily on community and some barriers that need to be broken to comprehend the variety of USonian identity more realistically and openly. Neither conclusively results in an overt unification of stereotyped peoples or of a US nation. Instead,

they both prioritize communities and individuals within them. They highlight the root of fabulous ordinariness. Individuals create communities. The individuals are not necessarily exemplary in and of themselves. Instead, they are rather ordinary individuals who happened to enact changes that had larger significance for the whole community. Fabulous ordinariness serves as a method to understand US identity as informed by self-made ideals, but maintaining self-making philosophies to deter social separations and denigrations. As such, these texts offer circumstances and characters that audiences can identify with to understand more fully their own cultural circles and conditionings.

CONCLUSION

USONIANS: YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW IN CULTURE AND MEDIA

Neighborhoods can be communal places
that support the members who live in it,
or they can be tribal places that attack
outsiders. Or they can be both.

-Bill Savage (qtd. in Corley)

Bill Savage, an English Professor at Northwestern University, is quoted in Cheryl Corley's article about Bruce Norris's *Clybourne Park*. Savage establishes the significance of Norris's comments on race and USonian society. Savage and Norris are speaking specifically to the conditions of Chicago neighborhoods. However, their reflections should be considered in a national framework as well. The national discussions pertaining to race, gender, class, and sexuality in-/ex- clusion provide evidence supporting the need to attend to national ideology as "communal places."

Norris himself acknowledges the variety of identity groups he is addressing, how individuals are self-constructing, and the ways communities are established and perpetuated. He explains that one of the aims of his work is to recognize similarities across traditional divisions (race, gender, class). He explains that even though there is conflict between the various characters in the second act who are diverse in their genders, classes, races, and sexualities, they are connected in seeing themselves as different from "Dan. The guy digs ditches for a living, so no one pays attention to him" (qtd. in Basso *n.p.*). Dan, however, is potentially the most important person in the play, as he connects the acts by unearthing (literally) a trunk that

belonged to Kenneth (whose death allowed the Youngers to move into Clybourne Park). Norris's work questions identities and communities. More importantly, it leaves those questions unanswered and lets the audience begin considering some of the following: What is the function of communal spaces? How are we, as a nation, constructing those spaces? Who is included and why? How is history being formed and informed as included and othered groups are changed?

One of the purposes of this dissertation is to raise the question: Who are we (USonians)? This question is introduced and explored through two related questions: What has happened to the self-made man and his ideology? And how do USonians relate to him and other representative models in culture and literature? Representation is about the masses connecting with a figure, ideology, or stereotype as well as the relationship an individual potentially holds in the same ways. This means that identity of the self, other, and the connections between the two (or the community) all become the subject of interest.

Another question of interest raised within this project is whether the discussion of fabulous ordinariness and US self-making development conducted here is specific to these texts or is characteristic of many USonian texts at large. On one hand, these texts are examples that illustrate my ideas on USonian self-development and fabulous ordinariness. However, it could be argued that many USonian texts contain elements of my research. When scholars immerse themselves within theories and approaches in the ways that academic researchers and intellectuals do, there is a tendency to see elements of one's project within a multitude of other texts. Perhaps in the same way that fabulous ordinariness is both distinguishable and familiar, elements of USonian identity development by way of self-making and fabulous ordinariness pops up in many USonian texts. In addition to these texts displaying salient examples of USonian

self-making and fabulous ordinariness, they also provide hints of the potential cultural work that these texts and ones like them might do now and continue to do in the future.

Every identity is simultaneously a stereotype and a modification of it. In the same way, every representative is both a model figure on a grand scale and a manifestation of the self. Because both the self and the nation are created and maintained as narratives, studying narratives that present and recreate USonians and the nation provides perspective that historical versions neglect. For example, the strong, stone-faced man of the 1950s is replaced by the more human Herman (Philip's father in *Plot Against America*). Herman is a persecuted member of the community he is concerned for. He is both a USonian and not. Despite his potentially dubious membership to the US, he serves as a model US citizen for Phil (his son) and the reader. Herman's character is a type: USonian, Jew, male, white, middle-class; yet he is more than those separate parts. Herman's identity arises from the interactions of those identities as well as the history of his nation and identity. Just as representatives exist for individual and mass purposes, so does the self's identity.

The cultural representations discussed in this dissertation display the important work of cultural expansion. A nation is premised on power structures. These structures often subordinate and denigrate minorities. USonian portrayals articulate the ways hegemonic structures oppress and homogenize nations, citizens, and national narratives. They also consider how nations become diverse, blend and adopt from minority cultures, and find ways for various demographics to identify with cultural representatives. The successes of Florentyna and Abel as well as Maryna are representatives of such inclusion. Their USonian identity is apparent in their motivation as well as a representative trait they possess. These characters do not succeed due to their otherness nor to being exotic. Instead, they are pragmatic, persevere, and believe as well as

develop USonian traits (democratic, individualist, and community centered ideologies, as the Introduction outlines). These characters also do not completely assimilate to US thinking or acting. They modify it, and in turn, USonian ideas influence them. These interactions are crucial to accurate depictions of national identities and representatives. Furthermore, considerations of diversity are necessary to understand citizen relations to national narratives and characters. Self-making and self-made rhetoric are a distinguishing element of US identity. Self-making is not exclusively or inherently about white males becoming wealthy. Perhaps, versions of it once were, but as these texts also show, to perpetuate that myth in the same ways is to do a disservice to the US and its peoples. Immigrants (Maryna and Abel), women (Eliza and Angelica), and community centered characters (Phil and Bob Yamm) show mutually developed USonian identities redefined as success stories and new, empathized versions of self-making.

Reflecting on the connection between representations of characters within cultural productions and those produced by community members introduces ways that social and communal selves are groomed by oneself as well as by one's community. Analyzing the models put forth by cultural texts such as these lays bare the relationship between media and culture and one's character. Fiction deserves to be acknowledged as a space for a type of sociological and psychological study not just of the author, but of the culture and the readers as well. Cultural representations are significant areas to study when understanding individual and communal identities as "one apprehends reality only through representations of reality, through texts, discourse, images" (Dyer 3). As work analyzing the connection between cultural products and identities continues scholars must continue to consider how

> reality sets limits to what . . .humans can make it mean. . . reality is always more extensive and complicated than any system of representation can possibly

> comprehend . . . . representation never ‘gets’ reality, which is why human history has produced so many different and changing ways of trying to get it. . . representations here and now have real consequences for real people. (Dyer 3)

Dyer’s points are crucial to understanding this project, its purpose, and the hope for continued study in this area. Yes, representations are inherently flawed and exclusionary. Yes, they will always contradict social conditions and reality. Yes, some can be extremely offensive and inaccurate. However, there is good that can be found by studying the connections between cultural productions, representations, and realistic social conditions. Representations may be more flexible than originally perceived. Furthermore, they may also allude to where the masses are and the problematics of ignoring them.

The examples of Abel, Maryna, and Twain's characters (from the Introduction) present cases of USonians self-making in ways audiences view as representative or worthy of imitation. National ideologies written as anecdotes make comprehending national ideologies easier. Many narratives of self-made individuals and (auto)biographies develop into a collection of anecdotal incidents. Maryna's self-reflection, Abel's patriotism, and Twain's characters' tricksterism provide narrated samples of USonian attributes, as these traits further cultivate those identified as USonian in the Introduction. Jerome Klinkowitz describes the value of anecdotes in US identity construction in *Frank Lloyd Wright and His Manner of Thought*. Klinkowitz explains Wright's assertions that "an argument from everyday life will carry more persuasiveness than one grounded in abstraction" (Klinkowitz 30). Rather than theorizing or lecturing about how to be USonian, the development of models achieves the purposes of both practices while simultaneously addressing a broader audience. By using stories to build representations and models of US citizens, the many possibilities for USonians are illustrated tangibly for readers.

Fabulous ordinariness is inherently narrative. As such when writers like Roth or Miranda develop characters who encounter US environments and issues, their stories present places where readers can see themselves within and being affected by those narratives. Various characters can demonstrate USonian characteristics in ways that critical or theoretical explications would have trouble articulating.

More research needs to be done to more thoroughly establish, in scholarly circles, the justification of examining fictional narratives as texts from which we may glean cultural "truths." But studies like these can begin to gesture towards the need for literary and cultural scholars and sociologists to gain a fuller understanding of the self and others. Perhaps most importantly, work like this, or at least this work, is intended to reflect upon why identity distinctions are so important. In addition, the need to also comprehend how identity markers are used by communities provides the starting place for changing the establishment and maintenance of inclusionary social structures.

The goal of this project is to introduce new ways of perceiving the USonian, the self, and one's connections to others. In today's world, we have become so expert at deconstruction, compartmentalization, and classification that it seems we sometimes cannot figure out how to connect. Perhaps that is part of why technology has now become so crucial in connecting and yet maintaining our separation with one another. It allows us to feel like others; but miles away and behind screens, we still cling onto our own identity groups, our individualism, and our role models. Going forward, if we work to develop identities focused on how we are connected with one another, how we can be inclusive, and how we can be models for those around us, perhaps USonian identity will become a less restrictive concept.

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