Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

Marjan Zabeau
(Student number: 19994320)

From Rags to Riches:
An analysis of American individualism in *Oh Play That Thing*

Supervisor: Dr. Yuri Cowan
English department

Master dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of “Master in English”

Academic year 2010 – 2011
In virtually every preface to a Master’s thesis the struggle of the author will have been emphasized, and I am afraid mine is no exception. The extremely long process of writing this thesis has been one of many ups and downs. Consequently, there is an enormous sense of relief that I was eventually able to finish. For being able to do so, I am especially indebted to the supervisor of this dissertation, Dr. Yuri Cowan. His suggestions and wide ranging knowledge of English literature were crucial in developing an interesting angle to approach a novel like *Oh Play That Thing*. I would like to thank him especially for giving me the chance to put forward my ideas, taking the time to reflect on them and help me to develop them into a hopefully interesting dissertation. Undoubtedly, his extensive comments have contributed enormously to the quality of this thesis. I would of course also like to wish him all the best with his own research.

There are several people in particular that I would like to thank for their never ending support and help during this difficult process: my mum for her warm words and hugs, my dad for the interest-free loan, Steven for keeping me fed and my house clean, Lenny for his computer skills, Valerie for her suggestions on the English language and the little ones (Jesseke, Daantje and the others) for always putting a smile on my face. I am also grateful to my sister Katrien, my sister-in-law Annelies and my friends (Esther, Leo, Lieselot, and Tish) for their kind words of encouragement at the right time.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION ............................................. 1

II. HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ON INDIVIDUALISM .......... 6
   1. HISTORICAL APPROACHES ON INDIVIDUALITY AND INDIVIDUALISM .......... 6
   2. INDIVIDUALISM IN AMERICAN SOCIETY ........................................ 10
   3. DE-HOMOGENIZING INDIVIDUALISM ........................................... 13
   4. HOW TO APPROACH INDIVIDUALISM IN *OH PLAY THAT THING* ............ 15

III. HENRY SMART ............................................ 17
   1. SUMMARY OF *A STAR CALLED HENRY* ....................................... 17
   2. CHARACTER SKETCH .......................................................... 19
   3. A NEW AMERICAN ............................................................ 21
   4. HENRY, THE SOFT INDIVIDUALIST ......................................... 25

IV. SISTER FLOW ............................................... 38
   1. A SELF-MASTERED WORK IN PROGRESS ...................................... 38
   2. THE HIGH PRIESTESS OF THE DIVINE CHURCH OF THE HERE AND NOW ...... 43

V. LOUIS ARMSTRONG ......................................... 47
   1. RACIAL ISSUES .......................................................... 47
   2. IMPORTANCE OF JAZZ ...................................................... 48
   3. HARD DEFENSIVE INDIVIDUALISM AND THE REAL LOUIS ARMSTRONG .... 49
   4. HARD DEFENSIVE INDIVIDUALISM AND DOYLE’S LOUIS ARMSTRONG ..... 51
   5. KEEP ON SMILING ......................................................... 57

VI. CONCLUSION .............................................. 59

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................. 64
I. Introduction

My interest in Irish literature in general and Roddy Doyle’s novels in particular has been the source of inspiration for writing this thesis. The first novel I read by this author was *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, in which Doyle tells the story of a physically abused woman named Paula Spencer. The brutal and raw depiction of the abuse this woman has to endure immediately makes it clear that Doyle is not a writer, nor a great supporter of stories with a happy ending. This is not surprising considering that the Irish, and Dubliners especially, have known a long history of struggle and hardship. In *A Star Called Henry*, Doyle most obviously portrays this difficult and painful Irish history as seen through the eyes of the street rascal Henry Smart. Doyle again combines historical fact and the adventures of Henry Smart in *Oh Play That Thing*, the second novel in the *Last Roundup* series. The novel takes place in the United States of the 1920s and shows us Henry’s attempts to find his way in this world and be successful, set against the background of bootlegging, mobsters, jazz clubs, the Oklahoma Dust Bowl and the Californian migrant life. A logical approach seemed to be to explore the historical veracity of the novel and as fascinating as this might be; the novel provided an even more interesting angle of approach. Besides Henry, two other important characters in this novel are trying to establish themselves by achieving success, which brings to mind the concept of individualism. This particular approach in the analysis of the characters would furthermore still allow for the incorporation of historical aspects.

Indeed, the link between *Oh Play That Thing* and individualism is quite evident. In this novel there are three main characters (Henry Smart, Sister Flow and Louis Armstrong) who are each trying to make something of themselves and to be successful. Yet, the way they do this differs greatly, and, as I will argue in this thesis, this is mainly due to their background and the goals they want to achieve. Henry Smart, the protagonist and thus our main focus in this dissertation, reminds us perhaps most of the immigrant entrepreneurship which is often associated with America, as he abandons behind his roots and to achieve the ‘American Dream.’ Whether or not he succeeds will be revealed later, but it is important to know that Henry has in fact no preconceived plan for success, on the contrary, the situations he finds himself in are often coincidental. In this respect, he cannot differ more from our second character, Sister Flow. Contrary to Henry, Sister Flow is aware that as a woman success will not come naturally, and thus she never ceases to work on bettering herself to achieve great things. She lives by the theory that you can achieve whatever you set your mind to through self-confidence and determination. Our third and final character, Louis Armstrong, can be considered as a mix of the previous two characters. Like Henry, Louis does not have a specific plan, yet, and in this he resembles Sister Flow, he knows that being successful requires hard work and perseverance. Moreover, being an African American his status in society is more
problematic than the other two. In fact, racial segregation is still in full force in the 1920s and the notion of freedom for black people is often obscure.

This general description of these three characters seems to imply that the discussion of a topic such as individualism is easy or clear-cut, yet, a glance at the existence of an extensive amount of literature on the topic immediately suggests otherwise. Before embarking on a journey into the world of individualism, it was thus necessary for me to understand exactly what this term entails. The first step, and granted perhaps not the most professional approach, was to look up the meaning of the term in a dictionary. The *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (2000) gives the following definitions. First, individualism refers to “the quality of being different from other people and doing things your own way” (661). This definition focuses on the aspect of individuality, meaning the characteristics that determine a person and mark him out from others, and the uniqueness of people. Naturally, in a general sense this is indeed relevant in the discussion of the novel as it implies that the three characters possess certain traits that distinguish them from the others. Yet, this seems rather superficial to act as a starting point for a dissertation, and indeed, for the analysis of the novel the second definition is clearly more interesting: “the belief that individual people in society should have the right to make their own decisions, etc., rather than be controlled by the government” (661). This definition clearly suggests the notion of a restrictive environment in which the individual lives, enabling or restraining him or her in making certain decisions. Perhaps even more striking than the possible existence of restriction, is that this additional definition adds the notion of the “right” of an individual’s decision making. Indeed, this freedom has not always been evident, as Louis Armstrong’s plight illustrates.

Curiosity urged me consult a much older edition of the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (1974) to confront the definitions provided by both editions. One of the definitions this older edition offers is: “feeling or behaviour of a person who puts his own private interest first; egoism” (441). This is quite interesting, as the more recent edition does not incorporate this negative take on individualism. Yet, as we will see later, individualism has not always been thought of as a good thing. This brings us to the second definition, which adds the element of social theory: “social theory that favours the free action and complete liberty of belief of individuals (contrasted with the theory favouring the supremacy of the state)” (441). This last definition not only suggests an even wider range of views on what individualism entails, it also shows that being free to do what you want and freedom of choice went from a social theory to an actual belief (cf. second definition of the 2000 edition).

The fact that there is no real consensus on and even an evolution of the conception of the term individualism in only 35 years stresses the need for an overview of the historical approaches on the subject. In the second chapter of this dissertation I will therefore start with providing a historical
overview of how and when people started to develop a notion of individualism, something which I believe adds to the understanding of the concept in its entire context.

Moreover, individualism is often associated with America and indeed we could even say that it lies at the very core of American culture. From the discussion of how people’s view on the term evolved throughout history, it will become clear that describing American culture is synonymous to elaborating on the individualistic nature of the American people. Bellah et al. describe it as such:

We believe in the dignity, indeed the sacredness, of the individual. Anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, judge for our selves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit, is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious. Our highest and noblest aspirations, not only for ourselves, but for those we care about, for our society and for the world, are closely linked to our individualism (142).

Bellah’s comment brings to mind the second definition of the *Oxford’s Dictionary* edition of 2000 with the notion of the right of an individual to make his or her decisions in life. Indeed, the concept of Liberty, and thus freedom of choice, is one of the self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence. This portrays the importance of the individual in general and of individuals’ rights in American society. Consequently, in the second part of the next chapter there will be a discussion of how individualism is perceived in American society, especially relevant because the novel discussed in this paper is set in America. Furthermore, theorizing on individualism as part of American culture has led to a specific take on this American individualism and will thus be significant for the analysis of the Roddy Doyle novel.

For now, it is important to point out that the concept of individualism was especially present in American society in the 1920s, which makes this topic even more relevant in the analysis of *Oh Play That Thing*. For many Americans the 1920s was an era of prosperity, and not surprisingly the period is also known as the ‘Jazz Age,’ the ‘Roaring Twenties,’ and the ‘Era of the Lost Generation.’ Like never before, it was a time in which people sought to better themselves and put their interests first. In the 1920s, Irene Thomson informs us, we are faced with individuals who, in the name of personal happiness, have begun to rebel against duty and responsibility (1989; 862). As a result of the quest for self-expression and the rational analysis of the individual’s position in society, morality had been weakened. Individuals in this period of American history readily acted on impulse and desire and often found themselves fighting the demands of a constraining society (for example bootlegging). This even lies at the core of the religion Sister Flow eventually creates. In her “Divine Church of the Here and Now” she puts the notion forward that God wants people to follow their instincts and act upon impulses. Not surprisingly, her church turns out to be highly popular.

This by no means implies that there is no control whatsoever. On the contrary, there are still subtle compulsions of public opinion that keep people more or less in line (the Chicagoan black and tan clubs come to mind here), yet more than ever the constraints operating on the individual are reduced. Furthermore, this obvious shift to a personality model is accompanied by a change in
social structure “from a producer to a consumer society, from industrial to finance capitalism” (Thomson 1989; 864). In this hedonistic age, the pursuit of happiness and pleasure was accompanied by the rise of mass consumption in which consumer goods were available on a mass basis. Advertising was used to create new needs or to unlock desire, in short to sell a dream, something which Henry understands all too well.

This ‘me generation’ is thoroughly described in *The Great Gatsby*. Set in New York City, the novel illustrates the shift in morals and attitudes at the time. Even though many people still lived in extreme poverty (for example tenements with a high mortality rate and poor living conditions), New York was the place where fortunes were made and it seemed that the American Dream was truly fulfilled. There was an enormous burst of prosperity, new technologies were discovered all the time, and people were able to travel all over the country thanks to the automobile. The 1920s were also the age of the empowerment of women of which the most important factor was undoubtedly the 19th Amendment, which allowed women to vote. In addition, magazine covers displayed women who were drinking, smoking and generally having a good time. The outrageous commodification of women resulting from this led to a thorough sexual, feminist revolution. It is also the time of Prohibition and organized crime resulting from the ban of alcohol. Overall, ‘The Gospel of Money’ led to dreams of going from rags to riches, and beside the prevalence of hard work, self-help books were available to aid achieving that aim. They stress the importance of not wasting time and organizing your life in such a way that you become more successful. The novel depicts, in short, the era of the myth of the self-made man and the culmination of the belief that an individual can rise from rags to riches.

These themes (New York as the centre of the world, the American Dream, the emancipation of women, mobility, mass consumption, illegal alcohol and many more) are also explored in the Roddy Doyle novel. More specifically, in *Oh Play That Thing* the three characters, Henry Smart, Sister Flow and Louis Armstrong, come from different backgrounds but all try to establish themselves as successful individuals in this era of possibilities. To accomplish success they display different types of individualism, which are closely linked to their personalities, where they come from, what they want to achieve (and thus what they consider to be successful) and how they want to achieve it. Even though this can be seen as the general take on American individualism and the notion of every man becoming “his own revolution” (Kazin qtd. in Mount 363), the type of individualism each of them displays differs enormously. Thus, to move away from a homogenized version of American individualism, I will provide nuanced versions of this individualism as proposed by Adrie Kusserow and Robert Bellah. The terminology used by these two authors allows for a specific approach and will be discussed in the final part of the second chapter. For now, it is essential to mention that Kusserow’s analysis concludes that even though American society is
strongly based on individualism, this individualism is supposed to be quite generic. Indeed, authors such as Hackney and Pitofšky (and others) have stressed notions like self-reliance, equality, freedom, hard work and success to define this culture’s individualism. Yet, Kusserow claims that these elements are primarily based on the American upper-middle-class and can thus not be extrapolated to the entire population. What is more, she found, through interviews of mothers and children of three different New York neighbourhoods, that American individualism can be de-homogenized because of people’s backgrounds and goals in life. Bellah too, argues that individualism can be refined as a result of what people consider to be important, happiness or material success. The careful examination of the different kinds of individualism of the three main characters (in conjunction with the terminology provided by Bellah and Kusserow) will be carried out in chapters 3 to 5.

In short, in this discussion of *Oh Play That Thing* I will argue that the majority of the secondary literature considers American individualism as being synonymous with establishing yourself as a successful individual and being able to rise from rags to riches, something which our three main characters are clearly trying to do. Yet, Kusserow and Bellah assert that this does not require one clear method or way of life. On the contrary, due to different backgrounds, different goals and different priorities in life, members of American society display different kinds of individualism and both Kusserow and Bellah have developed a specific terminology to characterize and distinguish these differences in individualism. Moreover, I will also argue that the three main characters in this Doyle novel clearly illustrate this notion of a heterogeneous individualism. In this dissertation I will therefore provide an analysis of each of their individualism, which will account for the different levels of success they eventually achieve. But first, let us take a look at how individuals were able to make their own decisions (to a lesser or greater extent) and how this aspect has shaped American society.
II. Historical and theoretical background on individualism

The ambiguity regarding the meaning of the term *individualism* arises from the confrontation of two random dictionaries and the apparent evolution in the definitions provided by these dictionaries. This makes it clear that further elaboration is needed. The fact that one of the definitions talks of ‘social theory’ already suggests that we are dealing with a concept that has been discussed thoroughly by different people in different periods of time. As a result, in this chapter I will first provide a historical overview of evolutionary changes in the conception of and theorizing on the subject, foregrounding the fact that an individual’s rights and freedom of choice cannot be taken for granted. Moreover, all cultures are individualistic in different ways. For example, the Japanese are thought to be more group-oriented, whereas American society is very distinctly associated with individualism. Secondly, I will therefore illustrate the importance of individualism in American society and how this has historically grown. From this discussion it will be clear that there is a generic, homogenous take on individualism. This take does not provide an adequate approach to analyse the individualism displayed by the three main characters of *Oh Play That Thing*. In the final section of this chapter I will therefore discuss Adrie Kusserow’s and Robert Bellah’s attempt to de-homogenize this American individualism into a heterogeneous kind.

1. Historical approaches on individuality and individualism

   Not only does the degree of individualism vary from one culture to another, it is also true that the nature of the term is subject to evolutionary changes. If we take a look at the notion of personal freedom in general, we see that individuals have been able to make their own choices in various degrees throughout history. This evolutionary change in the individual’s freedom of choice has been identified by Talcott Parsons as a pattern in which there is “a process of ‘liberation’ from the control of previously constraining forces” (431). This is a process which is virtually always accompanied by severe conflicts. Naturally, these conflicts may be long-lasting, the outcome may be uncertain and success is not always guaranteed. Even today, violent public uprisings take place in which personal freedom (often freedom of speech) is a crucial issue. In some cases (for example Egypt) the modern revolution has been successful in overthrowing the establishment considered to be responsible for the limitation of personal rights, yet as Syria proves, this is certainly not always the case.

   Being able to make one’s own choices has thus clearly not always been evident and freedom was often merely partial. For example, in Greek society an individual’s fate was closely linked to the whims of the Gods, yet despite this religious determination there was also room for personal autonomy and even control by the individual of his own fate. To illustrate this thesis, Parsons
recalls the stories of Oedipus (by Sophocles) and the death of Socrates as told by Plato (430). Significant in these stories is that an individual has the right to make his own decisions in matters of his own life and death (e.g. Socrates did not resist the unjust legal verdict that he had corrupted the youth of Athens and thus chose to drink the lethal poison voluntarily). It goes without saying that this kind of freedom only applied to the elite and that slaves did not have such an impact on their fate in life.

Christianity provided a crucial step in the development of individuality. The death of Jesus resembles the case of Socrates, as both men voluntary accepted their unjust sentence of death, making these sacrificial deaths. As in Greek society, freedom is limited, and indeed the Christian religious fate resembles being subjected to Grecian Gods. Yet, the individual has the choice to live his or her life in a certain way, which would then be projected into the realm of the transcendental, rewarding or punishing people for their choices. In the Middle Ages, the development of scholastic philosophy and theology were important for the liberation of the individual with the rationalization of the Roman Catholic world-orientation. As a result, a new framework for the consideration of ethics was developed and a new emphasis was being laid on the consciousness of the individual, not only in religious matters, but also in the ethical repercussions of the individual’s actions in relation to his fellow man (Parsons 433).

Obviously, the Renaissance and Reformation were the next substantial steps in the emancipation of the individual. With the humanized depiction of religious themes (such as the image of the Virgin Mary figure as an attractive and beaming young mother), the Renaissance, as Parsons claims, “certainly redounded to the emphasis on the position of the human individual in this life as well as the next” (Parsons 434). The Reformation, however, was perhaps even more significant. Martin Luther and John Calvin, who objected to the doctrines and structure of the Catholic Church, led this Christian reform movement. Consequently, the relation between the individual and social order, and obligation was redefined and went from a predominantly religious concern to a predominantly secular one (Parsons 435). From what is said in the previous paragraphs it is clear that, up until now, religious forces mainly determined an individual’s freedom. The choices people were able to make had repercussions in this or the next life, but their fate was still fixed by some higher power. It was thus inconceivable that there could be a pursuit of an individual’s own interests, regardless of moral or religious repercussions.

Revolutions in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth century in fact gave way to modern individualism and the notion of personal freedom as we understand it now. All over Europe people began to stand up against monarchical and aristocratic authority and used classical political philosophy and biblical religion as important resources to assert the right to govern themselves. Within these resources however – biblical religion for obvious reasons and classical republicanism
with the focus on an active citizen contributing to the public good – the individual was still bound to religious and moral obligation and not yet completely free. Nevertheless, one man took the notion freedom to the next level. This man, John Locke, stated that the individual “is prior to society, which comes into existence only through the voluntary contract of individuals trying to maximize their own self-interest” (Bellah 143). For the first time in history, such an emphasis is being laid on the individual and the notion of self-interest regardless of any religious or moral motivations. He thus states that man is not determined by society, or by religion. Obviously, the fact that individuals pursue their own interests could be considered problematic, yet not so for Locke. As long there is enough left for others, “the state of order in human society was not to be regarded as problematical” (Parsons 436).

Before Locke, Thomas Hobbes had already written on this subject in his *Leviathan*, where he takes on a more negative view on individualism. Hobbes mentions the “war of all against all,” (qtd. in Parsons 436) meaning that when men pursue their interests/passions, regardless of the interests of others and of a collective interest, this tends to lead to a conflict of different interests which ultimately means the destruction of the other. So both men shared an emphasis on the concept of ‘self-interest.’ Both thought that in the natural state of things an individual is conceived to be entirely on his own, yet led by an attachment to others in a social system and by the advantages of going along resulting from this attachment. What is crucial about the time and environment in which Hobbes and Locke lived, is that the development of the Common Law was in close connection to Puritanism, and the Puritans’ stance to oppose prerogatives claimed by the Crown. As a result, the more secularized way of thinking that took hold in England in the course of the Reformation (and originated from a Protestant background) can be summed up as English Utilitarianism with its special emphasis on the concept of self-interest (Parsons 437).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, one of the most influential figures of the eighteenth century, shows some similarities with Hobbes and Locke but is of course influenced by his own time and environment. The French philosopher is pivotal in this historical overview, as he talks about the total integration of individuals in a social collective. In Rousseau’s view a societal community is “a single tightly integrated entity characterized by a unitary General Will, and with relation to which the individual had one and only one clearly paramount role, namely that of citizen” (Parsons 437-438). On the other hand, Rousseau also thinks that social institutions constitute chains as it were that restrict the natural freedom with which man allegedly is born. In one way, Rousseau can be seen as one of the fathers of totalitarianism (and Communism), whereas with his notion of the “natural man” he is also influential in the expressive revolution and the cult of the individual.

According to Parsons three additional figures are especially significant for the present discussion of individualism as they can be seen as theorists of general human action; Emile
Durkheim, Max Weber and Sigmund Freud. Their main focus point was the conceptualization of the socialized personality, the relation or contrast between motivation and instincts, and the internalization of cultural values and norms. When we look at Durkheim more closely and his view on individuals, we see that he stresses the notion of a “milieu social” (Parsons 441) and the normative structure of the moral order of a society. Furthermore, he places special emphasis on the motivation an individual displays in effectively participating in the life of a moral community. This motivation leads to achievements and as a result of these achievements an individual is able to develop individuality. Durkheim also takes up the notions of a common moral base and the “cult of the individual” in which he seems to stress the religious ground of modern individualism. More specifically, Durkheim asserts that there is no such thing as crude egoism, which glorifies the individual’s pursuit of self-interest. On the contrary, he takes a more humanistic stance by “stressing the rights and needs of human individuals as such, but with a strong imperative of the obligation of universalism” (Parsons 443). In other words, he stresses the status of the individual in a social collective and the importance of a general and common moral commitment through a shared value system. This is reminiscent of what is said in the Declaration of Independence and in the Bill of Rights. The most important passage in the Declaration with respect to individual’s rights is undoubtedly: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, and the pursuit of Happiness” (Jefferson quoted in Duncan & Goddard 11). The importance of the individual, rights, needs, and freedom in American society will be further discussed in the next part of this chapter.

So when we confront Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Durkheim we are able to draw a general image of individualism as they share certain notions. Like Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau sees the freedom of the individual as the natural state and Durkheim too, talks of the cult of the individual. Hobbes and Locke view society as the collection of single entities with self-interests (which has a positive or negative outcome), but Rousseau’s and Durkheim’s individuals keep their eye on the common good and they stress the responsibility an individual has as a result of being part of a social group. Durkheim adds to this that society works not only because its members work for the common good, but also because they share moral values.

The concept of an individual’s rights and needs and his or her responsibility towards society was something that was especially explored in American culture. John F. Kennedy’s ‘Ask Not What Your Country Can Do For You’ inauguration speech perhaps most clearly voices this relation. In the next section, we will therefore discuss how Americans perceive individualism and how this historically developed into a generic view on American society’s individualistic nature.
2. Individualism in American society

One of the first people to discuss American culture was J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur. It struck him that Americans displayed a far greater amount of personal initiative and self-reliance. More than Europeans, Americans truly believe that they can rise from rags to riches and become free because of the geographical, social and political environment in which they live. “Here,” he says, “the rewards of his industry follow with equal steps the progress of his labour; his labour is founded on the basis of nature, self-interest; can it want a stronger allurement?” (qtd. in Bellah 35).

This analysis of the American resembles most Benjamin Franklin’s view on life (will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter IV), however de Crèvecoeur seemed to ignore many aspects of American culture and so we turn to Alexis de Tocqueville for a more accurate analysis.

This French social philosopher made a thorough analysis of the relationship between character and society in America in his book *Democracy in America*. He describes the mores (or “habits of the heart”) of the American people and shows how they helped to form the American character. In general, de Tocqueville sees Americans primarily as supporters of free institutions; however, some aspects of their character might eventually isolate Americans from one another and thereby undermine the conditions of freedom. It is therefore needed that strong selves also contribute to their communities. Most importantly, de Tocqueville was the first to point out “individualism” in Americans (Bellah et al. vi-vii). De Tocqueville talked of individualism as being more than egoism as it “is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste” and “there are more and more people who, though neither rich nor powerful enough to have much hold over others, have gained or kept enough wealth and enough understanding to look after their own needs. Such folk owe no man anything and hardly expect anything from anybody. They form the habit of thinking of themselves in isolation and imagine that their whole destiny is in their hands” (qtd. in Bellah et al 37). Thus, like de Crèvecoeur, de Tocqueville stresses self-reliance and personal freedom in American people. However, how they perceive the relation between the individual and society differs.

Robert Bellah, the American sociologist I have cited several times before, distinguishes three central strands in describing American culture and individualism: biblical, republican, and modern individualist. John Winthrop was a representative of the first strand and his understanding of life in America was strongly linked to life in service of God. According to Winthrop material success would not lead to a satisfying life. On the contrary, only devotion to God and the creation of a community, would allow for a genuine ethical and spiritual life. The republican strand, in contrast, with important figures such as Thomas Jefferson, talked about equality and the notion of formal freedom that would allow people to simply do whatever they pleased. However, this
freedom required a strong connection to community. The modern individualist strand, of which Benjamin Franklin is the most important representative, refers to the ability of man to attain success through hard work without interference from religious or governmental institutions (Bellah 29-32).

From what is said above, de Tocqueville clearly takes the biblical and republican strand more into account than de Crèvecoeur in that he asserts that religion and involvement in public affairs withdraw the individual from his isolation. It must be said that in de Tocqueville’s days, America was still primarily an agrarian society in which Protestant Christianity and the controlling influences of a basically egalitarian ethic of community responsibility were omnipresent. In the nineteenth century, “the town at its best was a moral grid that channelled the energies of the enterprising citizens and their families into collective well-being,” Bellah et al. explain (39). Thus, the new national type de Tocqueville described, namely the independent citizen, was a self-made man who held strongly to biblical religion and who knew the duties as well as the rights of citizenship.

Modern individualism quickly became the United States’ dominant tradition however and the self “the only or main form of reality” (Robert Coles qtd. in Bellah et al. 143). This ontological individualism is defined in a glossary at the end of Habits of the Heart and refers to “the belief that the individual has a primary reality whereas society is a second-order, derived or artificial construct. (...) It is opposed to the view that society is as real as individuals, a view we call social realism, which is common to the biblical and republican traditions” (Bellah 334). This modern individualism refers to the fact that an individual is fully responsible for his or her actions and can determine his or her destiny (Mount 362; Thomson 853). Without relying on society, an individual is thus able to be successful through hard work. It is clear that this type of individualism is not quite what Durkheim envisaged when he developed his view of the cult of the individual. Durkheim’s institutionalized type of individualism with the focus on the socialized individual contrasts with modern American individualism, which is a type of utilitarian individualism as developed by Hobbes and Locke and in which the individual is clearly prior to society and driven by self-interest.

The reason for Americans’ tendency to be individualistic is not hard to identify. As Sheldon Hackney asserts, the essence of Americanism was “a reliance on the Constitution and the political system it defined, along with a commitment to equal individual opportunity, self-reliance, and maximum individual freedom” (16). As a former British colony it is indeed not surprising that something like individualism has come to play such an important role in the life of the American people. A number of historical events have given the country an exceptional sense of self, the most important of which was the War of Independence (to overthrow British rule) from which the United States emerged as the first independent colony in the late 1700s. In addition, the American Revolution put forward notions such as “equality” and “achievement,” meaning that there could be
no such thing as the acceptance of aristocratic hierarchies and systems of authority. These notions of equal opportunity for everyone, regardless of personal background or family lineage, were revolutionary, and as a result, there was a strong belief in self-reliance and personal responsibility (Grabb et al 515; Pitofsky 277).

Bellah et al. confirm what is said here and further claim that “Americans tend to think of the ultimate goals of a good life as matters of personal choice. The means to achieve individual choice, they tend to think, depend on economic progress” (22). In addition to economic success, freedom is perhaps the most resonant, deeply held American value (Grabb et al 513). It turns out that for many Americans freedom primarily means “being left alone by others, not having other people’s values, ideas, or styles of life forced upon one, being free of arbitrary authority in work, family and political life” (Bellah et al. 23). Yet, Americans feel that to be free is much more than being left alone. Most importantly, it refers to the fact that you are free to define yourself, to be your own person free from the demands of conformity to family, friends, or community. In short, to be free is to be able to pursue happiness in whatever way you want. Of course, this can also be applied to the economic sphere in that freedom is strongly linked to the notion of free enterprise. Americans feel they should be free to do whatever they want to improve their material circumstances. Hackney further elaborates on this crucial trait of American society by saying that Americans live by “the belief that striving for success is the normal condition of life, and that individuals are obliged to attempt to improve themselves and their circumstances” (20). Naturally, this also means that an individual is free from people who have economic power over him or her. When we talk about freedom and constraint, Jean-Jacques Rousseau springs to mind again. For Rousseau an individual was only truly free, when he is “born free” and has not been subjected during his lifetime to any (or almost any) “constraints of pressures emanating from the social environment” (qtd. in Parsons 425). Contrary to this view, Durkheim says that a human being is first and foremost a socialized individual and that “the proper amount and the right kind of socialization constitutes an essential set of conditions of developing at all high capacities for the practice and enjoyment of freedom” (Parsons 426).

Overall, based on the analysis of American individualism by authors like Bellah et al., Grabb et al., Hackney, Mount and Pitofsky this particular branch of individualism can be defined as the freedom and the right of individual people to make their own decisions and to define themselves (self-expression). In making these decisions individuals act independently from society and thus display a great degree of self-reliance. As the Land of Opportunities, America is the place where people can rise from rags to riches and be successful. In this process hard work, equality and self-interest are considered to be crucial virtues. However, this generic notion of American individualism fails to acknowledge distinctions in the way individual people use individualism to
become successful. In what follows, two methods of de-homogenizing American individualism will be discussed, which will then serve for the analysis of the three central characters of *Oh Play That Thing* and the specific type of individualism they display.

3. **De-homogenizing individualism**

The brief historical overview has undoubtedly made clear that the discussion of individualism has resulted in the development of different strands, meanings and definitions. Yet, when applied to American society many theorists seem to develop a homogenous definition. This definition is indeed perfectly applicable to Henry Smart, Sister Flow and Louis Armstrong as they each make certain decisions in order to be successful. Yet, in this generic individualism, significant differences can be distinguished. The analysis of the characters’ individualism thus irrevocably demands a more specified and clearly defined approach to classify different types of individualism.

In *Habits of the Heart* Robert Bellah makes a distinction between “utilitarian individualism” and “expressive individualism” (27). The former refers to one’s devotion to professional and material success and sacrificing everything to obtain that goal, whereas the latter refers to a more immediate notion of enjoyment of life. Because the three characters discussed in this dissertation clearly have different goals and different priorities, this distinction will be the first way to characterize our characters’ individualism. There is another angle though, which is particularly insightful when applied to the three central characters. Adrie Suzanne Kusserow confirms in her article “De-Homogenizing American Individualism” that theories of the Western self are too often built on a generic individualism, because it is in turn generally based on the upper-middle-class with a Protestant and European background. Moreover, she finds that these theories often attempt to find general socio-centric elements in American society by which she means that conceptions of the self are too often flattened into a supposedly uniform individualism. This irrevocably leads to stereotyping with a homogenized conception of the Western self, thus ignoring obvious basic variations such as gender, generation, geographic location and ethnicity.

In her analysis of the rhetoric used by parents of different social classes, Kusserow has distinguished three different styles of individualism: hard defensive, hard offensive, and soft offensive individualism (216). She came to these three different styles of individualism by exploring the intricacies and subtleties of perceptions of the child’s self through observation, and by interviewing white American parents and teachers of preschool-age children from different social classes of three New York communities (Carter Hill, South Rockaway and Beach Channel). Her studies led to the conclusion that “parental conceptions of the child’s self did not reflect bipolar class constructs (a solely conforming working-class and a self-directed upper-middle class), nor was one generic brand of individualism sufficient to characterize them all” (214). The specific worlds in
which they lived led to various strands of individualism and different ways to obtain goals in life. Kusserow repeatedly emphasizes the fact that these distinctions of individualism are unique to the particular worlds from which they grew and cannot automatically be extrapolated to other geographical areas of the same class background. Those areas naturally need the construction of their own specific notions of individualism, however this should not mean that there is no way at all of breaking down the concept in more nuanced versions. Henry, Sister Flow and Louis belong to different subcultures (not so much belonging to different social classes) and thus experience and practice their individualism differently. So I will provide valuable arguments to defend the notion of applying these three distinctive types of individualism, put forward by Kusserow, on the three central characters of *Oh Play That Thing*. Naturally, these characters do not correspond completely with the three categories Kusserow distinguished. For that, their needs, values and beliefs, in addition to the time, social backgrounds and environment in which they live, differ too much from the people Kusserow interviewed. Yet, in a more general way they can be seen to correspond with these orientations of individualism.

The first type of individualism, hard defensive individualism, is linked to South Rockaway, a racially mixed, lower-working-class community in Queens. Crime, violence, drugs, prostitution, racism and poverty mark this area in Queens. This tough environment leads to the belief that the future holds struggle and hardship, and that rough times are inevitable. The individualism here is mostly based on values that emphasize self-determination and keeping to yourself as a way to survive the rigors of a bad system that cannot be trusted. The children here learn to stand up for them, to buck up, to trust only themselves and to not rely on anyone else. Crucial here is that a child is able to follow the philosophy of the lone individual who stands tough against the outside world. In this tough stand humour, teasing and putting things into perspective are a way to deal with rough times and to take the edge off things (Kusserow 216-219). Taking into account the characteristics of hard defensive individualism, Louis Armstrong immediately comes to mind. The segregation between black and white people and the violence against black people urges Louis to take a defensive stand. Independence is a concept which is often problematic for him and black people in general, but Louis knows that it is vital to assert himself as a successful artist. He also has an enormous sense of humour and is not afraid to stand up for himself.

Beach Channel is home to the second type of individualism, a hard offensive kind of individualism. It is a fairly safe and neat neighbourhood in another part of Queens with a predominantly white, Irish and German upper-working-class community. This hard working community is especially proud of its achievements and they feel very strongly about obtaining success through hard work. The main attitude is to go for it, because success is only achieved through hard work, tenacity and self-confidence. Realizing you can only count on yourself is, that
nobody can do it for you, is the way to accomplish things. Self-determination with a bit of feistiness and courage is key to reaching success. To put this kind of individualism in a motto is to say: “whatever your mind can conceive, you can achieve.” Kusserow plainly defines this individualism as an “[a]ggressive, outbound individualism led by the gravitational pull of goals and the sweat of work and determination” (221). Undoubtedly, the way Sister Flow lives her life and the fact that she thinks that people can achieve whatever they set their mind to, resembles this hard offensive individualism. She believes every minute counts and so she never ceases to work on her future.

Finally, soft offensive individualism emerges in Carter Hill, a predominantly white, upper-to upper-middle-class community on the upper east side of Manhattan. Here, too, violence and drugs are not a major part of life, because these families have the financial means to insulate their children from it. The mothers from this neighbourhood are said to be practicing a soft psychologised individualism, in which self-confidence and the assertion of the child’s unique feelings are paramount. Important here are the cultivation of the child’s emotions and the development of a good sense and knowledge of your own abilities. To obtain success or to take on the world is possible by emphasizing the child’s psychological uniqueness, personality and individuality. In other words, it is not so much through hard work or perseverance that you get on in life, but by being self-confident, believing in yourself and being proud of what you do that you reach happiness and success. The image of a flower is adequate in understanding this kind of individualism. Like a flower, a child needs to grow, bloom and blossom; it needs to open up in order to reach its full potential. Unlike the other types of individualism where the child needs to be strong, harsh and ready for obstacles, the soft individualism requires the child to be loose and willing to pour itself into the world (Kusserow 222-224). It is not hard to identify Henry’s individualism as soft individualism. As a highly confident man, he mainly follows his instincts and uses his so-called unique qualities and skills to get on in this world.

4. How to approach individualism in Oh Play That Thing?

As mentioned in the introduction, the 1920s in American society are said to be the stage of excessive individualism. Because Oh play That Thing starts in 1924, it is thus a particularly interesting time to watch three completely different characters try to make it in the world, to establish themselves as successful individuals and pursue their notion of happiness and success. In the next three chapters, a thorough discussion of the individualism displayed by Henry (Chapter III), Sister Flow (Chapter IV) and Louis Armstrong (Chapter V) will be made based on the distinctions defined by Robert Bellah and Adrie Kusserow. More specifically, I will provide an insight in these characters’ backgrounds because I believe this explains what they want to achieve in life and how they try to obtain their goals. Foreshadowing what will be said in the next chapter,
we can draw attention to Henry’s childhood in the Dublin slums and his continuous competition with his deceased brother as the reasons for him desperately wanting to make something of himself and earn a decent living.
III. Henry Smart

To understand the *Last Roundup* series and Doyle’s novels and short stories in general, it is important to know that the author exhibits a rather pessimistic view on life, as Caramine White asserts:

*Doyle has telescoped his vision of life: living life, surviving day to day, is hard enough. His characters are trying to stay alive. (...) The desperation underlying the carpe diem attitude of Dubliners is emerging in his novels. The pessimism comes from living in a country where, if one does get educated, one may need to emigrate to find a job; or if one quits school and is lucky, one can find a low-paying job instead of living on the dole; where one’s future is dim at best, and a bright future means leaving one’s homeland. Many Dubliners, and most of Doyle’s characters, do not have a “future” by American standards. Is it any wonder they so vigorously live life in the present? (22-23)*

As I have mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, the struggle and hardship the Irish have had to endure throughout their history is reflected in Doyle’s novels and *The Last Roundup* series is no exception. It is sometimes hard to see that Henry does not get a break from bad luck, and from an early age he seems destined for misfortune. Yet, like many other Doyle characters he lives life vigorously and he is always ready for new opportunities. His misadventures in Ireland ultimately force him to leave his home country in search of a better future in America, where he truly lives by this carpe diem attitude.

In the following chapter a short discussion of *A Star Called Henry*, the first novel of the series, will be provided to understand who Henry is and how he wants to establish himself in the Land of Opportunities. In the summary of this first novel and in the general character sketch that follows, crucial elements in understanding Henry’s individualism (the choices he makes to become successful) will be put forward. As I will argue in the main part of this chapter, these elements confirm the heterogeneous view of individualism defined by Adrie Kusserow and Robert Bellah. More specifically, Henry’s individualism can be defined as the soft defensive kind (Kusserow’s terminology), and a mixture of both expressive and utilitarian individualism distinguished by Bellah, as the examples from the novel will illustrate.

1. **Summary of *A Star Called Henry***

When we look at Henry Smart’s life story, it is easy to understand how White came to his comment on the Doyle characters. Henry is born in 1901 in what is called a typical Dublin tenement. His mother Melody Nash carries a name promising a bright future, but “promises weren’t kept in the slums” (3) and by the time she is twenty her life is pretty much over. His father is a one-legged, strong and hard man who works as a bouncer at Dolly Oblong’s brothel. The couple have several children of which Henry is the first to survive. He is named after his deceased brother Henry, but deciding upon his name drives the couple apart. Henry’s father is convinced that naming
the second boy after the first will ease the pain of the loss. His mother, however, believes dead
children live on as stars in the sky, therefore there is only one Henry. The fact that Henry shares the
same name with his dead brother is significant for his existence as Henry always feels he has to
compete with the namesake. Life as a married couple is not exactly a walk in the park for Henry’s
parents, as the mother continues to mourn her lost children, adopting a drinking habit whilst doing
so, and Henry’s father stays away from home more and more. Neglected by both his parents, Henry
soon starts roaming the streets of Dublin by himself, and later, at the age of only five, his nine-
month old brother Victor joins him. The struggle for survival is very prominent, and at that time,
Dublin is filled with “thousands of street arabs” (63) just like them, and like many, Victor too, dies
of pneumonia. This event leaves Henry shattered, because he feels he has failed to save his
brother’s life or at least acknowledge the fact there was something seriously wrong, even though his
death could in no way have been prevented.

At the age of fourteen, he joins the Irish Citizen Army and is involved in the Easter Rising,
where members of the Irish Volunteers, the Irish Citizen Army and Cumann na mBan have
barricaded themselves in the General Post Office (G.P.O.). The Easter Rising was one of the key
moments to end British rule and to establish the Republic of Ireland. Yet Henry (and many of the
other members of the Irish Citizen Army) is not really fighting for the Irish cause, but rather for
economic freedom and a socially just society. While they are barricaded in the G.P.O. Henry meets
his old schoolteacher again and there is an immediate attraction between the two. The Easter Rising
fails, and the British besiege the G.P.O. For a while, Henry has to lie low working as a docker and
staying with Piano Annie. However, he is approached by Jack Dalton and soon operates as a hit
man for the republican cause, taking orders from Michael Collins or Jack Dalton. In addition to his
activities as a hit man, Henry is also expected to train country boys who will be drafted in the
guerrilla war against the British. During his time as a mercenary, Henry meets the love of his life
again, his old schoolteacher Miss O’Shea, to whom he had lost his virginity in the G.P.O. a few
years before. Although he feels special and important, as a member of a secret elite and with an
equally militant wife as Miss O’Shea by his side, it will take him a while to realize he is merely a
slummer and his chances under the new republican rule are as limited as they were under the
British. Moreover, he will find out that he has been used as a slave, doing the dirty work in taking
care of anyone who needed to be taken care of (read: finish them off) in the eyes of the ruthless
businessmen who have come to power. The truth is that Irish freedom only comes for a select few;
for the common Irishman and Irishwoman, however, nothing will change. What is more, the new
leaders cannot afford to be associated with a plain murderer like Henry, so when he is no longer
needed, he too will see his death warrant in the form of his name on piece of paper. He is able to
escape and lives like a tramp wandering through Ireland. With his wife in Kilmainham Gaol, Henry
goes to see his daughter Saoirse living with old Mrs O’Shea in Roscommon, before leaving Ireland to start afresh in the United States, the Land of Opportunities.

2. Character sketch

Henry’s identity has been problematic from the day he was born. In the very first scene of *A Star Called Henry*, we see him sitting next to his mother Melody while they are watching the stars in the sky and consequently his dead brother Henry. Melody believes dead children continue to live on as twinkling stars in the sky because “[God] needed them all up there to light the night” (1). We are witnessing the first and most crucial depiction of Henry’s character: he feels neglected and inferior compared to the first and, in his mother’s eyes, only Henry. As a result, he feels denied an own identity: “I roared and screamed my right to be named” (34). In his later life, Henry will regularly look up at the sky, look for his lost brother and yell out his own name, for example, when finds himself laying under a blanket on a rock in the Utah Desert (a scene which is repeated in *Oh Play That Thing*): “I’d stare at the star till I knew I had it. (...) Then I’d yell. -My name is Henry Smart (...) -The one and only Henry Smart! (...) I’d yell until I could no longer see its shadow against the blueness of the night, until there was nothing out there. I killed my brother every night” (35). Doing this affirms that the namesake is merely a dot in the sky, while the living Henry is the one doing things. It is his way to assert himself as a being, to outshine and to prove himself to his dead brother. The matter of his name cannot be underestimated. In different periods of his life he will take on different names (e.g. Fergus Nash, Henry Glick,...), because being Henry Smart requires a kind of pride, confidence and self-consciousness which he does not always posses and thus feels he has to adopt a different name to be able to be someone. Furthermore, he strongly feels the need to assert himself as a ‘worthy’ being, trying very hard to get noticed or to mean something. This is especially clear when he desperately wants to be Louis or Sister Flow’s manager. This aspect will be discussed later in this chapter.

The way Henry presents himself is very often boastful, and we could even say he is almost suffering from fits of grandeur. In relating the story of him coming into this world, for example, he talks about being “the big news, a local legend” (22) and he sums up a couple of miraculous events accompanying his birth. For instance, there is a shooting star that was said to scoot across the black sky over Dublin at the precise moment of his birth, bringing to mind the birth of Jesus. He goes even further by saying: “Where were the three wise men? Where were the sheep and the shepherds? They missed it, the fuckin’ eejits. They were following the wrong star” (22). Furthermore, he is very aware of the way he looks: tall and handsome, with beautiful eyes that leave no woman unaffected. But above all he is very courageous: he has nothing to lose and nothing to fear and that is exactly the reason why they use him in the fight for Irish independence. He is a man you can take
to war, who follows orders without asking questions. However, his vanity will leave him blind for seeing the truth. It is not until he sees his own name on a piece of paper given to him by Jack Dalton that he understands that he is a pawn in the war, who has to be taken care of when he is no longer needed. In *Oh Play That Thing* as well, his vanity will blind him for seeing the truth on many occasions.

On a side note, it is perhaps interesting to draw attention to the question whether the title of this first novel refers to Henry’s dead brother or to Henry himself. The presence of the dead brother is irrefutably significant in Henry’s life. Yet, does the title refer to the dead boy, symbolized as a star in the sky, or is it in fact the successful Henry himself? Not only was his birth a remarkable event, according to Henry, he also played a vital role in several historical events. For instance, he claims to have suggested to Connolly to add the part about the rights of children in the Proclamation of Independence, which again shows his sensitivity towards the fate of poor in the slums, while it pays homage to little Victor as well (96). This aspect of myth making and his presumed presence in historical events is a great part of Henry’s personality and there are several more instances in *Oh Play That Thing*. For example, he claims to be singing the voice of the girl on Louis Armstrong’s ‘Tight like This’ record: “It was me who supplied the voice of the girl. Earl Hines tried it; Don Redman tried; they all tried, but it was me who found the voice that stopped Louis” (216).

Furthermore, Henry is a true opportunist and hardly ever lets a chance go by to earn a bit of money. For example, when the ‘shawlies,’ (Dublin women wanting to collect their ‘separation allowance’ while their husbands are abroad fighting for England) come by the G.P.O. Henry pleads their case and is allowed to give them their money, “minus [his] 10 per cent” (103).

When it comes to Irishness, Henry has never really identified with Ireland. His involvement in the Irish Citizen Army was sparked by socialism, rather than patriotism, as his background in the Dublin slums made him realize at a very early age that the world was socially unjust. Moreover, when he talks about the banner which hung across the front of Liberty Hall that reads “We Serve Neither King Nor Kaiser, But Ireland,” Henry himself would have added “Or Anyone Else,” instead of the Ireland part, as he “didn’t give a shite about Ireland” (91).

It is evident that the fact that we see things through Henry’s eyes is crucial to understanding the events he is describing. As the main character and focaliser of the novel, he is also the narrator whose voice and perception of the events is the only one we get. In this story, the truth is his. Furthermore, Henry is very aware of the fact he is telling a story and he addresses the reader quite often in the three novels. The result is that he sometimes tells us things he could not have known. It is the image of an old man telling the story of his life. Yet, the fact that this is a character with a sometimes-distorted vision on events should not in any way make us forget that we also get a useful depiction of the time and environment in which he is living. As an author Doyle has charted the
ways “in which individual life stories coincide or intersect with national history not only at a local, but also at regional, national and global levels, while at the same time creating a very concrete picture for the reader what [he] perceives to be the historical present of [his] characters” (Mattson 42). This is why it is important to have some background information on American society to understand the decisions the three main characters of this novel make. For example, it is useful to have additional information on immigration (chapter on Henry Smart), self-help literature and religion (chapter on Sister Flow), and race and slavery (chapter on Louis Armstrong).

3. A New American

The main reason why Doyle made Henry go to America is because it is the one place any immigrant can embark on a journey of renewal. Robert Wuthnow comments on the journey taken by millions of immigrants going to America by saying that “[c]oming to America represents a decision to leave behind something in the hope of finding a better life. The transition itself is sometimes a passage fraught with danger and accomplished at considerable cost” (6). The ability of newly arrived immigrants to make something of themselves is something which is perhaps most often associated with American culture, and certainly in Oh Play That Thing as well. As the Land of Opportunities America is the one place where one can rise from rags to riches, where hard work and self-interest are considered crucial virtues. It is perhaps interesting in this respect to pay attention to the first and probably most important motto in American society, “E pluribus unum” (Out of many, one). This motto, found on the ribbon in the eagle’s mouth in the American seal, originally referred to the making of one country out of thirteen different colonies (1790). It is true that this original motto is perhaps no longer applicable to the current nation where the focus is more on the statehood as a total of 50 different states. Yet, it is relevant from another point of view, namely that the United States is construed out of so many different people, while membership is based on one common thing, the American Dream. The motto refers to plurality of this society, yet with a population that shares a common goal. Herman Melville comes into mind here. In Redburn (1849) Melville writes: “Settled by the people of all nations, all nations may claim her for their own. You cannot spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the whole world. (...) No, our blood is as the flood of the Amazon, made up of a thousand noble currents all pouring into one. We are not a nation, so much as a world” (qtd. in Berthold 2007).

From 1890 until 1924, during the second immigration wave, Europeans from Eastern and Southern Europe poured into New York. They were mostly unlettered, poor, religiously different, and politically unwanted in their countries of origin, and quickly gathered themselves into a new and somewhat homogenous group recognized as Americans. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur writes in his Letters from an American Farmer (1782): “Here individuals of all nations are melted into a
new race of men, whose labour and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world” (qtd. in Gleason 22). However, his recipe is more or less confined to Northern Europeans as he further claims they are a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes, which are melted into a new people called Americans. He also talks about losing one’s origins: “In this great American asylum, the poor of Europe have by some means met together, and in consequence of various causes; to what purpose should they ask one another what countrymen they are? Alas, two thirds of them had no country” (qtd. in Berthold 2007). These European immigrants had made the life changing decision to leave the mother country to become ‘someone’ in America. There they very much felt the need to change and to adopt the new ways. As Emma Lazarus’s poem on a tablet within the pedestal on which the Statue of Liberty stands, says:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

The statue thus symbolizes the role of America as an asylum for lost souls; yet, it also implies the promise of a better life. New York, and the Lower East Side specifically, were the places where the notion of the melting pot was truly tested, as they could be seen as a microcosm of the melting pot and its problems, of which a tenement building was probably the most notable example. The reason for this was clearly because New York was the true gateway into the US. Millions of immigrants passed the Statue of Liberty whilst sailing to Ellis Island. In the 1920s and 30s, however, it was not quite the true melting pot yet as a huge percentage of the people living in the big cities as New York were of foreign born parents. People of all nationalities, religions and race lived together primarily in the Lower East Side, the most densely populated place on the globe at the time. In a way, the tenements contributed to the melting pot as people were forced to live so closely next to each other, even though conditions were terrible, there was no heating, no water or ventilation. Consequently, the mortality rate there was high, and depression, alcoholism and fires were frequent.

Obviously, this assimilation was by no means easy, as Duncan and Goddard confirm, and “many immigrants struggled to hold onto, even to re-establish the world they left into the world they entered” (67). One of the most crucial aspects that immigrants face in their new country is ethnicity and what it means to be American. According to Robert Wuthnow, early discussions on the topic suggested that “American democracy would be preserved to the extent that immigrants abandoned their ethnic entities and became like everyone else. More recent understandings have championed pluralism instead of assimilation. According to the pluralist vision of America, we are living closer to our ideals of inclusiveness than ever before” (7-8). Hackney confirms this by saying that “[t]he melting-pot metaphor provides for the huge amount of assimilation that has actually
gone on in the United States, but it does not accommodate itself to the huge amount of persistence of pre-American cultural identities that is also part of our reality. Not only do these pre-American cultural identities persist, but Americans want to maintain them and will resist any notion of Americanism that requires the obliteration of these identities of descent” (20). Being American thus clearly means you somehow have to blend in and adopt the new ways, whilst honouring the background and traditions.

One of the most in-depth novels on immigrants in America is Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*. The novel shows the harsh conditions immigrants in the Chicagoan meatpacking industry have to endure in the early 20th century. It is a detailed depiction of the conditions they live and work in, how they are exploited and how life in an urban society in many cases leads to death. It also gives an interesting insight on how immigrants feel integrated or uprooted, on how immigrants are basically caught between two worlds. The following passage from the Jurgis - Ona wedding illustrates this delicate process: “Of these older people many wear clothing reminiscent in some detail of home (...) All these things are carefully avoided by the young, most of whom have learned to speak English and to affect the latest style of clothing. (...) Some of the young men you would take to be Americans, of the type of clerks, but for the fact that they wear their hats in the room” (14-15). The difference between the older and the younger men in this passage resembles the difference in attitude between Hettie and Henry, which will be discussed in the next paragraph. Suffice to say that both Doyle and Sinclair (and for instance Mary Antin in “The Promised Land” as well) portray the difficulties involved in the process of assimilation, in which the older people clearly want to preserve their roots and the younger generations know what it means and what it takes to be American. The fact that it is such an important theme in within the American tradition of immigrant literature, shows how crucial this aspect of assimilation was for the new members of American society and how difficult it often was to achieve. On a side note, the hardships immigrants had to endure (either by adjusting to the new ways of life or by finding employment in the industrialized America) is reflected in the fact that one-third of European immigrants from 1908 to 1923 returned to Europe (Hirschman 604), showing that not all immigrants were able to feel at home in America.

One of the most obvious examples of an immigrant trying to blend in, but also holding on to the old country is Hettie. Her country of origin remains unclear, but we suspect she comes from Eastern Europe. In her cafeteria she offers great home cooking at very cheap prices. The cooking she presents can certainly be called American (for example she offers meat loaf and sandwiches), but she is in no way a real American. The most obvious example of this is her language: “[s]he handled the language like the mince she choked with her long man’s fingers, forcing it into the shapes demanded by the menu. She’d come from some place further away than Ireland but she
wasn’t telling me where. - Don’t know the American for it” (11). Not only has she not learned to speak English fluently, she does not really want to either. She even feels like she has not really left Europe at all and as a result she never strays beyond her street. “What’s to see,” she comments, “[m]ore faces from home” (55). According to Hettie if you walk left you are in Poland, and if you walk right you are in Russia, so she asks herself why bother trying to blend in at all? Henry thoroughly disagrees: “It was a new world, and newer the further uptown we went. Taller, wider, sparkling. (...) The crowds were here, (...) all pushing and roaring for their share of attention and profit. And all changing as I looked; there was room here for ambitious elbows. I could hear the hiss of neon and accents that were American and nothing else, hiding no old geography or muck” (56).

Henry’s attitude towards the link between immigrants and their home country is thus clearly different from Hettie’s. Whereas she and many other immigrants try to hold on to some, or in some cases to many aspects of their cultural heritage, Henry cannot shed his Irishness fast enough, thus showing his inclination towards the melting-pot theory. At the end of A Star Called Henry it is already clear that he is fed up with his home country. He needs to get out before it gets to him: “I was going. I couldn’t stay here. Every breath of its stale air, every square inch of the place mocked me, grabbed at my ankles. It needed blood to survive and it wasn’t getting mine. I’d supply it with plenty” (342). He wants nothing to do with Ireland anymore, his goal is to start afresh and become a new man. He travels all over England for a while, but he still feels hunted and it is quickly evident that he will need to go farther. Like many Irish before him, he thus decides to go to America. While in Ireland and England he would forever need to look over his shoulder, Henry knows this will not be necessary in America: “I could stare into the eyes without the fear of recognition. (...) This was where a man could disappear, could die if he wanted to, and come back to quick, big life. I had arrived” (Doyle “Oh Play That Thing” 1).

Fresh off the boat, Henry immediately starts to lose his Irish background and begins his transition to become an American. He poses as an Englishman, with an English name and an English accent, and even though the customs inspector recognizes him as a fellow Irishman and greets him in Irish gaelic, he passes the interview and is welcomed to America. By throwing his passport into the water after he gets through customs, he symbolically throws away his Irish identity and consequently every link he has with the country. Perhaps it refers to a denial of any kind of (governmental) authority, but most importantly it renders him nameless. He is no longer Henry Smart and will go by a new name in the New York underworld. Besides adopting a new name and leaving Ireland behind, it also signifies the break from his family. Perhaps this is not done intentionally, but we do get the feeling that Henry will never re-join his wife and child. Indeed, he hardly talks about them, scarcely thinks about going back and certainly does not show any intention
of trying to find them. In fact, he clearly feels he is now ready to start his new life: “I was a clean sheet” (5). Even when it comes to work, he cannot stay when it reminds him too much of Ireland. The first, and one of the most logical places to go when you need work as a newly arrived immigrant, is to go to the docks. Together with thousands of other men, Henry waits to get picked, yet the familiarity of the scene transports him directly back to the Dublin docks: [t]he familiarity of that routine - acceptance, rejection, daily pay and kickback - the Irish accents all around me, the red ears on the men dying for one of the boss’s toothpicks, they all told me to stay away from the water, or as four or five avenues could get me” (12).

To substantiate his transition to become an American even more, one of the first things he does is ask the taxi driver to take him somewhere to buy an American suit and to see a Douglas Fairbanks movie. This American actor, screenwriter, director and producer was considered to be one of the first great Hollywood figures and the first to be called “King of Hollywood,” (Wikipedia) and in the eyes of Henry not only the embodiment of a true American, but also the embodiment of America as the Land of Opportunities. Later in this chapter many more instances will be mentioned of Henry’s willingness to shed his Irishness. This will remain an aspect of his personality until he feels ready to return to Ireland.

4. Henry, the soft individualist

In the next section I will argue that Henry’s individualism can be qualified as Kusserow’s soft defensive type of individualism as emerged in Carter Hill. In this kind of individualism there is a focus on self-confidence and awareness of your own talents. To be successful or to take on the world is possible by emphasizing your psychological uniqueness, personality and individuality. In other words, it is not so much through hard work or perseverance that you get on in life, but by being self-confident, believing in yourself and being proud of what you do. A person with this kind of individualism has to be very aware of his or her emotions, feelings, desires, tastes and personality. The knowledge of these elements is crucial to find the right societal outlet. The flower metaphor helps to understand how an individual evolves: it takes time to grow, blossom and once it is fully open it can reach its full potential. Unlike the other types of individualism where the individual needs to be strong, harsh and ready for obstacles, the soft individualism requires the person to be loose and willing to pour itself into the world.

There are three crucial aspects of Henry’s personality that have led me to argue that this kind of individualism can be applied to Henry’s. First of all, many of his actions are directly or indirectly linked to the death of the first Henry. His namesake is already prevalent in the first novel, but in *Oh Play That Thing* Henry continues to assert himself as an individual by shouting his name at the stars (at his dead brother). He does this when he feels confident, but also when he feels lost
(for example the scene in the Utah desert). This affirmation of his ‘self’ is coined with the assertion of his own uniqueness. This is strongly linked to the second aspect of his personality, his boastfulness. The self-confidence he displays guides him in his job hunting and in the people he deals with. The final crucial aspect, his opportunism, can also be explained by this soft defensive individualism. That is to say that when it comes to self-reliance, status and personality, this is mainly conferred by the degree of material or professional success. Lacking a socially acceptable income, or any likelihood of attaining one, has long-term consequences for the kind of person you can become and the kind of life you are likely to live. Bellah quotes Rainwater to explain this thesis:

As people grow up and live their lives, they are engaged in a constant implicit assessment of their likely chances for having the access and resources necessary to maintain a sense of valid identity. People’s anticipation of their future chances, particularly as children, adolescents, and younger adults, seems to affect quite markedly the way they relate to others and the way they make use of the resources available to them. (...) When people define their position in life as such that they have “nothing to lose,” they are much less responsive to the efforts at social control exercised informally by those in their neighbourhood and formally by agencies of social regulation. By reducing social capital, chronic poverty blocks economic and political participation, and consequently weakens the capacity to develop moral character and sustain a viable family life as well (Bellah “Individualism”).

From a very early age Henry has had to learn to seize every opportunity he can take, because in roaming the slums of Dublin he could not afford to be picky. Yet, Henry is not what you would call a hard worker. He does not possess the determination or perseverance of Sister Flow, nor is he talented like Louis Armstrong. Because of this, the ways in which he makes something of himself is less dependent on a plan he has devised for himself. As a result, he has to make do of whatever comes his way. For that, he is an opportunist in the true sense of the word.

*Fresh off the boat: an up-and-coming man in Manhattan*

In the first part of his journey, Henry works on his success in New York. Naturally, he is already familiar with what coming to America entails: “[i]t was America, not just the U.S.A. America was bigger than the states, bigger than the world. America was everything possible” (4). Henry feels brand new, excited and he is convinced he will make a successful living in this land of opportunities, yet, the strife with his deceased brother is never far away. On the way to the tailor he hangs out of the taxi and like many times before he addresses the dead Henry: “It was too early for stars, but I knew that my voice, steered by the glass and concrete, would meet them as they came out later on. (...) - My name is Henry Smart” (8). For the first time in America, he addresses the dead brother, because he is feeling confident and is ready for what is to come.

Henry has several short occupations (working for a blacksmith and an undertaker, and reading to Puerto Rican cigar makers) before he starts out as a sandwich board man, employed by
local shop keepers to carry his boards through the streets of lower Manhattan to make their businesses known. Unlike many other sandwich board men, who carry boards with dull, uninspired messages, Henry understands the power of the messages they convey and knows the way they are presented is crucial to convince people to buy the merchandise. Even when it comes to something as ostensibly simple as sandwich boards Henry takes the trade to the next level. Confronted with other sandwich board men, he knows he can do better: “I’d measure the length and breadth of the wooden pages and, always, I saw waste and opportunity” (10). Moreover, he understands how important he himself is for the businesses he represents: “I was value for money. Women’s eyes went from my eyes and, as they wondered about the rest of the handsome man inside the sandwich, they read the words and were very often sold. Women had their perfect eyes tested, bought electric razors for dead fathers and infant sons” (9). During this time, Henry wants to be called ‘Henry Glick’, “[a]n American name, invented to be remembered, and easily thrown away” (28). In many ways, this name suits him as he is indeed good at what he does, but, as we will see later, it equally does not. His best quality is without a doubt being good with words and, naturally, he is fully aware of this: “I knew how to unsettle and soothe with words. I knew how to bully and push. (...) And inspire, provoke and terrify. I was still only twenty-two, but I’d been inspiring and provoking with words before most of the New York ad men knew what they were for. (...) Sell the words, sell the goods and the life. Sell the need and the salvation” (33). These clear affirmations of his talent, will be something that Henry does regularly and ties in neatly with the soft individualism we attribute to him.

His way with words sells his sandwich boards, but he has other tricks up his sleeve. For example, he sells Hettie’s daughter Mildred an ordinary bar of soap, but the way he does this shows his self-confidence. With the simple words, “The skin you love to touch,” (28) Mildred is lured into buying something ordinary for an exuberant price. Henry realizes that he arrived too late to roll with big New York ad men, yet, he has his own niche to pay attention to. Whereas the ad men used radio and neon signs to draw in women with money, Henry will concentrate on the penniless ones. Mildred proves that this can be done. Furthermore, the fact that he is able to sell this bar of soap sets the process of self-development further in motion: “I wanted to get out on the streets. I’d just sold a repackaged cake of soap to a hophead with no money. I’d passed my own test; there was no fuckin’ stopping me” (32). Henry realizes that he has truly arrived in the Land of Opportunities and that he is getting his share. What is more, he knows that New York is the place to be successful and he knows how to read this city:

The city of the good time, the Big Noise. I was there three months and I felt at home. And I felt that way because it was no man’s home. It was too big, too fast; nothing stayed fixed. I knew the blocks, the corners, but that wasn’t enough. This was the city that fell and rose every day, the city that was colonizing.

1 referring to glic, from the old Irish glice, meaning wise, prudent; clever, shrewd (Wiktionary)
the sky. A man with ambition just had to look up to meet his possibilities. I did it all the time. And I listened. To the clock that hung higher above Manhattan than the men on the girders. I could hear it clearly. I could feel its beat. (...) Those who got on lived by the clock hanging over it. I listened to the clock. The city that dished out time. It could be bought and spent, borrowed, stolen, wasted, fucked and killed. Time was money. Time was life. It was up to me. (16)

Perhaps more than the average immigrant, Henry is aware of the possibilities this city offers. Even when he comes to food and lodgings Henry knows how to get a good deal. While he is working as a sandwich board man, he sleeps in a room behind Hettie’s cafeteria, carrying advertisement boards for her establishment. Even though Henry gets paid to carry the boards and gets to sleep there, he also manages to get free meals: “I just finished my dinner (...) great value at 58c., and better yet because I wasn’t going to pay for it” (11). Henry knows straight away when there is an opportunity in front of him and he always seizes the chance, regardless of the possible consequences. While he is working for Mr. Grass, the undertaker, he sees that the coffins are being used to smuggle bottles of hooch. When he encounters Mr. Grass’s son (also known as ‘&Son’) and two hard men he offers his services even though he knows it is dangerous, but “it was money and I needed some” (14). He gets a serious beating, but still asks if he is in, and funnily enough &Son sends him to Johnny No-Can-Do, who directs him to Fast Olaf. From then on, Henry delivers the poisonous, self-brewed hooch to the poor customers in the neighbourhood, with the bottles tacked to the insides of the sandwich boards. Again, opportunistic Henry chips off a percentage of the takings: “I brought the loot back to Fast Olaf, minus my 15 per cent” (15).

Unfortunately, his vanity and unawareness of danger had gotten him into trouble numerous times in the first novel (e.g. Henry only realizes he is a pawn when Jack Dalton hands over the note with his name on it after he, Henry, had executed many men whose name were on a similar pieces of paper), and here again he is oblivious to imminent threat. Even though Johnny No tells him he is not allowed, Henry still decides to go out on his own and start his own sandwich board business. Not only is he convinced that he can do much more with them, he also feels that this is the only way to better himself and to distinguish himself from other immigrants. Henry explains: “Lugging another man’s boards, I was another stiff, a mick fresh off the boat. Lugging my own boards, I was a man of business, a young man on the go. And not lugging them either, but presenting them” (19).

It is clear that in this phase of his life, Henry displays what Robert Bellah calls utilitarian individualism. What matters most is being successful and distinguishing himself from other newly arrived immigrants. He wants to make money and sees opportunities to achieve this everywhere.

One should think that after what he experienced in Dublin, Henry would have learned to be a bit more careful, but sadly, this is not the case. He had hoped to buy the boards off Johnny No,

---

2 The 18th Amendment prohibited the “manufacture, sale, or transporting of intoxicating liquors” anywhere in the United States. However, people flouted the law and bought their alcohol from bootleggers. As a result, organized crime and gangs of organized mobsters, such as Al Capone and his 1000-man army, flourished (Duncan & Goddard 25). Fast Olaf’s half-sister comments on this: “Manhattan was the Big Bottle. There were thirty-two thousand dives and speakeasies on the island” (15).
who obviously does not want set to set up someone with his own boards when he is making money of them. The pure opportunist in Henry nonetheless steals the boards and thinks that staying clear of Johnny No will be sufficient to make it in the new trade of advertising. And even though Johnny No’s face reminds him of Jack Dalton and for a split second he is worried, Henry nevertheless truly believes that New York is big enough for a new market player. Here Henry’s bravery pops up: he shares his plans with Fast Olaf and asks if they will continue the business of delivering the hooch as before. Again, Henry deducts his share of the bootlegging part (“23 per cent and rising” 22), but apart from that, he truly takes pride in advertising other people’s goods. Together with the sign painter Steady, Henry presents his boards to well-selected shop keepers because knows he is the man to get their businesses booming: “[t]hey listened, and saw the boards, and more boards, then hoardings and neon, the whole sky lit by the stuff. They saw where I was going (...) and they wanted to come with me” (24).

Sure enough, he soon needs more backs to carry his boards and employs a couple of young men who are themselves ads for the ads they carried. Carefully chosen, the boys that carry his boards are the words made flesh. They can sell the goods they are advertising to all kinds women. Yet, not surprisingly, rightful owner of the boards Henry robbed gives him a beating and warns him to stay out of his way. Again, he feels he is back in Dublin and for a moment he hesitates to continue, but his ambition does not allow him to quit. Not much later three of his men also get jumped and Steady dies a rather mysterious death, but still Henry refuses to quit: “I wasn’t running away. And I wasn’t giving up on the streets I’d conquered in the summer months. I was expanding; that was what I was doing. I wanted America, not just a few village streets on a tiny island tucked into its east coast” (55). Even though he stands his ground (“I walked” 64), there is a serious glitch in his plan. The optimism he felt when he first set foot on the land has now been replaced by a sense of danger and, like in Ireland and England, Henry has to look over his shoulder once again: “Old faces kept me company. Critical Eyes Are Sizing You Up. There was nothing new about this place” (75). In his home country, he knew he had to leave and start over, but in America he refuses to do this.

Henry’s unawareness of danger could be labelled as carelessness or even naivety, yet, in many cases he is just plain stupid. When he attends his first speakeasy he asks for an Irish whiskey when he knows they only serve “pure Lower East Side” (68), drawing attention to himself while he is in a place filled with men who probably share his past as a gunman. The half-sister’s lessons (Chapter IV) help him to be composed, he does not run, nor does he go into hiding. Only when it comes to a confrontation with Johnny No, Mildred, &Son and other hard men, he knows there is no

---

3 “speakeasy” a place in the US where people could buy alcohol illegally, at the time in the 1920s and 1930s when it was illegal to make or sell alcohol (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2000) 1239)
other option and he flees out of Manhattan with Olaf’s half-sister by his side. And once again he shouts at the stars: “I yelled at the sky and my dead brother. - Fuck off!” (96). Obviously, this time he does not feel quite as confident as when he yelled at the other Henry when he had just got off the boat.

For a moment, Henry thinks it might be wise to go back to Ireland, where the new Irish state is already three years old. The fighting would be over, but it remains uncertain whether or not it would be safe for him to return. He decides to stay in America and he ends up with Olaf’s half-sister in Sweet Afton, a farmer’s town far from New York City. She soon establishes herself as a notorious palm reader, but Henry has to find his place again. At first, Henry adopts his own strategy, namely to stand in the same spot long enough in order to get a job offered to him (thus waiting for opportunities to come to him). This strategy works, primarily because women are still attracted to him, “they knew what they were paying for now, and it wasn’t new water. It was the elegant, wandering man they were paying for, and they had him for the day” (104). Obviously, the men prefer to see him leave as soon as possible. It should be noted here that it is mainly thanks to the sister and their newly affirmed partnership that he is able to make something of himself. Whether it is out of love or mere lust, interestingly enough Henry pours his heart out to the half-sister and tells her his entire story. Even though she is a self-centred woman and only stays with him because she can use him, she now gives him two things to do in this new town for which he is not really qualified: a diviner who looks for water (he feels drawn to water) and a dentist who pulls teeth (many people with bad teeth in town), and indeed their plan works - for a while. Undoubtedly, Olaf’s half-sister is the brains of the operation, yet Henry suspects this is thanks to his uniqueness: “I wondered if some of that magic didn’t come from me, from rubbing up to me. It was coming back, the feeling - the glow. I was, remember, the miracle baby” (110). His boastfulness takes over again, but unfortunately, once again Henry is careless, lazy and over-confident: he pulls a perfectly decent tooth from the town’s leading man and he has to run from Sweet Afton.

A black man’s white man in Chicago

After roaming the eastern part of the States for a couple of years Henry ends up in Chicago and he gets to know hard work again, “hating it, but knowing it was work, ignoring pain, the world outside work, the bellows and howls from the pens at the other end of the plant (...)” (130). Like many other hard men (most of them from Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia), he works in one of the packinghouses Chicago is famous for (cf. The Jungle). He stays at a border house and gets jumped by his landlady Mrs Grobnik every time he goes in or out because she wants to set him up with her niece, yet he feels truly alive again. Slowly he builds up his self-confidence and for the first time since he arrived in America he is able to relax and use his own name again: “I was Henry Smart. I
was back again, and working hard” (130). Using his own name does not make him assert his Irishness again, though. On the contrary, more than in New York Henry is faced with a new culture which makes him feel even more like an American and he feels like he has finally lost everything Irish about him: “I was a Yank” (134). Whereas most of the workingmen head home after work, Henry steps out every night, wearing his first American suit and feeling free for the first time. He tells us: “I felt the freedom I’d never really known before. Because there was no past now waiting to jump. I had to be careful but there was nothing behind my back; it was all ahead. The place was wild, and as new as I was” (133). Unlike New York, Henry feels, Chicago is a real city. He had walked New York from side to side, but Chicago has room he feels. Granted, the air is full of the stink of new-dead cattle and pigs, which cannot be rid of by the rain, and they could be heard anywhere, but there was also money and opportunity in the air. Chicago seems to be the centre of America and Henry is convinced great things await him here.

After getting to know the city thoroughly he is introduced to jazz music and falls in love with it: “[t]his was free and wordless and the man with the trumpet [Louis Armstrong] was driving it forward without ever looking back. It was furious, happy and lethal; it killed all other music. It was new, like me” (134). His love for this new kind of music brings him back his sense of self and this leads to new opportunities. He quickly decides to leave his job at the packinghouse, because the pay is bad, the work is bad, and they would only be getting worse as autumn and winter arrive (146). Also, hanging out with the Poles and Lithuanians reminds him too much of the Irish. He knows he is safe with these men, however, he says, “I’d be safe here too, but alive again. I didn’t know what I’d do, but I knew I’d be doing it here. I didn’t know why - it was stupid, sentimental; I could see that. And dangerous. (...) I was ready again, excited. I believed” (146). From this comment we clearly see that Henry is mainly driven by emotions and instincts, instead of a preconceived plan.

One of these opportunities is his connection with Dora. He identifies with her because she is neither black, nor white, but new and American like Chicago and Henry himself. Dora used to work in a dress shop, but she had to pretend she was white using hair straighteners and powders. Now, she is working for a family, doing the black woman’s work and being paid less than in the shop, but she feels better now she does not have to pretend to be white anymore. Together they are swept away by the music and they can let go completely, forgetting the world around them. It goes without saying that their involvement is not quite as evident as their dancing would suggest. For example, they meet on a Monday night which is the only night coloured people are allowed in the club. Henry is not a tad interested in the distinction between black and white, but it is something he will have to take into account eventually. It is even difficult to determine what colour Dora is. To white people she is a black woman, to black people she is not a white woman, but is not a black
woman either. In short, she is neither and thus belongs to none at all. For example, she lives with other black women in the same room, but she can be white (or considered to be white) and enter a club on non-coloured nights.

Dora finds it unacceptable that Henry, as an Irishman, does not understand that segregation exists. The Irish were in fact the first European immigrants to experience discrimination in America. At the end of the 19th century, the Irish were seen as just a notch above the African-American slaves, both physically and culturally. They were seen as pests, as monsters and bums lingering the streets of the American cities. They were discriminated against and even in help-wanted-signs it said that “no Irish need apply” (Berthold 2007). Moreover, the plight of an Irishman in regards to the one experienced by a black man is perhaps most clearly expressed by Doyle himself in *The Commitments* when he says that “the Irish are the niggers of Europe” (9). In this respect it is not surprising that Henry can relate to Dora’s position (and Louis’s position) in society even though he is blind for the more evident discrimination and exclusion coloured people experience. Both of them know what it is like to hide and to pretend to be something other than they actually are. Henry had tried not to be Irish for three years, but he does not quite understand how black and white are divided. He does not see the line, but he knows he and Dora do have respect certain rules. This means that their best option is to go to black and tan clubs where they have license to dance together. In these clubs, black men can be with white women (which is rare) and black women can be with white men, but they still have to obey some rules. For example, they cannot enter the club together, they can dance but not sit together, let alone kiss.

Dora introduces Henry to Louis Armstrong and there is an immediate connection between the two men. Henry believes that Louis recognizes the man he used to be: “[a] man who carried a good suit through checkpoints and locked doors. Louis Armstrong had looked at me and seen someone he wanted, a man he needed to know, a man who’d stroll right on with him. He’d seen Henry Smart” (142-143). Clearly, Henry is thrilled with his newfound self-confidence and his boastfulness becomes his guide him once again. It takes a couple of months, but the second time Henry sees Louis, the trumpet player has just lost his mother and plays a piece of music that silences the whole club: “[i]t was the blues, his grief crying out of the bell. But is was no lament. It was the cry of a terrified child, left all alone, forever. No notes, no breaks, but all one howl that rushed at her dead body; it was angry and lost and - *What about meeeee!* - it turned and turned, and returned to the body, and washed, and dressed her. His mother, mine - *she skips and she laughs, her black eyes shines happy* - he sent his mother home” (155). Henry recognizes himself in the affirmation of self and the loneliness Louis is feeling. This feeling appears to be mutual. Louis almost immediately offers Henry a job to remain at his side day and night, yet it takes Henry a long
time to grasp why he is there: “[t]he voice was always a growl; it took hard reading. But I was learning. There was serious business ahead. He was nervous, staying in charge” (174).

The first time Henry understands why he is accompanying Louis and is able to make his presence felt, is when they are in the studio recording ‘West End Blues.’ Louis’s time to finish the record is up, but he is not satisfied with the result and wants to continue. The studio engineer tells him there is another band coming in, but Henry steps in and makes it perfectly clear that Louis will leave only when he is ready. Of course, at that moment it is mainly Louis who demands the extra time, but the fact that Henry is there certainly helps to make a stand. Interestingly enough, here we witness another scene in which Henry asserts his presence in a notable historic event: “I was there, in that corner, in that studio. The most famous trumpet solo in jazz history was played by Louis Armstrong but it was brought to you by Henry Smart. I was Louis Armstrong’s white man” (168).

One can hardly call Henry coy or unpretentious. In *A Star Called Henry* the best example of his boastfulness is undoubtedly the way he relates the tale of his birth. Comparing the way you come into this world to the birth of Jesus is not exactly a sign of modesty, but asserting his involvement in Louis’s career is neither. However, his self-praise does not end here. Both men like to look sharp, and Henry knows how he can stand out: “I was the sharpest ofay in Chicago, the best dressed Irishman anywhere” (170). He has his self-confidence back, and knows that a fine suit and a new fedora can complete the image of Louis’s man. Yet, he still does not quite understand why is actually there. He knows he cannot present himself as Louis’ manager, but that does not prevent him from keeping up appearances.

Henry makes the same mistake in Chicago as in Sweet Afton, namely thinking that hard gangsters do not exit in this part of America. Quite the contrary, there are plenty of them, mainly Italians (men like Al Capone) involved in bootlegging, robbery and other illegal activities. Even though he knows he should stay away from them, he has to follow Louis into a meeting with one of them: “I wondered what I was doing, strolling squeakily into the middle of this gang. I’d gone thousands of miles and five years to avoid men like these ones, and here I was, following Louis. Into the Lexington Hotel” (175). He has to lead Louis up to Joe Glaser, who holds his hand for a long time to measure him up. Henry needs to appeal to his old ways in the presence of these men, being confident, but not too confident, and above all courageous: “I was in a room full of the hard men, my only friend a smiling black man. And what looked like the hardest man of the lot wouldn’t let go of my hand. He was talking to Louis and he was looking straight at me. Glaser held on, and I made no effort to take my hand back. I leaned out over the table. It was up to Louis. It was why I was there. I learnt as we went along. I looked straight back at the fucker” (178). It is clear that

---

4 means ‘white man’

5 From 1928 to 1932 Al Capone made the hotel at 2135 S. Michigan Avenue his gangland headquarters, an association that the hotel’s reputation never escaped (Encyclopedia of Chicago).
Henry is there to let Joe believe Henry is Louis’s manager, and at that time, Henry thinks this himself, but he will quickly learn that Louis does not take a manager. Henry is there to be Louis’s white man. Only with him by his side, can Louis get to the next level in his success. He serves as Louis’s ticket to the next level of success.

The next phase in their collaboration exists in robbing houses and here Henry is able to show off his expertise. For instance, he watches the houses they plan to rob and helps the maids of these homes to carry the groceries. His attraction to women, back in full force, leads to valuable information as he lets them talk about where and how they live: “I didn’t mess; I didn’t string them along. I just let them do what they really wanted to do, talk. I never walked them home. I never swapped names or promises. They always spoke first. They always walked home happy, to a room that would never be theirs” (183).

Unexpectedly, one of the houses they want to rob is the house of Mrs Lowe where Miss O’Shea is living with their six-year-old daughter Saoirse. Needless to say Miss O’Shea is angry and hurt because she feels Henry did not try to find her and he cannot tell her he did look for her everywhere he went: “(...) she was right. I’d never looked back. I’d never stopped and turned” (199). When asked what he was doing in Chicago, he tells her that he thought that if he stopped running all over the place, he could start heading back. It is clear that Henry feels he could only turn back if he had made something of himself. Miss O’Shea tells him she noticed he has gone soft: he used to be able to stand still for hours, but now he is restless and off his guard. Indeed, his life with Louis is primarily focussed on having fun, wearing nice clothes and enjoying music (thus displaying an expressive individualism). It is even reflected in the way he sleeps. For the first time in years he is able to sleep well, without having to worry somebody is coming for him. Getting to know his daughter too fills him with happiness; for the first time he is able to be a father and a family man. Yet, he remains restless and he knows that he is not ready to settle down. When Louis tells him he needs to go to Harlem to get away from the Chicago gangsters, Henry more than happily accompanies him, leaving Miss O’Shea and Saoirse behind once again. Henry’s individualistic stance does not allow him to leave Louis and devote himself to his family; he still wants big things.

*To Harlem and beyond*

Even though Louis repeatedly and explicitly tells him he does not want a manager, Henry still tells Miss O’Shea he is kind of his manager, or at least the one that takes care of him. Henry is clearly convinced that Louis needs Henry to protect him from people who want to exploit or use him. Yet, Louis chooses to go with Tommy Rockwell (an agent of the management type) and Henry has to constantly defend his position by Louis’s side. He still justifies his presence by asserting that
he is the one who makes sure that the dealings are fair, but Louis’s need for him is clearly lingering. Moreover, Henry becomes aware that his white skin will forever be a sign of what is not. He will never be really part of the music scene Louis belongs to. Finally, Louis’s reasons for keeping Henry by his side are starting to dawn on Henry. Henry now understands that his whiteness is the only reason why he can stay, but that means he has no immediate impact on the action: “I was in because of what I wasn’t. I wasn’t black, I wasn’t a player or an agent or a manager or a shark or a friend of Al Capone’s. I wasn’t the things that the dangerous white men were. So I was useful - just as long as I wasn’t anything. Just Louis Armstrong’s white man” (245). Needless to say, it bothers him enormously that in this age of entrepreneurship and economic prosperity he has not accomplished anything, especially in Harlem, a place where black and white can live next to each other without any major problems (except when a black person is killed by the police, for example). Here he could be Henry Smart, a white man and an Irishman but that would not have really mattered. He is in the centre of great things, but in fact he is only there because of the colour of his skin, as Louis’s white boy. And that makes him an outsider. He knows he has to leave Louis, but he is not quite ready to do it.

When he visits Hettie she tells him he has adopted the way black men dress, walk and talk. This makes him happy, but worries him too. On the one hand, it means that he is no longer an Irishman and because of the music he has finally become an American. It is, however, worrisome because this transformation has happened without he himself noticing. His past experiences have indeed taught him to be careful and try not to be noticed. Walking like an African, as Hettie claims, is way too new and defiant, and again he would have to be careful. Indeed, a man like Rockwell makes Henry realize that the action might be in Harlem, but it is still managed out of Manhattan by the same men he had to hide from the first time he was in New York.

He asks Louis to sing a song for Piano Annie, and while they are in the studio recording the song Henry sees himself going back to Ireland for the first time: “I could see, feel, the three of us. Leaving, and arriving. I’d left Dublin so many times but I’d never arrived. I’d always crept back in, on a stolen bike, in someone else’s threads, with someone else’s name. (...) But never as me. Henry Smart had never gone home. He was now, though. Going home. Henry S. Smart. Henry the Yank” (264). However, before he is able to say goodbye to Louis and go to Chicago to get Miss O’Shea and Saoirse, Henry sees Fast Olaf’s half-sister again, who is now known as Sister Florence Grattan-McKendrick, Sister Flow for short. Yet, she and Rita (Rockwell’s secretary) hardly acknowledge his presence which annoys him deeply: “[t]hat was it. I wanted the old me back. I wanted to be Henry Smart. I wanted a gun and a cause. I wanted to take action, get things done, see them done with a well-aimed stare” (275). The fact that he has not been able to make a name for himself
makes him see a new opportunity in this encounter and his plan to go back to Dublin is postponed again.

When Sister Flow tells him she wants to record sermons, Henry immediately offers to get Louis Armstrong involved to fill the silence between the words with his music. However, by then Louis has become a successful and well-known artist and many people want things from him. Asking Louis to star on these records is to be one of these shoulder-shoulder-tapping people, and even though Louis and Sister Flow do not like each other at all, Henry feels great. He finally feels he is doing something worthwhile and establishing himself as an individual. Unfortunately, it also means the end of his bond with Louis: “[i]t was a handshake, on a deal. Two friends shaking hands. But I felt it then, before I knew it. The loss. The end. The wave, goodbye. I wanted to grab again, but couldn’t. (...) Forgive me. We’ll start again, I’ll start again. I’ll know. I’ll know the next time. I’ll never make you be a nigger minstrel” (289).

For a while, Henry acts as Sister Flow’s manager but again he runs out of luck. Indeed, his instincts about the hard men in Manhattan controlling the music scene in Harlem were correct and for the fourth time Henry is forced to run. He is saved by Louis and Sister Flow and drives to Chicago to catch up with his wife and child. Henry tries to apologize to Louis, but the latter does not accept this apology. In Chicago it appears that Miss O’Shea and Saoirse have already left, although Mrs Lowe can direct them to a hotel downtown. Here, Ned Kellet (an Irish spy Henry met in Kilmainham Gaiol) is waiting for him. Kellet is there on orders from the Manhattan and Chicago men and men in Ireland who want Henry dead, but this time he is saved by his wife. It seems that even though Henry is renowned for being a hard and courageous man, the fact that he is able to stay alive is mainly because of luck. Yet, on every occasion he feels that he will be able to save himself showing his never faltering self-confidence, and perhaps distorted vision on reality.

*Tramping through America*

What follows is a journey through America, Miss O’Shea, Saoirse and Henry travel in boxcars all over the country. To survive, they work whenever they can or turn to crime and begging when there is no other way. It is the time of Great Depression and millions of Americans are constantly on the move. Times are of course hard, but they are happy and they even have a new member in the family, a boy called Séamus Louis, also known as Rifle. For years, the family travel across America together with millions of other families. Disaster strikes, however, and Henry slips from a moving train, losing the bottom part of his left leg and separating him from his family. Having to wear a wooden leg immediately brings his father into mind. Moreover, he also resembles his father in the fact that he is separated from his family. He hears stories about them at camp fires and to communicate with them he tells stories about himself: “[t]here was a story for them there.
Men stared at the leg; women stared at the man who owned it. And I told them how I got it. And, sometimes, a finger would reach out, and a fingertip would kiss the teak. And I began to feel like the fine man I used to be” (360). With his stories he wants to let them know that he is not a failure and that he is still looking for them. Unfortunately, he never finds them again and he almost dies in the Utah desert before he is discovered by John Ford, which foreshadows the next novel in the Last Roundup series.

On a side note, it is perhaps interesting to mention John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath here. Not only is John Ford the director of the Hollywood film version, the novel is also a depiction of the migration of thousands of families to California. Many crop holders are forced to leave their farms in Oklahoma as a result of drought and economic difficulties. It is these Okies Henry meets by the campfires in the Hoovervilles, who make him feel like he is back in Dublin living the life of a slummer. Unfortunately, when these people eventually arrive in California it proves to be very far from the so-called Promised Land. There is too little work for too many people and as a result the wages are low. Furthermore, Californians are not enthusiastic to see them coming and they have to suffer from verbal and physical abuse. This part of the Doyle novel shows some very strong pieces of writing in the description of the hardships these migrant people have to endure. Steinbeck’s novel as well depicts a grim image of this period in American history. There is no sense of relief and like the American government leaving its people out in the cold, Steinbeck too seems to abandon his characters by leaving their struggle unresolved. Moreover, this phase in Henry’s life clearly shows that he will never achieve the American Dream and all his efforts were in vain. In this respect, he differs enormously from Sister Flow. So in the next chapter we will take a look at Fast Olaf’s half-sister who displays an entirely different kind of individualism to go from rags to riches.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{6} People from Oklahoma}\]
IV. Sister Flow

We do not get to know her real name, but before she is called Sister Flow Henry refers to her as ‘the (half-)sister.’ She is Fast Olaf/Eddie’s half-sister, who lives with Olaf and their dying mother on the fourth floor of an Orchard Street tenement. Like Henry, she is an opportunist, however, there is more to it than that. Even though she can sense opportunities a mile away and never passes up on any that come her way, she is constantly working on her self-development. She does not know what the future holds, but she continuously works on being equipped to achieve greater things in life. She is an intelligent, confident and hard woman for whom not even the sky is the limit. It goes without saying that this kind of individualism, with its focus on professional and material success, leaves little room for the enjoyment of life and indeed the half-sister does not seem to be having a good time. For that, she can completely be associated with Bellah’s utilitarian individualism.

Based on its characteristics, we can identify Sister Flow’s individualism as the hard offensive kind as it resembles the white working-class attitude of Beach Channel (Kusserow’s terminology). In the following discussion we will see that there are three key words to describe the half-sister’s individualism: assertiveness, self-determination and self-confidence. Sister Flow, as I will argue, is convinced that an individual can achieve whatever he or she wants to achieve not only through hard work, but especially by believing that you can do whatever you set your mind to. In that respect, her individualism does indeed resemble the Beach Channel’s individualism. Here, their motto is that hard work will get you the success you seek if you display tenacity and self-confidence. In their view, with the right amount of perseverance, nothing is impossible.

1. A self-mastered work in progress

As mentioned in the second chapter, one of the central strands in describing American culture and individualism distinguished by Robert Bellah et al. is the modern individualist strand with its focus on hard work to attain a successful life. Benjamin Franklin is undoubtedly the most important representative. He can be seen as the quintessential example of a self-made man who left his poor background behind to become wealthy, successful and influential. Franklin was very much impressed with and influenced by John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress and Poor Richard’s Almanak, both books stipulating ways to be successful. As a result, in his Autobiography Franklin was the first to give expression to what many believe is the most important aspect of American culture, namely the opportunity to go from rags to riches if only one puts in the effort. This is clearly expressed in Franklin’s view on (European) immigrants: “If they are poor, they begin first as Servants or Journeyman; and if they are sober, industrious, and frugal, they soon become Masters,
establish themselves in Business, marry, raise Families, and become respectable citizens” (qtd. in Bellah 33). In his book, Franklin also provides a schedule of his daily activities, indicating the prevalence of the notion that every minute counts and that success requires hard work, discipline and determination, three notions that are equally important to the half-sister in Oh Play That Thing. On this topic, it is undoubtedly interesting to refer to James Gatz’s daily schedule in The Great Gatsby. Gatsby mentions for example that he needs to take a “bath every other day,” to “read one improving book or magazine per week” and to “be better to parents” (175-176). Like Franklin, Gatsby is convinced that being successful requires a rigid organization of your life and making a list like the one above helps you to achieve this. It is the most obvious expression of Bellah’s utilitarian individualism mentioned earlier and refers to one’s devotion to the pursuit of material and/or professional success. Naturally, this leaves little room for expressive individualism where the focus is on the deeper cultivation of the self and the more immediate pursuit of happiness. On a side note, this notion of expressive individualism is aptly manifested in “Songs of Myself,” a poem by Walt Whitman. Already in the first line (“I celebrate myself”), Whitman displays his conviction that there is more to life than material belongings. According to him, to be successful was to live a life rich in experience, establishing oneself as an intellectual, social and loving person (Bellah 34). This concept of utilitarian individualism is something that characterizes Sister Flow greatly. She devotes her entire life to bettering herself mentally and financially (showing her focus on utilitarian individualism) and she is very much aware of the fact that every minute counts. Yet, Henry comments at one point that he has never seen her really smile or appear to be genuinely happy (291). It is indeed true that we never see her enjoying anything or talk of happiness, unlike Henry or Louis. Contrary to Sister Flow, these men obviously hold expressive individualism higher than utilitarian individualism as their actions are clearly more focused on having a good time.

In American culture stories and instances of self-made men for whom hard work and innovation were crucial to rise from rags to riches are very prominent. During the nineteenth century these stories circulated widely in textbooks and popular literature. Important examples include the McGuffey Readers (a series of textbooks that were widely used in American schools from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century), stories about Benjamin Franklin, Daniel Boone and Abraham Lincoln, and of course the stories by Horatio Alger (Mount 363). “The stories do not reflect statistical realities as much as they tell of possibilities,” Robert Wuthnow writes on the topic, “[t]hey show that strangers and immigrants can make it; they suggest equally that America is an open society, a place where all can succeed” (105). Even though these are in fact stories first and foremost, they do reflect the way Americans think about themselves and their country, and thus influence their thinking, shape their behaviour and inspire to model their life after these stories. It is perhaps interesting to recall Roland Barthes’s observations on narratives in general:
narratives play a mythologizing role by transforming ideas and beliefs into the taken-for-granted or ‘natural.’ The power of narratives lies in the fact that they establish the frame in which thought and behaviour take place, more so than in the specific messages they convey. The implied or signified meanings are typically multivalent, suggesting possibilities that do not become explicit enough to be examined critically (qtd. in Wuthnow 109-110).

In other words, the stories on self-made men and women are culturally influential, as they are primarily significant as a shared cultural meaning. They are well known throughout the country and recognizable for many. They represent the possibility of personal transformation and the ability for each and every one to achieve great success. In that way, as Alex Pitofsky asserts, they can be interpreted “as an apotheosis of individualism” (277). However, they also act as a symbol of legitimacy, which implies that through hard work and leading a good life people are able to attain great successes in their life, and consequently deserve what they get because it results from personal effort. In these stories the individual takes action and there is no such thing as good or bad luck. There is no randomness in life and thus the individual is fully responsible for the course his or her life takes. In other words, we could say that these stories serve as templates for people who want to succeed in life in general and indeed for members of American society more specifically. Real life is of course more complex than what is told in these stories, yet its focus on hard work, personal sacrifice and unrivalled moral virtue is essential to be successful.

On the whole, they are mentioned here because they serve as a guide for many immigrants like Sister Flow. Like the heroes of the Alger stories the half-sister knows that as an immigrant hard work (which is the first step) will enable her to achieve great success. As Wuthnow concludes: “These are powerful stories. They collectively reinforce the idea that America is still a land of opportunity, that it is a place where newcomers from diverse backgrounds are not only welcomed but given the freedom to fulfil their highest dreams” (112). The success of Alger’s self-help stories was unprecedented, and he published more than a hundred novels and seldom deviated from the narrative formula. He always celebrates the “specific type of unsinkable young hero and the American business culture in general, which Alger invariably depicts as a meritocracy in which poverty is little more than a temporary obstruction for those willing to work hard, to respect social conventions, and simply to have faith that a reasonably comfortable place at the bottom of the middle class is never out of reach” (Pitofsky 279). Even though these stories were a good starting point in understanding hard work as pivotal in success, the half-sister turns to more specific guidelines (self-help literature) to obtain her goal.

In the 1920s, society was perceived as a constraining force, an image which was supported by the self-help literature of the time. In *The Art of Thinking*, for example, Ernest Dimnet argues that one must retreat from society in order to get to know or to find oneself. This idea is also found in the writings of Jackson and Salisbury who express the unnaturalness of self-control imposed by society on its members. Indeed, they claim that self-control is hard on the body, “which was
patterned before self-control came into fashion” (qtd. in Thomson 857). This notion of self-control will be a key concept in Sister Flow’s own created religion (which will be explored in the final part of this chapter) as it celebrated the concept of doing whatever you want to do.

However, the most important author of these self-help books is undoubtedly Emile Coué, especially significant in this discussion because he is even quoted in Oh Play That Thing – though he is not mentioned explicitly. In his Self Mastery Through Conscious Autosuggestion (1922), Coué expresses the idea that through self-mastery one gains the ability to live in relative happiness regardless of the conditions he or she is living in. In short, whatever the constraints of society may be, they are basically irrelevant (like the temporary obstacles in the Alger stories). His aim is to build self-confidence and the conviction that you can achieve whatever your mind can conceive. It is not so much an expression of the self, but rather the methodical process of bettering the self. It is in fact a revaluation of life through the change in attitude, which “teaches us that the burdens of life are, at least in large measure, of our own creating. We reproduce in ourselves and in our circumstances the thoughts of our minds. (...) It offers us a means by which we can change these thoughts when they are evil and foster them when they are good, so producing a corresponding betterment in our individual life” (78). To achieve this, Coué has developed a simple formula which sets before the mind the idea of a daily improvement in every respect, mental, physical and moral. The formula runs as follows: “Day by day, in every way, I’m getting better and better” (Brooks 52). The idea is that the rudimentary rhythm exerts a lulling effect on the mind and so aids in calling up the Unconscious, which is where the real self dwells. Charry Brooks also adds that the words need to be uttered aloud, because in doing so the idea is reinforced by the movements of lips and tongue and by the auditory impressions conveyed through the ear (54).

Fast Olaf’s half-sister truly believes that this type of autosuggestion is the key to success. To illustrate this more clearly to Henry, she gets hold of one of her nipples to prove that if only you work on them long and hard enough, they will eventually get bigger. While she is moulding her nipples she mutters the same words Coué uses. After hours of working on them, all the while chanting Coué’ words, she remarks: “Ev-ery thought entirely filling my mind becomes true and transforms itself into action. As the guy says. Think titties, be titties” (26). Strangely enough, when asked who the guy is, she refuses to reveal Emile Coué’s name, though she does mention it is called “autosuggestion” (43). She explains that it is the process of implanting an idea in oneself by oneself; an idea, she tells us, which is the very “up-to-date thing” (43). Here, she tells us that autosuggestion has nothing to with will, strength or control. Again, the link is made with society and its constraining force and the rebellion against control in general. In contrast, the key aspects of autosuggestion, the half-sister informs us, are imagination and repetition: “Saying it, again and again. Up and down. Every day, ever-y way, I am getting, better, and better. Until you don’t have to
believe it anymore. (...) It’s a land of gold, daddio. Only, the gold ain’t in the streets. It’s in your head” (44). She reminds Henry of the fact that America is the Land of Opportunities, but you have to have the right mind-set to make something of yourself. As a result, the sister is constantly working on her self-development and holds highly the notion that every minute counts (“Waiting is dying” 21), which brings to mind Benjamin Franklin’s and James Gatz’s schedule. All three know that there is no time to lose because opportunities will not wait. Furthermore, she scolds Henry for not being ambitious enough: “Fine is fine. (...) But you have to have ambition in this life, you know. (...) This time is always the last time” (16). She showed Henry the nipple thing so he would learn from it and even though he sometimes utters the words, he never quite catches on. She is convinced that every thought can become a reality, and if you say the words often enough, you will start to believe them. Indeed, we could even assume that the half-sister was right in her beliefs. Henry utters the words sporadically but without real conviction and thus ultimately fails in achieving the American Dream. Fast Olaf’s sister, in contrast, proves that the determination and conviction eventually pays off, as we will see later in this chapter.

In a way, she also expresses Locke’s and Hobbes’s utilitarian view on individualism and Coué’s use of autosuggestion by telling Henry that “[w]e are what we make ourselves and not what circumstances make us. (...) I can make me what I am. And you can make you what you are” (42). As mentioned in the first chapter, the utilitarian version of individualism as conceived by Hobbes and Locke, states that an individual is prior to society. Sister Flow’s comment proves that she too believes that an individual is ultimately responsible for his or her actions and that the circumstances we find ourselves in depend on the choices we make. Therefore the true key to success is imagination and the ability of the mind to turn dreams into reality.

As a woman she knows she has to present herself in a way that pleases men in order to get things done: “The market wants it, she said. - The flappers¹ are the thing, see. All the girls out there want to be flappers. No tits, no hips. That’s what the girls want. But that’s not what the boys want, you know. And the boys are the market right now. Always and forever. The boys want tits, tits I can give them. (...) Long hair too. the girls want it short, the boys like it long” (26). It is true that, like Henry, she is an opportunist, but in her case there is less luck involved. Like no other, she is able to observe and tax situations, and she knows how to handle people. Not only can she assess people’s needs and feelings, she is also able to inspire them to certain behaviour. “She was the Barker. She announced their need, told them what they lacked and wanted. She worked on the women; the men came natural,” (104-105) Henry comments on this. This is also true for Henry. The opposite sex cannot resist him, but men dislike and even distrust him. The difference between Henry and Sister Flow lies in the fact that she is able to win over both men and women, whereas Henry is only

¹ A young woman in the 1920s who wore fashionable clothes, had short hair and was interested in modern music and new ideas (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 484)
successful with women. This is especially obvious in Sweet Afton where they end up after having to run from New York when they found themselves in a predicament. The half-sister immediately makes a name for herself by reading women’s palms. Yet, she does not immediately ask for money; she knows the psychology behind the situation asks for a more composed attitude: “[w]ait and see. I’m a miracle, you know. I take their money, I’m less of a miracle. I might even be a grifter” (99). Whereas Henry is much more impulsive or even acts against his better judgement, the half-sister always uses her intelligence. She knows nothing of reading lifelines or heartlines, “[b]ut the market demanded, so she sent her finger strolling along, pretending to explore and understand” (109). Even if she lacks the qualities or talent to perform certain actions, her assertiveness and self-confidence will hide this truth.

She is very independent, but in Sweet Afton she realizes that Henry needs her and she needs him. This is the only point in the novel where she is open to a partnership: “I got things you want, you got things I can use. Sounds as near to a partnership as I’ll ever need or want. Till it’s safe to go back. Till it’s safe for me to go back” (100). She does not cover up the truth, and lets Henry know exactly where he stands, that is she only cares about herself. Unfortunately, and even though his name suggest otherwise, Henry is not always quick to catch up. She warns him quite literally, but Henry is unaware of the impending danger. As a result, he has to flee again, but this time she does not join him. She has the town of Sweet Afton wrapped around her finger and is not quite ready to leave yet. The next time we meet her, she will have accomplished big things but is still ready for more.

2. The High Priestess of the Divine Church of the Here and Now

In the next paragraphs we will discuss the creation of Sister Flow’s very own religion. It might seem strange that she was able to do something like this, yet in America many types of religion coexist because the culture is particularly receptive to a wide variety of religions. Until the 1950s the religious landscape in America was greatly dominated by Protestantism. The majority of the churchgoers attended Protestant services, even though for a long time Catholics were the single largest religious body in the United States. Most of the immigrants who came to America during the nineteenth century had a Catholic background and together with the immigration of a large number of Jews, the three branches (Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism) were considered to be the face of religion in the country. There was always room for new houses of worship, however, and from the 1950s onwards there was an unprecedented growth in American religion (Wuthnow 129). Robert Wuthnow further asserts that religion is “the vehicle through which many Americans achieve personal transformation. This is especially true of those who say they are spiritually reborn. In other cases, religion serves as a source of hope or provides role models. The vitality of American
religion is, in other ways, widely assumed to be a beneficial feature of American democracy” (7). Wuthnow thus emphasizes the fact that the inclination towards new religious groups has been a way for Americans to reinvent themselves. This is exactly what Sister Flow does, reinventing herself as the high priestess of her own religion.

According to Irene Thomson, the self-help literature mentioned earlier in this chapter is greatly responsible for the innate and unbridled egotism of man in the 1920s, because on the whole they are a celebration of arrogance and self-sufficiency which encourages people to not control their instincts (858). In that philosophy, the strength lies in the letting-go of passions and as a result there is an excessive obsession with self-expression. People are governed by their instincts or by impulse, and to let go completely is the ultimate goal. In Sweet Afton, Olaf’s half-sister starts elaborating on this notion and takes the first steps towards creating her own religion. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the half-sister puts a strong emphasis on the importance of the present. Henry does not quite grasp the direction she is heading for and assumes it is just another way to fleece the town of their money. Yet, he understands that “[s]he believed in the thing, the now, what she saw and felt, now; no putting off or waiting. The future would be better, only if you had the now. (...) She believed this, and she was making a religion of it. All other faiths dangled transcendence, the transcendence of the dirty world as probable, possible, or sure-fire certainty; transcendence as a promise or treat” (120). She uses this notion to make the people of Sweet Afton feel better about themselves, in which she succeeds quite prominently.

When we talk about Sister Flow it is apparent that the creation of her own religion is just about the quintessential example of a radically individualist approach to religion. In this respect we can also refer to Russel H. Conwell, a minister who became one of the most popular speakers in the 1920s. He preached the gospel of money in the true sense of the word. According to him “God wants you to be rich.” One famous line from Acres of Diamonds, a speech he delivered over 6,000 times, says: “Money is power: money has powers; and for a man to say, ‘I do not want money,’ is to say, ‘I do not wish to do any good to my fellowmen’” (qtd. in Berthold 2007). To Conwell, money is the root of goodness as you can use money to do good (God wills it so). Sister Flow does not preach about the importance of money, but the message she delivers resembles the Conwell’s approach to religion as she stresses the importance of following your instincts, thus focusing on the individual. In the name of God, both preach the fulfilment of very self-centred notions, namely the pursuit of wealth and the indulgence of desires.

When Henry meets Sister Flow for the second time in New York, she is an improved version of herself. In Sweet Afton she already knew what was needed to reinforce the image of herself, and by now she has almost perfected this. She knows what to wear, how to sit and talk, how to eat and how to look. She is still all woman, but has become a man as well, adding authority to the
She was the boss these days” (276). She is no longer obsessed with the Emile Coué’s method, because she feels she has become the best she can be. She is now the High Priestess of the “Divine Church of the Here and Now,” of which the main doctrine is that you can do whatever you want to do because God does not object. In fact, he even insists that you follow your impulses. And in the 1920s many people are apparently open to this kind of religion: she has her own church in Los Angeles which seats two thousand people and has a rotating electric light on the spire. In addition, she has her own radio show, miniature rubber dolls, other priestesses and a college is planned to be opened.

Los Angeles, because of its demographic pluralism and continuing immigration, is the birth place of several sects that have gained national and international followings, Michael E. Engh informs us (475). One of these is Guy and Edna Ballard’s “Mighty I Am” movement which resembles Sister Flow’s religion somewhat (with its focus on the individual), but there is one person who clearly served as a source of inspiration for the creation of Sister Flow’s character. This person, Aimee Semple McPherson, was almost synonymous with religion in Los Angeles in the 1920s. She started out as an itinerant evangelist and faith healer during World War I, and travelled from city to city. She created the International Church of the Four Square Gospel and her megachurch, the Angelus Temple, seated over five thousand congregants. Her sermons were popular shows attracting both locals and tourists. She combined traditional religious elements with theatricality, using costumes, an orchestra, expensive lighting and elaborate stage sets (Sister Flow too, uses theatricality to get her message across). Aimee Semple McPherson understood the importance of reaching vast audiences beyond the walls of her own church and was consequently the first woman in the United States to obtain a federal license to operate a radio station to broadcast her church of the airwaves (Engh 487; Sutton 36-38). Like Sister Flow, she preached a positive message and she too, claimed to have supernatural powers. She could lay hands on people and seemingly heal them (cf. Sister Flow reading people’s palms in Sweet Afton). Another similarity between the two women is that both project sexuality and are extremely charismatic. Both women understand the importance of marketing and use the most advanced strategies to get their message across.

The next step in her success is to record phonographs with sermons and for this, Henry offers his services. Henry suggests introducing her to Louis Armstrong who can star on her records to fill the silences between the words. Yet, not only is she suspicious of getting Henry involved (self-reliance is an important trait of hard offensive individualism), but when she sees how popular Louis is, she is also afraid he will outshine her. She is clearly intimidated by Louis’s success and for the first time she meets someone she cannot impress with her looks or talk, something which

---

2 The heaviest concentration of cults and occult activity was along the West Coast, the area where the conventional churches are weakest (Stark et al. 137)
infuriates her. She even stops being the respectable Sister Flow and talks dirt to him, “because she wanted to see him caught; she wanted to see him dangle” (288). She has no impact on Louis whatsoever and it frustrates her enormously. To make matters worse, she loses her charisma in the studio and even needs Louis to tell her what to do. The four “Dearly Beloved” records they record that day are a great success, but it is mainly thanks to Louis that they even got recorded at all. Even though she thoroughly hates Louis she still wants to go and see him perform at a Harlem night club because “[h]e’s going places the jigs haven’t been before. He’s the nigger that’s going to matter” (301). However, the situation escalates and Louis again tells her what to do when Henry gets into trouble. At first, she is reluctant to take orders from this black man, but when she goes out to hold off the men coming after Henry, she is clearly bigger than Louis and she is more than pleased.

We do not really get to know what happens to Sister Flow after she helps Henry to escape from the Harlem nightclub, but we do know she remains very successful until she eventually disappears (again like Aimee Semple McPherson who also disappeared for a while). We are told that she becomes a controversial woman, a sensation, loved and hated at the same time, but wanted and even hunted everywhere she goes.

In the next chapter, we will discuss Louis Armstrong, his individualism and the world he comes from and lives in. We already mentioned that Sister Flow despises Louis mainly because he is a successful African American. In those days black people were considered to be inferior to white people and the fact that the half-sister cannot assert her superiority is a source of great frustration. In addition, the way they both live their lives, what they consider to be important and their ideals lie in opposing ends of the spectrum. Sister Flow is serious, ambitious and self-centred, whereas Louis is a talented, pleasant and good-humoured man.
V. Louis Armstrong

For the discussion of *Oh Play That Thing* and more specifically for the analysis of Louis Armstrong’s individualism it is necessary to have a quick look at the racial situation in the United States in the 1920s and the importance of jazz music in the emancipation of black people. As will be made clear later in this chapter, the history of African Americans in general motivates Louis’s actions significantly. As an African American, Louis knows the notion of oppression and consequently the importance of independence more than Henry or Sister Flow. As a result, compared to these other characters, Louis holds independence more highly and his individualism can thus be identified as a hard defensive kind of individualism, as will be argued more thoroughly in this chapter.

The characters also differ from each other when it comes to priorities in life. Sister Flow clearly thinks material success is more important than happiness and so she displays utilitarian individualism, while Henry shows a tendency towards both expressive and utilitarian individualism. Louis however is a man who knows hard work and shows his self-determination when he keeps on playing his instrument with bleeding lips. Though, unlike the other two characters Louis is not interested in making money. He wants to be successful as an artist, yes, but he always wants to keep a smile on his face and he is clearly happy to be alive (showing his expressive individualism). Because of his background as an African American in segregated America of the 1920s this is rather astonishing.

1. Racial issues

America is a society highly conscious of colour, usually in terms of black and white, and it seems that racial equality remains an unattainable dream. This continuous inequality between the black and white population finds its origin in slavery and the long lasting oppression of African Americans. In 1607, the English established a line of colonies from Maine to Georgia, and soon the settlers were growing tobacco for the European market. In 1619, a Dutch ship sold twenty Africans, destined to work on plantations in Virginia. The demands for workers increased as cash crops expanded and developed. As a result, plantation owners embraced slavery and by the time of the American Revolution in 1776, one in every five Americans was a slave. Moreover, slavery was for both Northern and Southern states a crucial element in the establishment of an independent country and consequently in the notions of equality and freedom. Edmund Morgan aptly observes that slavery can be considered to be the central paradox of American history, and the rise of liberty and equality in America can easily be linked to slavery: “[c]olonists transplanted European social hierarchies to the colonies, but as skin colour began to mark caste, lower class whites demanded
expansion of voting rights and landholding privileges” (Morgan qtd. in Duncan and Goddard 9). What he means is that the more whites enslaved Africans (which makes the white people belong to a superior group in society), the more they were able to assert liberty from the European colonizer. And so freedom for one group meant the enslavement of another.

The Great War for Empire left Britain with an enormous debt and naturally higher taxes were imposed on the colonies. This led to the American Revolution and the Declaration of Independence with which America ultimately became the first colony to separate from its mother country. The Declaration talks of equality and liberty for all, yet this clearly did not include the African slaves. What is more, only in 1865, after the Civil War between the Southern and Northern states, was slavery abolished (Duncan and Goddard 8-18; Spencer 552-553). This by no means meant that people of colour were free and especially in the South segregation was part of every day life. This was even upheld by the Supreme Court in 1896, which ruled that “separate but equal” school rooms, hospitals, libraries, hotel accommodations and street cars were in fact legal (King 22). This meant that black people were no longer valuable property (as slaves), but the segregated race relations and the second-class treatment of black people were from then on legally and constitutionally sanctioned. Moreover, violence and (physical and verbal) aggression against African Americans were widespread as a manifestation of the relation between blacks and whites. For example, the ideology of white supremacy, which developed after the abolition of slavery, found expression in the frequent lynchings\(^1\). Sister Flow as well, adheres the notion of white superiority. She makes it perfectly clear that she looks down on Louis and she is clearly frustrated by the fact that he is not intimidated.

Chicago of the 1920s, where Louis Armstrong lives when we first meet him in this novel, is no exception. Here it is also apparent that segregation is in full effect. Moreover, whereas other ethnic groups can quite easily follow a path of assimilation and migration, black Chicagoans are forcibly segregated. “In 1930,” John Hagedorn informs us, “nine out of every ten African Americans lived in areas that were at least 80 percent black” (195). While other ethnic groups such as the Irish or Italians were able to move from the city centre to the suburbs in compliance with their mobility on the social ladder, blacks were confined to certain areas within the city often resulting in poor living standards and illiteracy.

2. Importance of jazz

As a result of this confinement to certain urban areas (especially in the Northern cities), in the early twentieth century a sense of self and a spirit of regeneration spread among black

\(^1\) Lynchings refer to the racially motivated murders of primarily black men by white mobs with no repercussions for perpetrators. The victims of these lynchings were hung, beaten, burned or stabbed to death. Quite often, they were tortured and/or castrated before they were killed. These kind of lynchings developed during Reconstruction and became a systematic feature and indicator of black-white race relations until the 1950s (Stephens 655).
Americans. W.E.B. DuBois is considered to be one of the initiators of what we now call the “Harlem Renaissance,” “Negro Renaissance” or “The New Negro Movement” (Singleton 29). This movement can be considered as the first expression of shared values and entails among others the creation of the “National Association for the Advancement of Colored People” (N.A.A.C.P.), but also finds expression in individual artistic efforts, such as black literature and music. The self-consciousness and the emergence of a new style and direction in the lives of black people is further strongly enhanced by the presence and success of jazz music.

Primarily in Chicagoan nightclubs, dance halls and “black and tan” cabarets, jazz is able to develop and become known to a wider public. However, Sacha Feinstein points out that jazz was still relatively unknown among whites: “Jazz became celebrated madness, a musical expression of the social tumult resulting from World War I. Yet, while the media felt safe commercializing and all-white band [Original Dixieland Jazz Band], the African-American musicians of the time - monumental figures such as King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, and Jelly Roll Morton - were practically ignored, despite their musical superiority” (16). John Gennari confirms this and adds, “[i]t was a curious collision of cultural forces: the art that vindicates American civilization is the one that points up the tragedies of American history and the hypocrisies of American culture; the voices loudest in public praise of the art belong to men hailing from social stations far removed from that of the artists” (22). The inferiority of these black artists is even exemplified in the way the some of the clubs are decorated. For example, the Cotton Club, a well-known and popular nightclub in Chicago, was decorated as an Old South plantation giving the white attendees the impression of a true excursion into another social world (Gennari 29). Even though black artists do not receive the praise and recognition they deserve, jazz nonetheless earns much credit for bringing black and white together at a time when segregation is still constitutionally upheld. For instance, in the “black and tan” clubs of the time whites and blacks are able to mingle without repercussion, even though certain rules need to be respected.

3. Hard defensive individualism and the real Louis Armstrong

When it comes to Louis Armstrong, I am inclined to attribute a hard defensive individualism to the manner in which he leads his life in Oh Play That Thing. We meet him when he is living in Chicago and is well in his twenties; yet, facts about Louis’s real life confirm the qualification of his individualism as hard defensive and thus serve as a useful contribution to understanding this character in the novel.

As mentioned in the first chapter, hard defensive individualism is linked to South Rockaway, the racially mixed, lower-working-class community in Queens. Because this area in Queens is a clearly tough and hostile environment (marked by crime, racism and poverty) the link
with Louis’s background is quite evident. As Max Jones, author of a Louis Armstrong biography, tells us, Armstrong believed his ancestors came from the Gold Coast and as a result he felt like a pure-blooded black man. His great-grandmother was born into slavery and Armstrong himself was born in one of the most impoverished parts of New Orleans on July 4, 1900. At the time, New Orleans was a seaport where conflicting cultures and races were forced to live together. The city was equally known for its crime, gambling, prostitution and violence as for its architecture, commerce and music. Surrounded by drunks, robbers and prostitutes, Louis was no choirboy either as much of his childhood was spent in reform school. Yet, as Jones informs us, “Louis survived the emotional upsets, domestic crises and other deprivations with a marvellous resilience. He came to think of the early struggles as the origin of his self-reliance and determination to succeed” (42). This comment clearly shows that the individualism he adopts will be marked by values that emphasize self-determination and keeping to yourself as a way to survive. The belief that the future holds struggle and hardship, and that rough times are inevitable, is an everyday reality for the children of South Rockaway and a likely possibility for Louis Armstrong. Consequently, children in this neighbourhood learn to stand up for themselves, to trust only themselves and to not rely on anyone else (the philosophy of the lone individual who stands tough against the outside world). If you want to survive you will have to be able to stave off trouble or to handle things on your own. Minding your own business, independence and self-reliance, and a dogged up self-determination are the traits needed to toughen, harden and stand strong against a challenging world. This was also the case in Louis’s real life. He comments on the rough environment in his early life: “[y]ou must realise it was very shaky all the time during my days coming up in New Orleans. Especially those early ones. They were rough. You had to fight and do a lot of ungodly things to keep from being trampled on. Sure I had fights and did a number of rough things, just so I could have a little peace or elbow room as we used to express it” (qtd. in Jones et al. 49). Even in his marriage to Daisy Parker (the first of four) he adopted this hard stance: “the way those tough men such as gamblers, pimps, etc., got along with their wives and whores, that was the same way that I had to get along with Daisy. That was to beat the hell out of her every night and make love in order to get some sleep. That was supposed to be love. (...) Many times she and I went to jail from fighting in the streets, and my boss would have to come get me out” (qtd. in Jones et al. 56).

Even in the lowest ‘negro slum’ where Louis grew up, he was constantly surrounded by religious music, marches and folk tunes. Apparently, Louis learnt to play the cornet in reform school and his talent was undeniable. Together with thousands of other black Louisianians who had migrated up north during and after World War I, Louis too settled in Chicago after Joe Oliver invited him to play second cornet in his band (Jones et al. 65).
The environment Louis grew up in clearly served as the basis for creation of the character Louis Armstrong in the Doyle novel. As I will argue, the tough early years of his life and the living conditions of African Americans in general have been driving forces behind the creation of a strong-willed and independent fictional character.

4. Hard defensive individualism and Doyle’s Louis Armstrong

Louis Armstrong is undoubtedly the most likable character in Oh Play That Thing. He is talented, funny, driven, hard and sensible. As mentioned before, Louis had settled in Chicago after Joe Oliver invited him to play second cornet in his band, yet by the time Henry and Louis meet, the latter has already established himself as a successful musician and is no longer the number two in a band. Henry is immediately drawn to him while he is on stage and this not surprising: “[h]is steps were crazy but he was in control. He was a puppet and master, god and disciple, a one-man band in perfect step with other players surrounding him. His lips were bleeding - I saw drops fall like notes to his patent leather shoes - but he was the happiest man on earth” (134-135). The fact that Louis continues to play even though his lips are bleeding clearly shows his determination. He can make a band play better and even step out of their comfort zone to invent new sounds. Yet, he is also focussed on perfection, like Sister Flow he is not satisfied unless he thinks it is perfect. For example, when he is in the studio recording “West End Blues” he only has a limited time to record the song. When his time is up, he is still not pleased: “I’d like another take, said Louis. - Fine can always be better” (167). Even though hard defensive individualism also entails a limited sense of pride, he cannot be content with something mediocre because he knows there is genius in what he does. He compares himself to men like Thomas Edison, Beethoven and Charles Lindbergh, because he realizes he is doing things that have never been done before: “I’m all of those guys and bigger than all of them. And different” (211). This attitude too, can be found in hard defensive individualism. One of the South Rockaway mothers said of her child: “If you don’t have your own self-awareness, then anyone can get inside of you and change you. People can, if you don’t believe in something strong enough, then you can be converted” (Kusserow 217). It is obvious that Louis too, takes up this stance to defend his actions and to stand his ground.

In 1928, the year that Henry and Louis meet, Armstrong has already made a name for himself and his star continues to rise: “[t]he first black man to talk on the radio, the sound that made America quiver, the smile that made America feel tolerant, the nigger in a tux, the man who discovered music every new time he put the horn to his lip, the growl that scared no one, the clown, the actor, the singer, the music (...)” (166). It is said, however, that it is Lillian Hardin, Louis’s second wife, who taught Louis how to wear a more fashionable attire. This enabled him to present himself as a sharp, confident man. But most importantly it was also Lil Hardin who made him
believe in and achieve bigger things. Lil comments on this in Jones et al. by saying that “I encouraged him to develop himself, which was all he needed. He’s a fellow who didn’t have much confidence in himself to begin with” (qtd. in Jones et al. 73). This aspect of Louis’s life is also present in the novel. Here we learn that she taught him to believe he is the World’s Greatest Trumpet Player: “I was calling him that before he knew the truth of it,” she says in Oh Play That Thing, “[a]nd I made others call him that too. Before I believed it” (173). Armstrong too, admits that it is actually Lil who put his name up in lights and made him see his full potential. Jones et al. comment on the difficult relationship with Lil Hardin: “Armstrong seemed to have within him both a broad streak of artistic pride and determination and an opposing lack of resolution and confidence in his personal life, which could hardly fail to lead to occasional inner clashes. There is something not quite in order about the behaviour of a man who overcomes every obstacle in his profession, and vanquishes all competitors, then goes home to be ruled by his wife. Armstrong, in the middle ‘20s, deferred to Lil in most matters. Since he worked with her, and then for her, the position did not go unnoticed” (92). In the novel too, this strange relationship with Lil is discussed. She is a tough little woman with a bad temper, who scares Louis. Even though she has done great things for him, he eventually stays away from her. Yet, Henry informs us that they regularly drive past Louis’s and Lil’s house where she still lives with her mother and that this calms him. In real life and in the novel, Louis is aware of the fact that this feisty little woman has helped him to advance his career, financially, and mentally. The fact that he is such a confident man is indeed thanks to her, yet, it is clear that they cannot live together. Later in this chapter, we will see that Louis is always in control and that he is more than able to stand his ground, but not when it comes to Lil Hardin. As result, he avoids her, much to her frustration.

Naturally, a man with Louis’s musical abilities attracts many people who want to act as his counsellor, manage him or direct him professionally. In real life, Joe Oliver offered him guidance and the concrete assistance he needed after Lillian had told him which steps to take to advance his career. But when we meet him in the novel Louis is without direct or indirect representation. Because there is an immediate connection between Louis and Henry, the former offers the latter a job. It is not immediately clear what this job entails, but it is clear Henry has to stay by his side day and night. Henry figures he has to act as his servant and hold the door, for example, but this is certainly not the case. “We together, that the tale,” Louis explains, “I hold the door, you hold the door. I drive, you drive. You not my manservant. I certainly not your boy; nay nay” (165). Louis is confident enough to know who he is and what he is capable of, so he is not afraid to stand up for himself.
This is clearly shown in the scene when he goes to meet Joe Glaser\(^2\) in the Lexington Hotel. He knows it is wise to take Henry with him; yet, his presence is merely outward appearance. Louis can clearly handle himself and does not hesitate to remind others of who he is. When a bellhop addresses him with “Lou-ee” in asking how is doing, Louis answers with “Mis-ter Armstrong is well” (175). He is obviously ready for the confrontation with Glaser and will not be put in an inferior position. Henry comments on this scene: “He stood his ground for a minute. As I got to know him I noticed that he always did this when he entered a public place, where he was likely to be the only black man: he stood. It was a challenge, a yell - and no one knew” (175-176). He sees Henry not as a servant or bodyguard, but this time he tells Henry to lead the way and keep the eyes in the back of his head open. Joe Glaser wants to be Louis’s manager and has wanted this for many years, convinced he can make Louis successful with the white audience (“The white start. The only start that mattered” 178). Yet, Louis has no intention of giving up his independence. Glaser is very straightforward with him. He admits that he has a terrible temper but he also says that he always keeps his word. Mentioning his temper is not yet a threat, but there is no doubt that Glaser wants to make his position and reputation in Chicago known. When he then extends his hand, Louis does not take it, making him the bravest man Henry has ever met. Louis knows he is already the World’s Greatest Trumpet Player, he is aware of his talent and is convinced he does not need a manager to be successful, so he leaves the meeting with Glaser without a manager.

At that time, however, he is always a day or two from being broke, and for just a second his confidence falters. “He looked at the ground in front of me, head drooped lightly, the man in front of the white man. (...) It shocked me there, from him, the hatred and the selflessness, the big please in the shoulders. I didn’t need. I didn’t want it,” Henry recounts (181). So Henry suggests that perhaps he should go with Glaser, and he immediately snaps out of his moment of weakness. He knows that having a manager will only lead to “slavery” (181). Here, it is obvious that as an African American Louis is very aware of the consequences of being in the service of a white man. Slavery might have been legally abolished, but Louis knows that working for a man like Glaser would resemble slavery too much.

Armstrong realizes the extent of his talent, but does not know how to make the world see it: “[h]is horn was the song of freedom but his life was a crazy jail. He needed control, but he hadn’t worked it out. I was the start but he wasn’t sure how” (182). Joe Glaser had offered him to make him known among the white public and Louis indeed knows that this is the next obstacle to overcome. Yet, Henry’s comment shows that Louis is not quite sure how to achieve this. Henry enables him to go without representation or a manager, but the next step is proving to be hard. Furthermore, even though he is in control on stage and when he needs to deal with hard men like

---

\(^2\) Joe Glaser, Al Capone’s associate
Glaser, there is nonetheless quite a long, chaotic period of time when this talented musician cannot get a gig. Jones et al. comment on this period:

"[f]or one reason and another, but mainly because musical tastes tend to change with each generation, the public for small-band hot jazz - never large - decreased rapidly during the later '20s. The demand was for larger bands and sweeter, less challenging, music. So Chicago became a scuffling city for the jazz fraternity, and many who had trekked from the Mississippi valley up to the middle west to follow the work now migrated to the big cities in the north. Even Armstrong, who recorded and worked regularly, knew days when he had nothing" (79). He is the king of the stage, but he does not know how to get up there. In fact, he needs a manager, but he does not want one. What is more, he is also aware of the damage he is doing to his lips, yet he has no confidence in his skills as a singer. He knows that as a singer he must be at the centre of the stage, but this still scares him. As a result, he is restless and nervous: “[h]e craved and cringed. There was no such thing as rest. He was trying to ignore the collapse of one marriage, bracing himself for another that he knew was going to be a disaster; he was already running from it. (...) He was running, to get away, to catch up, to grab control of himself and his life and his genius” (187).

He wants to cross the line Glaser was talking about on his own, but it did not happen immediately. And so Henry and Louis are together in this chaotic time, making money by robbing houses. Yet, even this he does with great conviction: “[h]e went at everything with everything he had; it was all, or nothing at all. He'd become a housebreaker. Mask, gloves - he even got himself a gunny sack. The man had style” (189). Funnily enough, the determination and conviction he shows on stage are the same determination and conviction he adopts in robbing houses.

For Henry, the way Louis leads his life, his motivations and choices, remain somewhat unclear until late in the novel. When he finally understands why Louis appears restless, he informs us: “[i]t was a fight. And Louis Armstrong was going to win. That was what the running was about. He wasn’t running at all. The man was standing firm. He wouldn’t work for the mob. He wanted the freedom of his sound. And, all around, they were closing in, ready to cage him. He was the city’s biggest draw, and dangerous with it - a genius bigger than any market, a nigger too big for the ghetto. He was profit - he knew it, and the lads wanted him” (210). Armstrong knows that the owners of the clubs, the owners of the stage (men like Joe Glaser), own the man on the stage as well, and he knows he has to avoid this in order to stay alive. Therefore, Louis would prefer death to ownership, because having a manager equals being owned. He is convinced he can be successful and rich, because he is fully aware of his talent. But if he wants to be able to have full responsibility and a say in his music, he must remain without a manager.

This is in fact the reason why he asked Henry to stand by his side. Having a white man accompanying him means he is able to manage himself (“you my white skin, O'Pops. You beside me, I manage myself. I can cross the line. Any time I want” 211). He can walk into a hotel full of gangsters, stand his ground and work up to that success Glaser envisioned for him. But he needs a white man like Henry by his side to make the world notice him. Not someone who tells people “this
is my nigger,” but a white man “that puts his hand on that white man’s shoulder and say, No, man, this is my nigger.” Of course, Louis adds that he is “nobody’s black man” (212). There is no doubt that even when Louis tells Henry he needs him by his side, that he remains his own man. Interestingly, Louis Armstrong wrote about the notion of having a white man by his side in a letter to Max Jones. When he was about to leave New Orleans for Chicago one of the toughest men in the neighbourhood called Slippers tells him: “When you go up north, Dipper, be sure and get yourself a white man that will put his hand on your shoulder and say ‘This is my nigger.’ (...) He was a crude sonofabitch but he loved me and my music. And he was right then because the white man was Joe Glaser” (Jones et al. 10). Indeed, in real life Louis did have Joe Glaser as a manager. Yet, it seems that his involvement with Glaser was the main cause why Louis left Chicago: “[r]elations between Louis and his managements seemed to be the only thing that brought him face to face with gunmen. Hines3 said that Armstrong ‘once changed managers and was threatened with gangster violence. After that he hired two bodyguards who protected him on and off the job for many months’” (Gennari 28).

Either way, Louis knows it is time to leave Chicago for Harlem, New York. As Henry comments: “[a] black man couldn’t go west and Louis couldn’t go home [New Orleans]; that would have been no escape. New York was the only place where Louis could become Louis” (228). Even without the gangsters Louis would ultimately have left Chicago as the jazz scene was in decline by 1929 and even a successful musician like Louis had a hard time finding a gig. Harlem, on the other hand, was a city inside the city where black music was booming even for white audiences. Funnily enough, here Armstrong gives up his independence and decides to go with Tommy Rockwell. He defends this decision by saying that Rockwell will “manage [him] soft” (239), whereas Joe Glaser would have managed him hard. By this he means that Rockwell tells him he has to play popular, sentimental songs that will sell lots of records, but then Louis is still able to do his own thing. Commercially speaking, it is better to record songs that appeal to a larger audience and Louis is happy to oblige because he knows that the words do not matter. It is the man who plays and sings the song and he knows that he is the man to make a difference. He is aware that the music is perhaps not quite as good as in New Orleans or Chicago. It is not cutting-edge, new, wild or free; it is organised, slick and orchestrated, but extremely popular. It is part of the New York ambition that can realize great things. Louis likes it, because he knows it is the only way to be known all over the world. It involves having to scratch other people’s backs in order to get your own back scratched, but Louis is willing to do whatever it takes. He still feels in control and not out of touch with his integrity. Making money is not what interests him, even though there is a lot of money to make.

3 Earl Hines, musician with whom Armstrong recorded “Tight Like This”
from these songs. And indeed, Louis becomes bigger than life: he sells thousands of records, and people from all over the world come to see him play, want to dress like him, and so on.

When we look at his repertoire it is obvious that during the period from 1929 to 1931, Armstrong’s songs mainly consisted of popular songs and ballads. He emerges as an individual name attraction. Furthermore, the influence of popular music altered with its nation-wide (sometimes world-wide) propagation by radio, the cinema and juke-box. Naturally, as jazz became more and more involved with popular music, commercial interests moved in at every level. But now New Orleans jazz and folk blues on record held very little attraction for any but black Americans, and popular songs introduced jazz to vast white audiences all over the world. Many would say that this led to the change and even decline of jazz music, but this is not always the case. Like Armstrong, many other jazz musicians took these shifts of social habits into account and continued to express themselves with the same originality and devotion. Yet, these commercialized songs undoubtedly helped to spread Louis’s reputation (Jones et al.105). On a side note, in real life Rockwell did indeed send for Louis to come to New York in early 1929 but there is no mentioning of Rockwell being Louis’s manager.

Because of this new, commercial turn in Louis’s career he is in high demand. People tap him on the shoulder all the time to ask him for favours and unfortunately Henry too wants something from him. Henry introduces him to Sister Flow but the new acquaintances do not like each other at all. Sister Flow treats him like an inferior: “[y]ou walk behind, Brother Lou-is, you get to watch my ass, all the way to glory” (284). Sister Flow is unable to recognize the fact that Louis is now much more successful than she is. What is more, she is intimidated and tries to unsettle him, yet he remains unimpressed. Louis even gets the upper hand in the studio when they record her sermons: “Louis understood it. The man on the radio had no colour. Only sound. (...) He’d never hide it; he’d never try to. But he knew: once he got into the studio, he wouldn’t and couldn’t be stopped. No Jim Crow way up there, no lynch mobs or coloured nights - the air was his” (296). Louis has always wanted to avoid being called “boy” and now this woman does exactly that. Not surprisingly, his appearance on the sermon records signifies the end of his relation with Henry. He does not show it explicitly, but both men know their involvement is now finished. He is able to handle Sister Flow, but he clearly feels let down by Henry. When Henry shows up at one of his performances with the priestess and is in apparent danger, Louis tells Sister Flow what to do and together they are able to get Henry out. Louis and Henry drive to Chicago together to find Miss O’Shea and Saoirse. On the long drive to Chicago, Louis tells Henry that he appeared on the records and is with him in that car out of friendship. Yet, now Louis too is in danger because of him helping Henry. He knows Sister Flow’s biggest problem with him is that she was never able to treat him like a black man and manifest her white supremacy, but she might quite possibly when he gets back to Harlem. This
makes Louis realize the harsh truth, namely that he will never be completely free: “[f]uckers don’t just own the ground. They own my goddam feet” (315). He was not free in New Orleans, Chicago, nor would he be in New York. But if a black man wants to play music, he has little choice: “[s]ick of having to be proud or shamed. Just want to blow my fucking cornet” (317). From this it is clear that Louis has tried extensively to retain his independence, but the conditions for African Americans do not allow him to be completely free. Though he is not a slave in the true sense of the word, Louis ultimately realizes that freedom remains a dream deferred.

5. Keep on smiling

Armstrong’s approach is serious when it comes to his music, but hardly ever about the circumstances in which he finds himself. In hard defensive individualism, humour and putting things into perspective are a way of dealing with tough times as it takes the edge off things. As mentioned before, independence is almost synonymous with self-defence, which means that you always have to stand up for yourself, learn to deal with your problems on your own and especially not cry about the hardships you might face. Using humour and putting things into perspective is a way to achieve this. As I have said before Louis Armstrong is a very likable character mainly because he is witty and down to earth. Examples from the novel in which he uses humour are plentiful, but I will provide two examples in which humour is clearly linked to taking the edge off serious situations.

In a first clear example, Louis faces Joe Glaser in the Lexington Hotel with Henry by his side. Joe Glaser, one of the most dangerous mafia men in Chicago is clearly unhappy with Henry’s presence. When they shake hands, Glaser holds Henry’s hand for a long time, seizing him up and clearly affirming his toughness. The scene could easily escalate into something more dangerous as the hotel is filled with edgy, hard men, but Louis is able to change the atmosphere. First, when Glaser asks Louis why he is shaking Henry’s hand, Louis answers dryly “[b]ecause your mama taught you manners, Mister Glaser” (178). Next, Louis shows the ridiculousness of the situation by saying “[m]y, my (...) I never get used to the ways of white folks. That just about the longest shake of a hand I have ever seen” (178). Glaser immediately lets go, feeling rather silly indeed, but Louis is clever enough not to address him directly for this idiotic situation. His sarcasm is enough to take the edge off the tension between these two white men. Moreover, it even established Louis as the man in control of the situation.

The second obvious example takes place when Henry and Louis have to run from a Chicagoan club from the Italian mobsters. Louis is not completely dressed and stops to put on his clothes. When Henry points out that his timing is not right, Louis answers him: “[n]ot dying with my nice vine on me” (220). They eventually manage to escape by hiding in the sewers and all the
while Louis is humming. At some point he even takes out his trumpet and starts playing. When Henry points out that they cannot stay down there forever, Louis tells him: “That the Irish in you, Henry. Always the bad news” (223). Furthermore, he enjoys their swim and comments: “See, Pops? It’s easy. You got to start thinking like a negro. We not heading into a whupping. We just got away from one” (223).

Despite the many hardships Louis encounters and the realisation that he will never be completely free, he continues to have a positive mindset. Moreover, he uses humour to overcome seemingly hopeless situations. For that, he clearly lives by an expressive individualistic creed. Indeed, even in real life he appears to be equally positive, as we can see from what he writes in his letter to Max Jones: “Now I must tell you that my whole life has been happiness. Through all of the misfortunes, etc, I did not plan anything. Life was there for me and I accepted it. And life, what ever came out, has been beautiful to me, and I love everybody” (qtd. in Jones 9).
VI. Conclusion

Choosing individualism as an angle of approach seemed logical as *Oh Play That Thing* tells the story of three characters trying to make it in American society in their own distinctive way. Yet, individualism soon appeared to be an ambiguous term, with no real consensus on its meaning. From the historical overview that was then provided we learned that people were not always free to take decisions regarding their own life. Until the seventeenth century the conceptualization on individualism showed that an individual was mostly bound to his or her religious fate, with varying degrees of involvement. As a result of the revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth century that swept across Europe and the questioning of monarchical and religious authorities, social theorists upheld the belief that man was born free. Yet, beside the fact that an individual has certain rights and needs, men like Rousseau and Durkheim also stressed the importance of the common good and pointed out that the strict pursuit of self-interest was undesirable.

The relation between individual and society was also extensively discussed in American society. There was of course a biblical strand in the theorizing on individualism, which stressed the importance of living a life in the service of God, and a republican strand with its focus on the pivotal role of the community. Yet, modern individualism, with the notion of hard work to rise from rags to riches, soon became the most popular strand. As the first colony to gain independence it is not surprising that individualism came to play such an important role in the lives of the American people. The notion of liberty became one of the self-evident truths written down in the Declaration of Independence and clearly shows the centrality of the individual in this society.

As we have seen, theories on American individualism unanimously talk of this individualism being synonymous with the individual’s attempt to establish him- or herself as a successful member of society and the ability to rise from rags to riches. In this process, authors like Mount, Hackney, Pitofsky and Thomson indentify self-reliance, hard work, achievement, equal opportunity and freedom of choice as crucial values upheld by many Americans. However, this homogenous take on individualism fails to show that there are actually many different ways of trying to accomplish success. Adrie Kusserow distinguishes three different kinds of individualism (hard defensive, hard offensive and soft defensive individualism) and attributes these nuances to differences in people’s backgrounds and goals in life. Likewise, Robert Bellah finds that a distinction can be made between two different types of individualism (expressive versus utilitarian individualism), based on priority given to either material success or personal
happiness. The Roddy Doyle novel discussed in the dissertation proves exactly this heterogeneous character of American individualism and its underlying reasons.

*Oh Play That Thing* is set in the 1920s, an especially hedonistic time in American society known as the ‘Roaring Twenties.’ In this era of prosperity, mobility, mass consumption and technological developments, the American Dream seemed possible more than ever before. As a result Americans sought to better themselves, and self-help literature was developed to assist them in this process. In the name of personal happiness, their interests were put first and many people looked for the right outlet for their self-expression. Needless to say, society was seen as restrictive and everywhere people searched for and found ways to rebel against duty and responsibility. Bootlegging, gambling and the black and tan clubs, where black and white could come together to enjoy music (more or less) freely, are only a few examples of the weakened morality and the rebellion against the demands of the constraining society.

Attributing soft defensive individualism to Henry perhaps seems strange because of his background as boy from the Dublin slums. The many hardships he endured in his young life may suggest an identification of his individualism with the hard defensive kind (Louis’s individualism), with its focus on independence, toughness and determination. Yet Henry is hardly what we call the lone individual standing tough against the cruel outside world. He is mainly guided by his feelings, instincts and self-confidence. He has no preconceived plan to get ahead in this world, but he knows his looks and talents will be sufficient to achieve whatever he wants. In some cases, this self-confidence pays off, as his sandwich board business illustrates. And indeed he truly acts like a flower opening up to the world as he always throws himself at new opportunities, thinking that each and everyone of them is the key to success and that his personal uniqueness will help him to achieve that goal. Unfortunately, his vanity obscures the assessment of his own capabilities (for example when he thinks Sister Flow’s success comes from his magic rubbing off on her). Furthermore, for his success he often relies on others and his status is in many cases the result of hanging out with successful or charismatic people. His flamboyance on the dance floor, for example, is the merit of Dora, and being a diviner and a dentist in Sweet Afton is only possible because the half-sister presents him as such. Even in roaming through America, he is more successful with his family than without. In fact, when he is truly alone, we see that he is unable to make to make anything of himself, as the final part of the trilogy, *The Dead Republic*, will also illustrate.

The most crucial element in Henry’s character is that he desperately wants to establish himself, to make himself noticed and to actually be someone. This is the result of sharing the name with his dead brother and his mother not acknowledging his existence. Robbed of an
identity, Henry often screams out his name at his brother to assert himself. This feature accounts for his ambition in his sandwich board business, as he tries to distinguish himself from other newly arrived immigrants, but it is more clearly manifested in his wish to be a manager. It is a shame Henry ruins his relation with Louis, but we understand why. The way he felt sitting next to his mother, feeling inferior, neglected and even denied an identity, urges him to make himself noticed. He clearly ignores his friend’s feelings: Henry is fully aware of the fact that Louis does not want a manager, yet forces Louis to do something of which they both know it is a bad idea. Henry cannot help himself though. Being able to manifest himself as Sister Flow’s manager (what’s in a name?), makes him act against his better judgement and puts his friend in awkward position. All because he desperately wants to be important, successful or even merely noticed.

In many ways, Sister Flow differs enormously from the other characters. She lives by Emile Coué’s methods of autosuggestion and thus believes anything is possible. The power of the mind overcomes any obstacle and she is convinced you can achieve whatever you want. When we compare her to Henry, her way of life indeed proves to be a lot more effective. Her individualism is marked by the notion that every minute counts. Yet, as a result, she never seems to enjoy anything. However, in terms of displaying American individualism as the ability to rise from rags to riches, Sister Flow does exactly that. Her attitude most clearly resembles the attitudes of the people Kusserow interviewed and attributed hard offensive individualism to. Her determination, confidence and assertiveness uncannily overlap with the hard economically driven women of the Beach Channel neighbourhood. Moreover, she is perfectly capable of manipulating people and knowing what to do to get something from them. She even takes great advantage of the need for self-expression especially felt in the 1920s and creates her own religion. Its main doctrine, acting on impulse and desire, is extremely popular, but like the real-life character Aimee Semple McPherson, Sister Flow disappears at the height of her popularity.

Based on Louis’s background and the importance of independence for him, it was not difficult to attribute a hard defensive stance to his individualism. As an African American, he is fully aware of the fact that segregation is still in full force and that society is hostile towards black people. Even though he truly is an optimistic man, he still knows he has to be careful. As an artist and as black man many people want to direct or control his life and people constantly want to be his manager. Yet, he wants to keep his artistic integrity and knows that a having a manager resembles being enslaved. In this respect, it is not surprising that Henry identifies with Louis. The plight of the Irish resembles the one of black people in many ways, but perhaps more importantly, life as a mercenary reminds Henry what is was like being a slave. Henry and Louis
both know life as a slave consists of following orders, but you are expendable when no longer needed. The fact that, as a black man in the 1920s, Louis is more or less able to fend off unwanted busybodies, is quite remarkable. Granted, he keeps Henry by his side to be able to go without representation, but his talent and determination often show that he can take care of himself. Moreover, he is not only able to stand up for himself, which the scene with Joe Glaser illustrates, he is also often completely in control (scene with Sister Flow recording sermons). This makes Louis an even more interesting character, as the hardship of life and the lack of freedom as an African American would suggest a pessimistic view on life. This is not the case, though. Louis is particularly optimistic and clearly enjoys life. Even when it comes to robbing houses, Louis does it in style. What clearly matters to him is that he wants to be able to do his own thing (even if that requires playing popular, commercialized songs) and he does not want to be put in an inferior position. This makes it particularly sad that he ultimately realizes he will never be completely free.

Robert Bellah is the second author on who we draw to refine American individualism and indeed distinctions between the three characters can be made based on Bellah’s terminology. Feeling he has no future in his home country, Henry decides to try his luck in New York. Like many other immigrants Henry knows a man can rise from rags to riches there, but most importantly it is the one place where he can lose his identity and become someone new. For that, he reminds us most of the immigrant entrepreneurship which is often associated with America. He readily adopts the new ways, making him the quintessential example of the assimilated immigrant in the New York melting-pot. Henry feels excited and new and follows the beat of New York City. In this phase he is clearly more interested in what Bellah calls utilitarian individualism. His ambition, talent and opportunism allow him indeed to gain some professional and material success, but his vanity and over-confidence soon get him into trouble. When he arrives in Chicago, in contrast, he is immediately faced with the vibrant and exciting jazz culture with which he falls in love. For the first time in his life, Henry feels truly free and is able to relax. Even though he wants to be Louis’s manager, he understands why Louis is reluctant and together they are able to enjoy the finer things in life for some time. Being broke all the time, they even turn to criminality but it is clear that Henry is enjoying himself, thus displaying a more expressive kind of individualism. Louis as well shows that having material things is not high on everyone’s priority list. True, Louis is also ambitious as he wants to be the most successful jazz player in the world, but this has nothing to do with money. For him, playing music and enjoying life in general is what guides him. In this respect, Sister Flow clearly stands out. Henry once
commented on the fact that he had never seen her genuinely smile or be happy, and we, the
readers, get the same impression. She is driven by ambition and will not stop before she gets
what she wants. Yet, that this will lead to a fulfilling life appears doubtful.

Clearly, applying Kusserow’s terminology to the three characters’ individualism is not
clear-cut. For that, the differences between the worlds of these characters and the backgrounds of
the people this sociologist/anthropologist interviewed are too substantial. Yet, overall there is a
strong overlap as examples from the novel illustrate. Most importantly, Doyle’s characters, their
different ambitions and different ways of trying to be successful have undoubtedly illustrated the
adequateness of the de-homogenization of American individualism by Kusserow and Bellah. It
seems that in describing general, highly upheld notions or attitudes in certain cultures, as
individualism is to American society, these concepts are still modified into individual
interpretations. In that respect, we can claim that there is an individualistic approach on
American individualism. Indeed it seems that even in theorizing on the individualistic nature of
American society, individualism prevails once again.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources


Secondary sources


