Noémie Duneton
St Cross College
DPhil in Medieval and Modern Languages

The Dysfunctional Family in Contemporary (post 1990) French and American Films and Novels

Noémie Duneton, St Cross College – DPhil in Medieval and Modern Languages, Trinity 2018

Short Abstract: The Dysfunctional Family in Contemporary (post 1990) French and American Films and Novels

This thesis explores a question which runs through contemporary fiction: what is the weight of the family of origin once children have become adults? It does so by examining the families in six different works: *Un Conte de Noël* by Arnaud Desplechin, *Le Skylab* by Julie Delpy, *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* by Delphine de Vigan, *The Savages* by Tamara Jenkins, *August: Osage County* by John Wells and *We Were the Mulvaneys* by Joyce Carol Oates. My approach in this thesis is pluridisciplinary both in terms of my primary and secondary material. I use films and novels, and, while I rely on traditional film and literary criticism, I also borrow concepts and ideas from psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology, and anthropology. Concepts drawn from these fields shed light on issues and dynamics that might otherwise go unnoticed. Each chapter has a different approach: 'Home' argues that the childhood home is especially significant as the place which physically embodies the family, 'The Reunion' demonstrates how family reunions uncover the family system which characters operate within, 'Meals' offers a reading of family dynamics through an examination of the representation of family meals, while 'Secrets and Traumas' argues that family secrets and traumas affect family dynamics, and offer keys to individual characters' psyche. Throughout the thesis I observe the ways in which families can become dysfunctional, and the effects of these dysfunctions on its members. I do so by exploring themes such as cross-generational transmissions, the relationships which exist between different members of the family, and how the family can be a locus of trauma. The analysis sees two recurring questions emerge: what makes someone part of a family, and whether the family is a ‘trap’ or a ‘refuge’. Throughout these explorations, the question is one of identity: how is one's identity shaped by their family, and is it possible to forego or escape family transmission.

Extended Abstract: The Dysfunctional Family in Contemporary (post 1990) French and American Films and Novels

This thesis stemmed from my interest in the treatment of families in fictions, and the realisation that there is a recurring question in contemporary Western fictions about the role and weight of the family of origin in adults' lives. The phrase 'family of origin' defined as the parents and siblings, as well as other relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, is used to differentiate with the family individuals may build for themselves by having a partner and children. I noticed this topic is often represented in both films and novels, and thus decided to explore those two mediums. From there I selected a corpus of six works, from both France and the United States: this interrogation around the family of origin is strongly present in contemporary fictions from both countries. In the hope of being able to explore my topic in depth, I chose works which represented a similar social class: middle-class white families. Many interesting topics could be discussed about the treatment of families from different backgrounds, but as a thesis would not allocate enough space to do so, I chose a specific kind of family to focus on. The corpus thus became *Un Conte de Noël* (2008) written and directed by Arnaud Desplechin, *Le Skylab* (2011) written and directed by Julie Delpy, *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* (2011) written by Delphine de Vigan, *The Savages* (2007) written and directed by Tamara Jenkins, *August: Osage County* (2013) directed by John Wells and written by Tracy Letts (and based on Letts's 2007 play) and *We Were the Mulvaneys* (1996) written by Joyce Carol Oates.

When I begun this research project I realised that, although families have been inescapable in films and novels since the very beginning of both arts, until now literary and film criticism has tended to focus, when looking at the family, on dyads or triads such as the parental couple or the relationships between parent(s) and child, father/son or mother/daughter for instance. Although this approach has of course been fruitful, and continues to be, I felt I should examine the family as a broader group. Subsequently to the identification of this relatively underdeveloped field I decided to concentrate on works that take as their focus adult children, and thus families in a later stage of their evolution. This allowed me to look at different kinds of relationships and power dynamics, as they change when the children confront their parents as adults themselves. It also brings forth new issues such as the care for elderly parents, which several of the works in my corpus look at. Contemporary fictions also mirror a new social reality in which family members do not necessarily live close by, thus presenting new challenges and paths to explore for authors and filmmakers who want to

examine the family.

In order to do justice to my aim of looking at the family as a group, I chose to borrow concepts and ideas from fields other than literary and film criticism. These concepts provided tools which allowed me to enrich my analysis, and to adopt new angles of analysis. Drawing on research on the family from such areas as psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology and anthropology, I hope to contribute new and interesting ideas for examining how family relationships are represented in cinema and literature. My belief is that these imported concepts shed light on issues and dynamics which might otherwise go unnoticed, and thereby facilitate a fuller and richer analysis. I decided to use a different frame of reference in each chapter, according to the chapter's topic and the research that has been executed in others fields on this topic. These frames of reference are not strictly delimitated to one chapter, however, and relevant concepts are used in more than one chapter. The first chapter examines the home, drawing on sociology and anthropology. In it, I look at the historical construction of the concept of home, and how homes are represented in the corpus, through the homes of families of origin or through the absence of such a home. This chapter explores the home in the American and French fictions in turn, arguing that, despite many similarities, there is a difference of treatment of the home in each country. The second chapter looks at the family reunion, using concepts from family therapy to do so. Working with theories of family myths, roles and alliances, this chapter demonstrates how reunions question the past and future of the characters, while also interrogating the validity of rituals. The third chapter focuses on meals, and draws mainly on insights from anthropology and sociology. It claims that meals can be analysed as moments which mirror the general working of the family, and investigates the importance of the rituals surrounding food and eating. In addition, this chapter looks at the relationship between eating disorders, trauma and power. The fourth chapter examines secrets and traumas, borrowing concepts from psychoanalysis and psychogenealogy. This chapter explores the repercussions of keeping or revealing secrets and the impact of secrets and traumas on the family dynamics, as well as the role of artistic creation in exorcising traumas and re-creating past memories.

As I was writing these four chapters, I realised that the topic of dysfunction was recurring across my analysis. By dysfunctional, I refer to a family, or family system, which stops operating properly, and therefore becomes harmful to its members. In order to better explore this, I chart the different dysfunctions displayed by the families in my corpus throughout the thesis, and come to show how a majority of the families represented in my corpus fails to protect their members in different ways. For instance, in *August: Osage County* and *The Savages* the family fails to provide emotional support, in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* the father sexually abuses his daughters and the

mother does not protect them, in *We Were the Mulvaneys* the parents banish their daughter, while in *Un Conte de Noël* the parents accept the banishment of their son and force their children to occupy genealogical roles other than their own. I also demonstrate how rigid family systems become harmful by preventing growth and evolution, both for the families themselves and for individual members. In *We Were the Mulvaneys* and *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* the family myth prevents the characters for facing the truth about the family, while in *August: Osage County* and *Un Conte de Noël* the roles constrict them from changing, and in *The Savages* the system is almost inexistent. The exploration of family dysfunction also reveals that these dysfunctions lead the individuals to become dysfunctional as well. Indeed, in Wells, Jenkins, Oates and Desplechin the characters abuse drugs and alcohol, while in Oates and Vigan two female members become anorexic. Throughout the thesis *Le Skylab* offers a counterpoint to the other works, as the family it depicts does not appear to be dysfunctional. Indeed, the family portrayed in Delpy's film seems a force for good: despite superficial disagreements between members, the family does not harm them. My analysis of dysfunction goes on to show how some works chart the evolution of family, and depict a correction of the family's dysfunction. This is the case in *The Savages*, *Un Conte de Noël* and *We Were the Mulvaneys*, as each of these works depict the growth of both the characters and the family unit. On the other hand, *August: Osage County* represent a family whose resistance to change leads to its explosion, and *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* reveals that Vigan's family has not confronted its own dysfunction, which her book is attempting to do.

Two other recurring questions also came to the foreground in the course of my research, and are discussed throughout the thesis**:** what makes someone part of a family, and whether the family is considered a ‘trap’ or a ‘refuge’. The first question asks whether it is blood or marriage that makes someone part family, whether an ostracised family member is still part of the family, and whether a family remains a family when members have little or no contact. The conclusion that emerges from my examination of this question in each of the chapters, is that the works in my corpus present two contrasting views of family membership. One which is largely binary – people are either in or out of the family – and the other where the family consists primarily of a continuum of different degrees of belonging. I thus argue that there is no general answer to the question of what constitutes a family, but only individual ones. The second recurring question revolves around the idea that the family can be both a refuge or a trap, as family members can be trapped by their family roles, the family myth, as well as the secrets and traumas of past generations. The works in my corpus offer a variety of answers to that question. In some the family is either a trap or a refuge, while in others it is both, demonstrating that these two terms are not incompatible opposites but partly synonymous. The thesis' conclusion brings these different threads together, and argues that at

the heart of these works lies the question of how to navigate being an individual when one's identity is shaped by one's family of origin.

Having written this thesis I feel this pluridisciplinary approach has been successful in that it has enabled me to offer nuanced readings of character behaviours and plots represented by the creators of the six works in my corpus. For instance, Depleschin's depiction of the Vuillard family, in *Un Conte de Noël*, is both expressive and slanted: I hope that my exploration of the secrets and roles at work would enable an audience to better appreciate the nuances of behaviour represented by Depleschin and his actors. Another example might be found in my analysis of the role of food in *We Were the Mulvaneys*. In her novel, Oates contrasts different types of meals, explores the different roles of family members around food preparation, evokes her characters' anorexia, alcoholism, and more: in reading behaviour around food ascribed by Oates to her characters, I show how their changing attitudes to food reflect the changing story of the Mulvaneys.

Table of Content

Introduction

This thesis explores a question which runs through contemporary fiction: what is the weight of our family of origin once we have become adults? The family of origin being here defined as parents and siblings, as well as other relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, as opposed to the family that people may build for themselves by having a partner and children. The family of origin is where we come from, and I set out to prove that contemporary fiction is preoccupied with interrogations of how identities are shaped by it, and what type of relationships adults should have with it. I focus on the idea that families can become dysfunctional, and this thesis explores the process by which that can happen. The definition of dysfunctional given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* is:

> 1. Of or relating to dysfunction; that disrupts or impairs proper, normal, or satisfactory function; not operating normally.
>
> 2. Chiefly *Sociology* and *Psychology*. Exhibiting or characterized by dysfunction; (of social interactions, family relationships, etc.) disruptively aberrant or abnormal, esp. when harmful to the emotional well-being of those involved; (of a person, group, family, etc.) incapable of forming or conducting normal social relations; maladjusted.[1]

The idea that dysfunction is linked to family is thus already apparent in this definition. Function is defined as: 'An activity or mode of operation that is proper or natural to a person or thing; the purpose or intended role of a thing.'[2] The idea is thus that something is not working as it should, in this case families, and that it becomes 'harmful to the emotional well-being of those involved'. Throughout this thesis I chart the different dysfunctions displayed by the families in my corpus, in order to argue that they are indeed harmful to the characters. I do so by examining the families in a corpus of six works: *Un Conte de Noël* (2008) written and directed by Arnaud Desplechin, *Le Skylab* (2011) written and directed by Julie Delpy, *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* (2011) written by Delphine de Vigan, *The Savages* (2007) written and directed by Tamara Jenkins, *August: Osage County* (2013) directed by John Wells and written by Tracy Letts (and based on Letts's 2007 play) and *We Were the Mulvaneys* (1996) written by Joyce Carol Oates.

In these six diverse works there is a confrontation between the adults and their family of origin, and in many cases the family is both the main hurdle faced by the characters and the only solution to that problem. The family thus plays several roles in these narratives: it is the element

1 "dysfunctional, adj.", *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, July 2018, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/2500051> [Accessed 15 August 2018]
2 "function, n.", *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, July 2018, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/75476> [Accessed 15 August 2018]

that puts the plot in motion through the necessary confrontation with or exile from the family, but it is also the organising principle behind those plots. The themes that are explored throughout this thesis are the transmissions between different generations, the relationships that exist between different members of the family and how the family can be a locus of trauma. Some recurring questions will emerge, mainly what makes someone part of a family and the characterising of the family as a 'trap' or 'refuge'. Throughout these explorations, the question is one of identity: how is one's identity shaped by one's family, and it is possible to forego or escape family transmission. Indeed, one of the themes of the works in my corpus is that the quest for the self necessarily involves a questioning of one's family of origin.

Before delving into the analysis proper, there are many different areas of choice that need to be clearly defined and explained. In this introduction, I start by discussing famous works that have looked at the family in the past, in order to demonstrate the importance of such a topic and contextualise the questions I explore in this thesis. I then retrace briefly how families have been approached in literary and film criticism, with the aim of situating this work within a broader context. Moving on, I make clear the motivations behind my decision to work with works from France and the United States, as well as with both films and novels, and how I came about selecting the specific works in my corpus. Finally, this introduction outlines the methodology used throughout the thesis.

Families have been inescapable in films and novels since the very beginning of both arts. Early examples include most Greek tragedies, such as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, which, through Freud, became one of our primary ways of understanding children's dynamics with their parents. Many major writers have tackled the topic of family in their works, such as Shakespeare, who in *King Lear* looks at the issue of inheritance and its entanglement of love, loyalty and legitimacy. These themes appear continuously in the literature of families, such as in Balzac's novels for example, thus demonstrating their importance. In her reworking of *King Lear* titled *A Thousand Acres*, Jane Smiley decides to focus on the two eldest sisters and offers a compelling account of their own motivations, and in doing so provides a new perspective on the impact of hierarchical family structures and of generational conflict. Family is also the driving force in Emile Zola's project *Les Rougon-Macquart*, which the subtitle *Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire* makes clear. In these twenty novels Zola uses the family both as a medium to study the importance of heredity and as a tool to examine the transformation of the French society during the Second Empire. This use of the family as a vessel for the depiction of a society's changes is also found in *War and Peace* which follows aristocratic Russian families during the French invasion of

Russia. Tolstoy's interest in the family is also evident in *Anna Karenina*, which gave us one of the most famous sentences about families: 'Happy families are all alike, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.'[3] Preoccupied with marriage and infidelity, as well as with more mundane details of domestic life, Tolstoy's study of characters places the family at the centre of his narrative. Family sagas spanning many generations has been around for a long time, and have famous examples in Old Norse and Icelandic sagas. A more recent instance is Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* which follows the Buendía family during seven generations. The similarities in name and events between the different members of the family sometimes blur the line between one generation and its ancestors, pointing towards the repetitive nature of the history of families.

This preoccupation with families that encompasses many different periods and countries continues in the contemporary period. Indeed, American writers such as Jonathan Franzen and Jeffrey Eugenides offer reworkings of the American family saga. Franzen questions the state of the American family in two of his major novels: in *The Corrections*, for example, he contrasts the elderly parental couple and their midwestern values and settled life to that of their three grown-up children. The conflict between the obsolescence of the old ways of life and the violence of modernity is exemplified by the contrasting lives of the siblings and their parents. In *Middlesex* Eugenides also addresses the ever-present fantasy of the American Dream through an exploration of a family's immigration from Greece to the United States, as well as the theme of incest and gender identity. Several contemporary French novelists, such as Marie NDiaye and Chloé Delaume, also put the family at the centre of their narratives, albeit in different ways. In Marie Ndiaye's novels family is intrinsically linked with issues of race and of belonging, as is the case in both *Rosie Carpe* and *En famille*. Chloé Delaume uses her own personal family story in her novels, such as in *Le Cri du sablier* and *Dans ma maison sous terre*, which manipulate words in a violence equal only to that of their subject matters.

The choice of family as a topic is not circumscribed solely to literature, and films have also used this fertile material. Indeed, films from different countries and time periods have taken the family as their subject, such as Yasujiro Ozu's *Tokyo Story* which depicts the relationship between parents and their adult children or Orson Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons* which explores the lives of the Amberson family in the Midwest of the beginning of the 20th century. The topic of family also spans different genres as the Smiths are the focus of the musical *Meet Me in St. Louis* while the crime trilogy *The Godfather* follows the Corleone clan. A discussion of families in film can not be complete without considering Thomas Vinterberg's *Festen*. *Festen* combines a use of

3 Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina* (1998), p. ii. Project Gutenberg ebook

shaky images and oppressive camera angles to expressively depict the commotion brought about by the revelation of sexual abuse. It belongs to the long list of narratives, both in literature and cinema, that deal with family secrets, their discovery and impact. More recently there has been a demonstrable interest in the family in French filmmakers, as exemplified by the films of Maïwenn, Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi or Noémie Lvovsky, although they all operate on different modes. Maïwenn's *Pardonnez-moi* offers similarities with Chloé Delaume's novels in its combination of the autobiographical and the imagined, as well as in the rawness of its topic. In a mock documentary style, that she will use again in *Le Bal des actrices*, Maïwenn/Violette confronts the different members of her family, exposing secrets and old wounds. Sharing a feeling of effervescence with Maïwenn's films, and also incorporating autobiographical elements, Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi explores in her films the weight of belonging to a prosperous family. In *Il est plus facile pour un chameau...*, *Actrices* and *Un Château en Italie*, her protagonists grapple with being wealthy while feeling lonely and unsure of themselves. Her exploration of family ties and of an unrealised desire for children alternates between intense joy and a similarly intense melancholy. In *Camille redouble* Noémie Lvovsky takes her depressed and alcoholic heroine back in time to her teenage years. This search for lost time is imbued with nostalgia, but also with a sense of hope that drives the end of the film. These French films, with their focus on the individual within the family, have their counterpart in the United States with films which emphasise groups, such as Wes Anderson's *The Royal Tenenbaums* and Noah Baumbach's *The Squid and the Whale*. Although very different from one another, Anderson has a very distinct visual and storytelling style while Baumbach navigates towards realism, these two filmmakers have created films about families that contend with difficult interpersonal interactions. Television series, which are said to be in their 'golden age', have also delved into the exploration of families. A few examples can be used to demonstrate the interest of the medium for this most ancient of subject matters, such as the French series *Fais pas ci, fais pas ça* which explores the different parenting styles of two neighbouring families, the American series *Parenthood* which follows the Braverman clan, spanning three generations, and the acclaimed British series *Downton Abbey*, which is reminiscent of Zola's exploration of the effects of a changing society on a single family.

Literary and film criticism has tended to focus on the family understood principally as the state of being married and raising children. For example, when Nicholas White writes about the family the focus is on marriage and divorce, and the relationships between family members other than the parents are not examined at all.[4] Similarly, in *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in*

4 See Nicholas White, *The Family in Crisis in Late Nineteenth-Century French Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge

French the entry 'family life' refers back to the entry 'marriage', which, additionally, provides a purely historical and sociological definition.[5] When literary criticism has looked at the relationships between family members other than the parents it has focused mainly on dyads or triads, such as the father/son or the mother/son, and in more recent decades, thanks to the changes brought about by feminist criticism, on such dyads as the mother/daughter and the daughter/father.[6] Similarly, the two volumes of *Relations familiales dans les littératures française et francophones des XXe et XXIe siècles* are divided between 'La figure du père' and 'La figure de la mère': literary criticism has thus been selective in the past in its approach to family, reducing it either to the parental couple or to subcategories of dyads and triads.[7] This is also true of film criticism, as shown, for example, by Mike Chopra-Gant's focus on what he identifies as the key figures of the family: the absent father and the mom.[8] One exception to this approach has dealt with American theatre in a more comprehensive manner, as can be seen in the books of Tom Scanlan and Thaddeus Wakefield.[9] This interest in drama and families in a larger understanding can be traced back to the tradition of Greek tragedies, a link which Bennett Simon discusses.[10] Furthermore, since the emergence of feminist criticism the family has tended to be seen mostly through that prism, as Lucille Murielle Clément and Sabine van Wesemael note.[11] At first it was a much-needed and necessary challenge to the exclusively patriarchal tradition, however, as time passed, it has sometimes tended to limit the areas that were being investigated. Recently there has been an evolution towards more variety, which, however, has mostly been limited to prominent issues that are being discussed in general in contemporary criticism, and not only in the context of families, such as issues of gender, race and displacement. These are prominent in film and literary criticism at the moment, as is shown by Daniela Berghahn's study of the diasporic family in contemporary European cinema and Michael Sheringham's analysis of race in Marie NDiaye.[12] Contemporary French literary criticism looking at

University Press, 1999) and *French Divorce Fiction from the Revolution to the First World War* (Leeds: Legenda, 2013)

5 Peter France (ed.), *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)

6 See for example Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, psychoanalysis, feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) and Lynda E. Boose and Betty S. Flowers (eds.), *Daughters and Fathers* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989)

7 Lucie Murielle Clément and Sabine van Wesemael (eds), *Relations familiales dans les littératures française et francophones des XXe et XXIe siècles* (Paris: Harmattan, 2008)

8 Mike Chopra-Gant, *Hollywood Genres and Post-war America: Masculinity, family and nation in popular movies and film noir* (London: I.B Tauris, 2006)

9 Tom Scanlan, *Family, Drama, and American Dreams* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978) and Thaddeus Wakefield, *The Family in Twentieth-Century American Drama* (New York and Oxford: P. Lang, 2003)

10 Bennett Simon, *Tragic Drama and the Family: Psychoanalytic studies from Aeschylus to Beckett* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988)

11 Lucie Murielle Clément and Sabine van Wesemael, 'Introduction' in *Relations familiales dans les littératures française et francophones des XXe et XXIe siècles*, ed. by Lucie Murielle Clément and Sabine van Wesemael (Paris: Harmattan, 2008), pp. 7-13 (p. 8)

12 Daniela Berghahn, *Far-Flung Families in Film: The Diasporic family in contemporary European cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013) and Michael Sheringham, 'The Law of Sacrifice: Race and the Family

families also tends to focus on the *récit de filiation* as a genre which has gained popularity since the 80s, as shown for example by Dominique Viart's article in *Le roman contemporain de la famille*.[13] Another main area of interest in French literary criticism is that of the family secret, something I will be discussing in this thesis but which is not my only focus.[14]

While I draw on this criticism, I also depart from these approaches as my focus is the relationships between the adult children and their parents and siblings, on which relatively less has been written. I shall especially examine the shift in power dynamics and the repercussions of childhood on adults' relationships. Of course such issues as gender, social class and ethnicity play a role in these relationships, and in the way families interact, and thus will come into play. By focusing on contemporary representations of adult children and their families I am able to draw on the current preoccupation with families both in literature, cinema and criticism, as well as give attention to a field that has until now been underdeveloped.

Following the identification of this underdeveloped field I have decided to concentrate on works that take as their focus adult children, and thus families in a later stage of their evolution. This will allow me to look at different kinds of relationships and power dynamics, as they change when the children confront their parents as adults themselves. Furthermore, it also brings forth new issues such as the care for elderly parents, which several of the works in my corpus look at. I have decided to focus on contemporary works as previously the preoccupation with the weight of the family of origin was not as prominent, or in some cases inexistent. Moreover, contemporary fictions mirror a new social reality in which family members do not necessarily live close by, thus presenting new challenges and paths to explore for authors and filmmakers who want to examine the family. Having delineated my specific subject matter and time period, the next step was to circumscribe a corpus. I decided to focus on works from the United States and France, as both are comparable wealthy Western nations. Although they have different histories and backgrounds, which will be addressed when relevant, they are similar enough to offer typical examples and fruitful comparisons. I have also chosen two different mediums, that of films and novels, because they are both representative of today's cultural production. Furthermore, cinema and literature often interact, and inspire one another: they are in a dialogue and looking at one without the other in the context of family, which is a theme prominent in both, would have felt like an important part of the

in Marie Ndiaye's *En famille* and *Papa doit manger*' in *Affaires de famille: The Family in contemporary French culture and theory*, ed. by Marie-Claire Barnet and Edward Welch (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 23-37

13 Dominique Viart, 'Fictions Familiales *versus* récits de filiation. Pour une topographie de la famille en littérature' in *Le Roman contemporain de la famille*, ed. by Sylviane Coyault, Christine Jérusalem and Gaspard Turin (Paris: Lettres modernes Minard, 2015), pp. 17-35

14 See for example Patricia Bissa Enama and Nathalie Fontane-Wacker (eds.), *Le secret de famille dans le roman contemporain* (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2016)

analysis was missing.

I selected *Un Conte de Noël*, *Le Skylab*, *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit*, *The Savages*, *August: Osage County* and *We Were the Mulvaneys* because they are all placed slightly outside mainstream production, as well as the production that is usually studied academically. They are all – either the work or their author – recognised to some extent, while not often discussed by criticism. This will provide new avenues of exploration, and I hope will shed new lights on these works that I believe to be worthy of scholarly criticism. Moreover, when examined side by side these six works echo with one another, both in terms of themes and treatment, which makes for a rich analysis. They however offer enough differences to make for an in-depth analysis, and to be able to explore different modes of representation of similar stories. I decided to mostly focus on authors and directors who have explored similar themes in some of their other works, in order to make my analysis more multidimensional. Lastly, in the hope of being able to explore this topic in depth, I chose works which represented a similar social class: middle-class white families. Many interesting topics could be discussed about the treatment of families from different backgrounds, but unfortunately a thesis does not allocate enough space to do so as a whole other volume would be necessary to do the subject justice. The works will however be examined in a broader context, and other works will be introduced when the argument warrants it.

Before moving on to outlining my methodology, I shall provide a brief introduction to each of the six works. In *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* Delphine de Vigan grapples with her own family history, as well as with questions of loyalty and creation. This work is inscribed in the tradition of the French *récit de filiation*, a search which is often brought by, or allowed by, the death of the parent. The classification of Vigan's work is slightly problematic as it contains autobiographical elements but without claiming to be an autobiography. The narrator and author appear to be entirely amalgamated but there is no claim of absolute truthfulness. In *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* Vigan even makes the point that writing always produces fiction, stating: 'Mais la vérité n'existait pas. Je n'avais que des morceaux épars et le fait même de les ordonner constituait déjà une fiction.'[15] It is thus accepted that this work is widely autobiographical but without claiming to be entirely truthful. Talking about her book Vigan herself states that writing 'éloigne de la vérité tout en cherchant à la restituer, ou plutôt à en inventer une autre, plus vraie encore'.[16] Vigan explains the shift between a first and third-person narration in the following way:

15 Delphine de Vigan, *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* (Paris: Jean-Claude Lattès, 2011), p. 47
16 Raphaëlle Leyris, '«D'après une histoire vraie»: Delphine de Vigan mêle la vérité et le mensonge' in *Le Monde*, 19 August 2015 <https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2015/08/19/d-apres-une-histoire-vraie-delphine-de-vigan-mele-la-verite-et-le-mensonge_4730284_3260.html> [Accessed 10 October 2017]

je suis partie avec l'idée que je pouvais écrire ce livre à la troisième personne. Ce que je suis parvenue à faire dans la première partie. J'étais dans un fantasme de toute-puissance, mais celui-ci a vite été mis à l'épreuve lorsque j'ai abordé ce qui est certainement la blessure originelle de ma famille : la mort d'un enfant. Je me suis heurtée à différentes versions. Il me fallait en choisir une et m'en expliquer. J'ai beaucoup de mal à dire que je suis écrivain, alors me mettre en scène en tant que tel me paraissait d'une grande vanité, mais là, je n'avais pas le choix. Et puis en avançant, j'ai pris goût à cette seconde voix qui me permettait de faire part de mes doutes et de mes interrogations.[17]

This work thus belongs to the genre of autofiction, which is why, throughout this thesis, I refer to the narrator and author indistinctly.

Un Conte de Noël is inscribed in a series of films by Desplechin which look at the often difficult interaction between the individual and the family. The director incorporates elements of the tale in order to transform them into something more directly savage, but yet which is infused with tenderness and an always slightly detached and comical views of things. Here, as in his other films, Desplechin shows how the unbearable harshness and violence of life can be confronted with devastating honesty, and ultimately with tenderness. Although Desplechin refutes the idea that his films are autobiographical stating 'Ce qui m'importe c'est de donner une impression d'impudeur au moment où les personnages se livrent. Quitte à semer le trouble et à laisser croire que je parle directement de moi …', his works play with the genre of autofiction.[18] Indeed, as Jean-Baptiste Renault notes:

La récurrence de certaines figures, configurations et questions suggère […] pour le spectateur, une forte présence des traces de soi, qu'elles soient cryptées ou non : on peut mentionner notamment l'idée d'un rapport conflictuel à la mère, la fratrie de deux garçons et une fille, la grand-mère ou la grand-tante homosexuelle […], la question de la religion et de l'antisémitisme.[19]

Furthermore, in the documentary *L'Aimée*, on Desplechin's own family, many of the same elements exist and connections can easily be established with the fictional families in his films. Desplechin further blurs the lines as his brother Fabrice acts in several of his films, and his real-life career as a diplomat appears to have inspired the filmmaker in *La Sentinelle* and *Trois souvenirs de ma jeunesse*. However, despite these elements *Un Conte de Noël* cannot be classified as a true autofiction, contrarily to Vigan's work, but rather, as Marie-Anne Lieb remarks, it is 'une fiction qui

17 Christine Rousseau, 'Tout sur mon père, tout sur ma mère' in *Le Monde*, 18 August 2011 <https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2011/08/18/tout-sur-mon-pere-tout-sur-ma-mere_1560765_3260.html> [Accessed 25 July 2017]
18 Yves Alion, 'Entretien avec Arnaud Desplechin' in *L'Avant-scène. Un Conte de Noël. Arnaud Desplechin*, No. 572 (May 2008), pp. 3-12 (p. 3)
19 Jean-Baptiste Renault, *Arnaud Desplechin. Trois souvenirs de ma jeunesse* (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Atlande, 2017), p. 185

joue à l'autofiction'.[20] This is also apparent in his choice of actresses Catherine Deneuve and Chiara Mastroianni, who are mother and daughter in real life, as as a mother and daughter-in-law duo in the film. Elizabeth's activity as a playwright confirms this interest in playing with the concept of fiction.

Presenting a brand of insanity which is sometimes similar to that of *Un Conte de Noël*, *August: Osage County* offers a derelict vision of both the American family and the American Dream. Adapted from Tracy Letts's eponymous play, it is inscribed in literary history as it echoes previous great American dramas, such as O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into the Night*. Furthermore, it plays with the familiar territory of fictional families with three sisters, found in *King Lear* and Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. The subject matter of this film is thus not new but, as Charles Isherwood notes in his review of the play: 'Mr. Letts […] somehow finds fresh sources of insight, humor and anguish in seemingly worn-to-the-stump material: the dysfunctional dynamics of the American family.'[21] This work also draws on autobiographical elements as Judith Sebesta and E. Teresa Choate explain:

> Tracy Letts has said that his own Oklahoma upbringing and certain family events had been ruminating in his head for years, eventually leading to this play (among them his grandfather's suicide by drowning, and his grandmother's spiral into drug addiction).[22]

Moreover, in the original production of the play Beverly was played by Letts's father.[23] *We Were the Mulvaneys* is the only work which does not appear to draw inspiration from, or play with, autobiographical elements. Similarly to *August: Osage County* this work questions the American Dream and its (im)possibility. As in many of Oates's works the novel plays with time and characters' points of view, to get at the core of what makes family ties so complicated and necessary at once. Family is often a central preoccupation in Oates's works, as Ellen G. Friedman notes: 'despite the violent dislocations her characters suffer, Oates places great emphasis on their family ties. The central characters of her novels have grandparents and parents, brothers and sisters, spouses and children – or at least some of these.'[24]

I have chosen the last two works, *The Savages* and *Le Skylab*, as they offer visions different from the other four. Indeed, the first four I have introduced have many elements in common, as will

20 Marie-Anne Lieb, 'Voix-off et voix(e) narrative: la conscience entre les lignes dans l'oeuvre de Arnaud Desplechin' in *Cahiers de Narratologie*, 22 July 2012 <http://narratologie.revues.org/6519> [Accessed 01 October 2016]
21 Charles Isherwood, 'Mama Doesn't Feel Well, but Everyone Else Will Feel Much Worse' in *The New York Times* (Theatre Reviews, 5 December 2007), <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/05/theater/reviews/05august.html> [Accessed 31 May 2018]
22 Judith Sebesta A. and E. Teresa Choate, 'Review' in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (March 2009), pp. 105-106 (p. 105)
23 Isherwood, *Op. Cit*
24 Ellen G. Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1980), p. 2

become apparent throughout the thesis, whereas Jenkins and Delpy often opt for a different approach to the family. This allows for a richer analysis as the confrontation of these works with the others sheds light on the significant absence of certain elements or reveal a different vision of the family entirely. *The Savages* looks at the unlikely reunion of the smallest family of the corpus, brought forth by the necessity to care for an ageing parent. Jenkins's film is often bleak and does not shy away from exposing the characters' pettiness, while carrying a tenderness and hopefulness at its core. Similarly to the others, save for Oates's work, her film draws from her own story, as Heather Huntington remarks:

> Although she is loath to call it an autobiography, per se, the movie has some very personal roots for Jenkins, whose father and grandmother both had dementia and both were in nursing homes. «It certainly is personal and real, but it's not a strict memoir. […] It's not a memoir, but certainly it has roots in a very significant personal experience. And then you invent and you riff and you draw and you build and you fictionalize.»[25]

However, it is sufficiently fictionalised as to not appear as an autofiction. Delpy's *Le Skylab*, on the contrary, is quite clearly an autofiction, a genre which Delpy plays with in her other films, and especially in *Two Days in Paris* and *Two Days in New York*, where the parents in the films are played by Delpy's own parents. As Clémentine Gallot notes about Julie Delpy : 'De film en film, l'autofiction est devenue son terrain de prédilection.'[26] Indeed, as Delpy explains about *Le Skylab*:

> Il y a beaucoup d'éléments fictionnels. Albertine et ses parents sont autobiographiques. Pour le reste, j'ai mélangé plein de choses, des voisins, des souvenirs sur lesquels j'ai brodé, des phrases que j'avais entendues dans des discussions politiques ou culturelles sur la télé.[27]

In this film Delpy plays the role of her mother, who passed away shortly before she made the film, while Albert Delpy appears as Jean's uncle, Jean being a fictionalised version of Albert Delpy. *Le Skylab* takes a more obviously comic approach to family life, and the film is infused with the nostalgia of Albertine thinking back to her childhood memories. The film is not plot-driven, and as Isabelle Regnier notes 'cette histoire […] n'en est pas vraiment une, […] ce qui compte relève plus de l'atmosphère que de l'arche dramatique'.[28] Framed as the memory of the adult Albertine, Delpy's

25 Heather Huntington, 'Exclusive Interview with Tamara Jenkins' on *ReelzChannel*, 30 December 2007 <http://www.reelzchannel.com/article/463/exclusive-interview-with-tamara-jenkins> [Accessed 30 June 2018]
26 Clémentine Gallot, 'Le Démon de minuit de Julie Delpy' in *Le Monde*, 22 June 2013 <https://abonnes.lemonde.fr/archives/articles/2013/06/22/p-le-demon-de-minuit-de-julie-delpy_3433565_3246.html?> [Accessed 30 June 2018]
27 Fernand Denis, 'L'hommage solaire de Julie Delpy à sa mère et à la famille' in *La Libre*, 5 October 2011 <http://www.lalibre.be/culture/cinema/l-hommage-solaire-de-julie-delpy-a-sa-mere-et-a-la-famille-51b8db84e4b0de6db9c37058> [Accessed 4 September 2018]
28 Isabelle Regnier, '*Le Skylab*: sous le Skybal exactement' in *Le Monde*, 5 October 2011 <https://abonnes.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2011/10/04/le-skylab-sous-le-skylab-exactement_1581987_3476.html?xtmc=le_skylab&xtcr=13> [Accessed 29 June 2018]

film operates on two levels. One where the adult Albertine, who has a family of her own, thinks back to her childhood and her family of origin and the other, which makes up the core of the film, where Albertine's parents are the ones grappling with their families. Delpy enjoys exposing people's contradictions, irritating habits and retrograde worldviews, but always with a compassion that refrains from judgement. Family here is a place of debate and conflict but also of laughter and camaraderie.

Having introduced my specific subject matter and corpus, I will now outline the approach I take in this thesis. Although I rely on traditional film and literary criticism, I also borrow concepts and ideas from different fields to enrich my analysis and offer a multidimensional and pluridisciplinary approach. Indeed, I believe that drawing on research on the family from such areas as psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology and anthropology provides new and interesting tools for examining how family relationships are represented in cinema and literature. These different concepts shed light on issues and dynamics that might otherwise go unnoticed, thereby allowing for a fuller and richer analysis. Sociologists, for example, have long been interested in the family and have provided many works on the evolution of the family through time and for that reason sociology plays a role in putting into context the experiences of the families in my six works.[29] When I draw on clinical concepts from psychology or family therapy, these approaches are not to provide a clinical examination of the families in my works, but to enrich the literary and filmic analysis, and to provide new ways of understanding the representation of these families. Furthermore, I am interested not only in how these concepts interrogate my six works, but also in how the corpus questions the theories in return. Each chapter thus draws on a different frame of reference, according to the topic of the chapter and the research that have been executed in other fields about this topic. For instance, the first chapter borrows from sociology and anthropology, whereas the second one calls upon concepts devised by family therapy. These frames of reference are not strictly delimitated to one chapter, however, and relevant concepts are used in more than one chapter. As each chapter draws on a different set of references, I do not introduce and discuss them in detail here, but will do so in each chapter.

An approach I use throughout the thesis, however, is character analysis, and more specifically what Esther Rashkin calls 'the legitimacy of analyzing the behavior and motivation of fictional characters'.[30] On that subject I believe Rashkin makes very clear the argument in her

29 For example see Jacqueline Scott, Judith Treas and Martin Richards (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Families* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) and Scott Coltrane and Randall Collins, *Sociology of Marriage & the Family: Gender, love, and property*, 8th ed (Australia and London: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2001)

30 Esther Rashkin, *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992),

Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative. There she provides a good overview of the debate, starting with the structuralists who reject character analysis as they stress 'the systems of codes, conventions, and signs that traverse characters and define the roles or functions they assume', and explains how the deconstructive approaches have 'tended to dismantle the notion of the fictive character', while Lacanian interpretations have 'transmuted the question of character analysis into an analysis of the subject as an effect of language or of the signifier'.[31] Although these approaches have allowed clear progress in their time and provide fruitful ways of looking at literature, they are not the ones I use here. On the contrary, I wholly agree with Rashkin that talking about a fictive character's past, or psychology, does not mean treating them as human or as real.[32] Moreover, I am not constructing fictions out of the material but instead trying to uncover what is already there and spoken of by the authors themselves.

In order to do justice to my aims and to the use of these varied concepts this thesis is divided into four chapters. The first one looks at the home, the construction of the concept and how it is explored in the corpus through the home of the family of origin or through the absence of such a home. This chapter explores the home in the American and French fictions in turn, arguing that, despite many similarities, there is a difference of treatment of the home in each country. As the home brings together the different characters in these works, it naturally follows that the second chapter focuses on the family reunion. In this chapter I demonstrate how reunions question the past and future of the characters, as well as interrogating the validity of rituals. Drawing on concepts taken from family therapy, I explore the family myths, as well as the roles and alliances that exist in families. The third chapter focuses on meals and claim they can be analysed as moments which mirror the general working of the family. Continuing with ideas introduced in the previous chapter, it examines the roles allocated to family members while also investigating the importance of the rituals surrounding food and eating. In addition, that chapter looks at the relationship between eating disorders, trauma and power. The fourth chapter focuses on the repercussions of keeping or revealing secrets and on the impact of secrets and traumas on the family dynamics, as well as on the role of creation in exorcising traumas and re-creating past memories. Finally, the conclusion brings these different threads together and explores the role and place of the family of origin in the construction of one's identity.

---

p. 5
31 Ibid., p. 6
32 Ibid., p. 7

Chapter I. Home

The characters in my corpus struggle with the question of which place their family of origin holds or should hold in their adult life. This family of origin is often associated with a home which the family inhabited during the childhood of the protagonists, and in many of the works the adults revisit this childhood home. What I therefore look at in this chapter is not the homes the characters occupy in the present but the ones they did in the past; their former homes, or in the case of *The Savages* the absence of such a home. In order to examine how homes are used and articulated in the works I begin with a discussion of how to define what a home is. The concept of home has been studied in many different and varied fields such as sociology, anthropology, history, psychology and human geography, and I draw from all of these disciplines to explore the meaning of home, looking at how it is constructed alongside the notions of house, the outside and the family. This discussion will then inform the second and third parts of this chapter. In the second part I explore how homes function in American literature and cinema, before turning to a similar examination in French fictions in the third part. It will become apparent that in most of the works, both American and French, the idea of home is explored alongside similar notions, such as that of identity, refuge and nostalgia. However, despite these strong similarities, I also postulate in this chapter that there is a difference in the treatment of homes in fictions from the United States and France, whereby in the former the home would be most important for its physicality, while in the later the home is more often constructed as a mental space. This chapter thus offers a confrontation of these different ways of thinking about the home, while also displaying the many similarities that exist between American and French fictions.

I. Definitions of Home

Before delving into an analysis of the home in my corpus, it is necessary to spend some time examining closely the concept of home itself. This concept has been explored repeatedly by both the social sciences and the humanities but no single definition has been accepted. Indeed, diverging and even conflicting definitions have been given of the home. In order to propose my own definition of the concept, I examine the existing debates about the home, debates which draw from several different fields such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, human geography, history, architecture and philosophy. My aim is not, however, to provide an exhaustive discussion of the notion of home, and this chapter would not provide me with enough space to do so, and thus I will not look at all the possible ideas that have been linked to the home.[33] Instead, I begin by examining the difference between the house and the home, before looking at the relation between the home and the family.

Before examining the notion of home in detail it is necessary to distinguish it from the house, as both concepts are often conflated with one another. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the house as 'A building for human habitation, typically and historically one that is the ordinary place of residence of a family. With *the*: a person's home'.[34] The house is thus a physical place, a dwelling, already linked with the family, which becomes the home when the article 'the' precedes it. The definition of home goes as follow:

1. The place where a person or animal dwells.

2. a) A dwelling place; a person's house or abode; the fixed residence of a family or household; the seat of domestic life and interests.
b) The place where one lives or was brought up, with reference to the feelings of belonging, comfort, etc., associated with it.
c) With *the*. The domestic setting.
d) The family or social unit occupying a house; a household.
e) The furniture or contents of a house.

4. A refuge, a sanctuary; a place or region to which one naturally belongs or where one feels at ease.

7. A residential institution providing care, rest, refuge, accommodation, or treatment. Also: a similar establishment for rescued animals; an animal shelter.[35]

33 For a survey of the available literature on the home, see Shelley Mallet, 'Understanding Home: A critical review of the literature' in *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 52, Issue 1 (February 2004), pp. 62-89
34 "house, n.1 and int." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, January 2018, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/88886> [Accessed 22 February 2018]
35 "home, n.1 and adj." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, January 2018, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/87869> [Accessed 22 February 2018]

As can be seen, the definition for home is far-reaching: it is a physical dwelling but can also be synonymous with the family, as well as denoting feelings of comfort and belonging. Thus, the home appears to be a combination of place, space and emotions. The fact that home is described as a dwelling explains the reasons why it is often conflated with the house, but as Shelley Mallett remarks:

> some social researchers argu[e] that such a conflation represents home as one-dimensional. […] researchers routinely claim that home is a multidimensional concept or a multi-layered phenomenon. As such, the physical dwelling or shelter is described as simply one aspect of home.[36]

My own opinion is that it is precisely that multitude of layers which makes the home such an important concept. For example, in her essay on home the anthropologist Mary Douglas argues that 'a home is not only a space, it also has some structure in time; and because it is for people who are living in that time and space, it has aesthetic and moral dimensions', making the point that the home is the organisation of space over time.[37] What I wish to argue here is that to use house and home interchangeably is indeed restrictive, as it does not allow for the full complexity of the notion of home but reduces it purely to a place.

It appears thus that the house is only one aspect of the multi-layered concept of home. Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft make the argument in their introduction to the cross-disciplinary collection of essays in *Our House*:

> Although protection from the elements would remain its primary function, it could not have been too long before the dwelling […] became an arena for more complex human practices. […] Thus was born the idea of the house as something *in excess* of its primary function as artificial shelter – as a place, in fact, which expressed something of the identity of the builder or owner or occupier, as well as something of the culture of the society in which it was built.[38]

Though they do not use the word home here, and they generally do not spend time on the distinction between house and home, I would argue that what they describe as the excess of the function of dwelling is what makes a house become a home. I believe Francesca Saggini and Anna Enrichetta Soccio offer a definition that is close to what I mean as they write that both house and home 'refer to the physical structure providing shelter and other primary needs for human beings and are inevitably linked to domesticity and the domestic universe', but that home relates 'more to privacy, intimacy and retreat, symbolizes its inhabitants and their values, whereas «house» refers primarily

36 Mallett, p. 68
37 Mary Douglas, 'The Idea of a Home: A kind of space' in *Social Research*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 287-307 (pp. 288-289)
38 Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft, 'Introduction: Culture and Domestic Space' in *Our House: The representation of domestic space in modern culture*, ed. by Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006) pp. 11-26 (p. 13)

to the building customarily used for habitation'.[39] Furthermore, a house is not necessarily a home, as is the case with abandoned houses for example. But, as David Morley notes in his book on home, migration and new technologies: 'Conventionally, in the West a home is […] inscribed in the particular structure of a house.'[40] Throughout this chapter – and the whole thesis – I will thus be working with the notion that the house is the physical dwelling while the home is a more complex concept. Mallett notes that 'most authors uncritically conflate house and home' but I do not wish to follow suit, as I believe the distinction important, for example when a place that was once a home merely becomes a house.[41]

Before exploring in more detail the implications the concept of home carries, it is worth noting that the distinction between house and home does not exist in French. Indeed the word 'maison' covers both concepts, as the dictionary definition shows: 'maison' is both the 'bâtiment servant d'habitation', as well as the 'ménage, administration des affaires domestiques' and the 'personnes vivant dans une même maison et formant une famille'.[42] I would argue that the lack of differentiation in French between house and home points to the greater importance given in that language, and thus culture, to the function of home as the excess of physical dwelling. Indeed, having only one word means that the more complex notions take precedence over the simpler one. I will come back to this idea later on as I want to show that the home is more important as a mental construct in French fictions that it is in American ones. I do not mean to suggest, however, that the multidimensional notions of 'maison' always take over, as they are some context where it clearly does not, but merely that it is often the case.

I now wish to examine how the notion of home is constructed against the idea of an 'outside'. In his work on the history of the home throughout the ages Witold Rybczynski shows the transition from a Medieval feudal open home to a private one, stating that by the eighteenth century 'the household had changed, both physically and emotionally; as it had ceased to be a workplace, it had become smaller and, more important, less public. […] It was now a place for personal, intimate behavior'.[43] Thus, our current idea of home was built as it became private and separate from the outside world, which was only allowed to intrude upon the home in specific ways and for specific reasons. This is an argument made by several researchers, such as Saggini and Soccio who write:

39 Francesca Saggini and Anna Enrichetta Soccio, 'Introduction: The paper houses of English literature' in *The House of Fiction as the House of Life: Representations of the house from Richardson to Woolf*, ed. by Francesca Saggini and Anna Enrichetta Soccio (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), pp. 1-9 (p. 2)
40 David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, mobility and identity* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 19
41 Mallett, p. 66
42 'Maison, n. f.' in *Dictionnaire Flammarion de la langue française*, ed. by Bruno Bourdon (Paris: Flammarion, 1999), p. 739
43 Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A short history of an idea* (London: Pocket Books, 2001), p. 77

'Home as the space physically and emotionally separated from the environments of work and professional life was a concept that slowly developed in England and in other Northern countries during the XVII century.'[44] In her essay on domestication, Rachel Bowlby goes further, arguing that the outside is perceived as a threat:

> Home is set up as a response to and bulwark against something perceived as a threat; it makes an interior separate from and set off against the dangers or anxieties that can then be safely thrown out onto an outside, an *out there*, whose differentiation has to be constantly re-established with the risk of every questionable foot across the threshold.[45]

Here not only are the home and the outside separate spaces, but the latter is ascribed negative associations, which only serve to reinforce the importance of the home. Home is thus the inside set against the outside, and the home is thus not only important in itself, but in what, and who, it excludes. As David Morley notes: 'the struggle to establish a clear division between the external world of work and community and the internal, private space of family was crucial for nineteenth century middle-class families in attempting to establish their respectability.'[46] This division is now firmly established in the United States and France: the works in my corpus focus less on the boundaries between the home and the outside world, and more on how the home can turn into a trap for its inhabitants.

Let us now look at the relation between home and family. Peter Saunders and Peter Williams provide a good entry-point for that discussion when they establish a distinction between house, home and household. They define the home as 'a place invested with special social meaning and significance where particular kinds of social relations and activities are composed, accomplished and contextualised' and the household as 'the mode of social organisation which is distinctive to the home'. For them the home is 'a socio-spatial system' that is a fusion of 'the physical unit of the house' and the 'social unit of the household'. They further argue that there are many different household types and that the family is only one existing variant.[47] Saunders and Williams's article brings to attention the interaction between physical places and social relationships, however, their view seems somewhat limited and I agree with several of the criticisms addressed to them by Peter Somerville. One of the reasons Somerville finds Saunders and Williams's definition of the home

44 Saggini and Soccio, p. 3
45 Rachel Bowlby, 'Domestication' in *Feminism Beside Herself*, ed. by Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 71-91(p. 83)
46 Morley, p. 23
47 Peter Saunders and Peter Williams, 'The Constitution of the Home: Towards a research agenda' in *Housing Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1988), pp. 81-93 (pp. 82-83)

problematic is that

> it presupposes that which needs to be proved, ie that the home is actually constituted by means of such «fusion»'. As an empirical concept, however, it is far from obvious that the home is always or necessarily constituted in this way – eg what about homes for the elderly and disabled […] ? «Home» used in these senses does not seem to involve reference to either «household» or «house». […] Empirically, therefore, it seems only partially correct at best to describe the 'home' as a fusion of «household» and «house».[48]

Indeed, although seeing the home as Saunders and Williams do as a fusion of house and household is beneficial in that it makes us think about the relationship between the place and the people, it also seems to be too limiting a view of home. Somerville continues by stating that:

> What they fail to notice […] is that the relations which play the key role in ensuring the home's social importance are not those of household and house but those of kinship and family. […] Focusing on the family rather than the household also helps to explain *why* the home should come to be so important, because the family, like the home, has strongly emotive connotations, which are lacking in the case of «household».[49]

Specific characteristics of French etymology support Somerville's argument, as Carine Goutaland argues: 'dans la culture occidentale, la définition de la famille est indissociable d'un ancrage topographique.'[50] She goes on to explain:

> En témoigne le lien étroit entre les notions de famille et de maisonnée: le terme *familia* désigne déjà, en latin, la totalité des personnes vivant sous le même toit […]. Ces notions peuvent être mises en parallèle avec le terme «ménage» qui, à partir du même étymon que le nom «maison», désigne d'abord le logis avec les meubles […] puis le groupe de personnes vivant dans ce logis.[51]

Although Somerville's argument is convincing, since Western societies place a great emphasis on families and it would therefore seem logical that they are what makes the home so important, his argument also has its limitations.

Mallett notes in her review that some authors 'suggest that the link between home and family is so strong that the terms are almost interchangeable', however, although this theory 'has currency in the Western popular imaginary' its critics 'argue that it is ideologically laden and premised on the white, middle class, heterosexual nuclear family'.[52] This appears to be true, and I tend to agree with Sophie Bowlby, Susan Gregory and Linda McKie when they write:

---

48 Peter Somerville, 'Home Sweet Home: A critical commentary on Saunders and Williams' in *Housing Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1989), pp. 113-118 (pp. 114-115)
49 Ibid., p. 115
50 Carine Goutaland, *De régals en dégoûts: le naturalisme à table* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017), p. 39
51 Ibid., footnote 63 p. 39
52 Mallett, pp. 73-74

> The white, western ideology of the home is one that prioritizes a physical entity […] and a set of social, economic, and sexual relations. Traditional views of the home are of «family relationships» made up of a heterosexual couple, married or cohabiting, with children or other relatives.[53]

As the families I examine in my corpus are all white, middle-class, heterosexual nuclear families I am thus focusing on what home means for this type of family, but it must be noted that what I argue here may not necessarily hold the same value for other types of families. Similarly, the houses – and thus homes – that I will be discussing belong to the specific context of Northern Europe and the United States. In that I am similar to Morley when he says that his work presents 'a EurAmcentric history of home, which does not necessarily apply to other cultures'.[54] This precision is also relevant in relation with Gaston Bachelard's *La Poétique de l'espace*, which I will be referring to frequently throughout the chapter. Indeed, Bachelard cannot be seen as divorced from his socio-political specificity, as Joe Moran states: 'Despite Bachelard's insistence that this imaginary house is a cultural universal, it is clearly reminiscent of the actual houses of a specific tradition […] it seems to refer to a particular kind of Euro-American settlement'.[55] It is thus important to keep in mind throughout the chapter, that my definition of the home is only valid is this specific context.

Now that this clarification has been made, I return to the importance of families when thinking of homes, which is linked to the historical rise of the family. Rybczynski explains that in the sixteenth century as formal schooling arose children spent more time at home and with their parents, prompting a transformation of the family.[56] This intensified in the seventeenth century, as houses continued to become more intimate, which the consequent development of domesticity. As Rybczynski puts it: 'domesticity has to do with family, intimacy, and a devotion to the home, as well as with a sense of the house as embodying – not only harboring – the sentiments.'[57] The eighteenth century reinforced this further, as then

> the house was no longer only a shelter from the elements, a protection against the intruder […] it had become the setting for a new, compact social unit: the family. With the family came isolation, but also family life and domesticity. The house was becoming a home.[58]

Here we come back to the idea of the home being more than merely the house, more than physical dwelling. Rybczynski's thesis is corroborated by John Lukacs's article on the history of family and

53 Sophie Bowlby, Susan Gregory and Linda McKie, 'Doing Home: Patriarchy, caring, and space' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1997), pp. 343-350 (p. 344)
54 Morley, p. 25
55 Joe Moran, 'Houses, Habit and Memory' in *Our House: The representation of domestic space in modern culture*, ed. by Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 27-42 (pp. 28-29). In the same work see also Smyth and Croft's Introduction, p. 14
56 Rybczynski, pp. 48-49
57 Ibid., pp. 74-75
58 Ibid., p. 77

the home. Indeed, Lukacs also argues that

> the idea of the family in the Middle Ages was much weaker than we are accustomed to think. […] It was only then [the seventeenth century] that, through the bourgeois insistence on privacy, the family became the most important unit of society.[59]

Like Rybczynski, Lukacs sees 'domesticity, privacy, comfort, the concept of the home and of the family' as the 'principal achievements of the Bourgeois Age'.[60] Philippe Ariès argues along similar lines and locates the birth and development of the family in the fifteenth, and especially the sixteenth centuries, and, like Rybczynski, traces it back to the beginning of formal schooling.[61] The family and the home thus developed together historically, and the rise of one led to the rise of the other, which explains why they are so intrinsically linked, and can even be seen as one and the same, at times. It is important to note, however, that I agree with Mallett's assertion that the link between home and family is not a fixed, but rather changing one. She states that the 'significance of the relationship between home and family can change over the course of an individual life […]. Hence, at some points and places in a person's life it may be pivotal, but at others it may be largely irrelevant'.[62] Indeed, as will become apparent when examining my corpus, a person's relationship with home is in a state of permanent evolution.

This exploration of home has shown that it is a complex concept, laden with overlapping values. The home is often conflated with the house, but, as I have previously stated, I argue that houses should be understood as the physical structures, while the home is a much more intricate concept. When one discusses the home, we should be aware of how the notion interacts with other ones such as that of the outside and family. Throughout this first part, I have not offered a single definition of home, as I believe it is not possible to arrive at a fixed definition, and moreover not necessary as the meaning of home varies from people to people. In that I agree with Somerville when he states that 'what is important is to analyse what the home means to different people and to attempt to explain the range of different meanings that we find'.[63] Different people have different meanings for home, which are also dependent on the context, as Moran notes, one should never 'overlook the fact that the buildings to which we have formed such an apparently organic, indissoluble bond are the product of particular circumstances, and connote specific meanings about

59 John Lukacs, 'The Bourgeois Interior' in *The American Scholar*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Autumn 1970), pp. 616-630 (pp. 624-625)
60 Ibid., p. 624
61 Philippe Ariès, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973), p. 250 and p. 267
62 Mallett, p. 74
63 Somerville, p. 115

wealth, class and cultural distinction'.[64] Furthermore, home is not only a physical, tangible place, but also a feeling, that of being at home, which is 'a personal and culturally specific link to the imaginary'.[65] As Angelika Bammer eloquently writes:

> «home» has always occupied a particularly indeterminate space: it can mean, almost simultaneously, both the place I am going to, the place I have lost and the new place I have taken up, even if only temporarily. «Home» can refer to the place you grew up […], the mythic homeland of your parents and ancestors that you yourself may never have actually seen, or the hostel where you are spending the night in transit. In other words, «home» may refer to a deeply familiar of foreign place, or it may be no more than a passing point of reference. […] On the one hand, it *demythifies* «home» as provisional and relative […]. On the other hand, its very determinacy has lent to the continual *mythification* of «home» as an almost universal site of utopian (be) longing.[66]

In the second and third part of this chapter I continue to develop the concept of home as new concepts emerge when examining the homes in my corpus. Something I have not discussed, although it appears repeatedly in debates about the home, is the relation of the concept with exile and migration. I have not done so because it would have led to a far-reaching discussion, which does not bear direct relevance to my corpus. But many works exist on the topic, such as *Home, Exile and Homeland*, for example, a collection of essays edited by Hamid Naficy.[67] My aim in this first part was to have a close look at the different definitions of home that exist, and to establish how the concepts were entangled with other ones in order to examine the works in my corpus in the light of this complex debate that exists around the notion of home. As I have shown, home is not only a place, but also a space, feelings and practices. What I explore in the rest of the chapter is the roles played by the homes in each work, and how their treatment differ in the American and French fictions.

Smyth and Croft note: 'the slightest glance reveals both the ubiquity and centrality of the house as an image within human culture. The fact is that modern cultural history is saturated with representations of domestic space'.[68] The house, and more generally architecture, are not only used within the action of fiction but have also 'served as foundational, powerful, and recurring analogues throughout the history of literary interpretation'.[69] Bachelard, for example, uses the house as a mean

64 Moran, p. 42
65 Margaret Morse, 'Home: Smell, taste, posture, gleam' in *Home, Exile and Homeland: Film, media, and the politics of place*, ed. by Hamid Naficy (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 63-74 (p. 63)
66 Angelika Bammer, 'Editorial' in *New Formations*, No. 17 (Summer 1992), pp. vii-xi (p. vii)
67 Hamid Naficy (ed.), *Home, Exile and Homeland: Film, media and the politics of place* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999). See also Andrew Gurr, *Writers in Exile: The identity of home in modern literature* (Brighton: Harvester Press and Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1981)
68 Smyth and Croft, p. 16
69 Kathy Mezei and Chiara Briganti, 'Reading the House: A literary perspective' in *Signs*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Spring 2002), pp. 837-846 (p. 837)

of literary interpretation in *La Poétique de l'espace*, and Ellen Eve Frank devised the notion of literary architecture to demonstrate 'the larger connection of correspondence or equivalence between the two arts'.[70] Furthermore, several critics, such as Mezei and Briganti, have argued that a special affinity exists between the novel and the house as they both 'furnish a dwelling place – a spacial construct – that invites the exploration and expression of private and intimate relations and thoughts'.[71] A particularly strong link thus exists between the house or home and literature, and the ubiquity of the home in cinema is equally undeniable. Richard F. Selcer justifies that the home 'is probably […] the subject of so many movies' because 'home cannot be readily defined […]; it must be depicted rather than defined'.[72] Houses, and homes, are used for many different purposes in fiction, and I explore some of them in this chapter, but what I set out to show is how the home is used differently in contemporary fiction from the United States and in that from France. In the former the home is linked to the idea of the American Dream and its importance relies heavily on its physical reality, whereas in the latter the home exists as a mental locus that embodies the characters' relationship with their past and their family. In order to explore these ideas I start by looking at the construction of home in my American corpus before doing the same for the French one, as this will make apparent the difference of treatment between the two, while also highlighting the similarities that do exist. Throughout the second and third parts I continue to explore how the idea of home differs depending on the people and the families, and how the home is constructed according both to the theories I have already discussed and new concepts that will emerge.

70 Ellen Eve Frank, *Literary Architecture: Essays towards a tradition: Walter Percy, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Marcel Proust, Henry James* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 7
71 Mezei and Briganti, p. 839. See also Charlotte Grant, 'Reading the House of Fiction: From object to interior 1720-1920' in *Home Cultures*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (November 2005), pp. 233-249.
72 Richard F. Selcer, 'Home Sweet Movies' in *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer 1990), pp. 52-63 (p. 54)

II. Home in American Fictions

Because of its history, the United States has a very specific relation to houses and homes, a fact that is reflected in its fiction. As Marilyn R. Chandler explains:

> In a country whose history has been focused for so long on the business of settlement and «development», the issue of how to stake out territory, clear it, cultivate it, and build on it has been of major economic, political, and psychological consequence.[73]

Indeed, the United States has been built through colonial settlement and possession of land, which explains the importance of property exemplified by the possession of a home. As Selcer justifies, the dream of home ownership has deep roots in the American psyche because 'the first colonists came seeking new homes in the New World, and the idea has never died'.[74] The idea of home is thus at the very foundation of the American psyche, and in a predominantly material way. What is important is the possession of a physical home, of a land that one can call one's own, and the epitome of that dream is the house, as opposed to other forms of homes such an apartment for example. Indeed, because 'separateness and individual ownership […] lay at the heart of the American understanding of settlement', as Sally Bayley states, the house is the main embodier of that dream of individuality and separateness.[75] As Saunders and Williams remark: 'the home in Anglo-Saxon culture is represented by a physical ideal (the detached house) and a legal idea (owner-occupation) both of which emphasise household autonomy and both of which represent a stout defiance of collectivism.'[76] The American home is thus firmly constructed against the outside world, and 'rooted in the notion of an unified self-sufficiency'.[77] In 1976 Clare Cooper wrote that 'the high-rise apartment building is rejected by most Americans as a family home' as it is 'perceived unconsciously as a threat to one's self-image as a separate and unique personality'.[78] Although today many Americans living in cities do live in apartment buildings, mostly because there is little other choice, the detached house is still the most powerful ideal of the home that exists in American culture. As John David Rhodes puts it: 'The detached, single-family home is one of the most powerful metonymic signifiers of American cultural life – of the dreams of privacy, enclosure,

73 Marilyn R. Chandler, *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American fiction* (Berkeley and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), p. 1
74 Selcer, p. 54
75 Sally Bayley, *Home on the Horizon: America's search for space, from Emily Dickinson to Bob Dylan* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 6
76 Saunders and Williams, p. 88
77 Bayley, p. 24
78 Clare Cooper, 'The House as Symbol of the Self' in *Environmental Psychology: People and their physical settings*, ed. by Harold M. Proshansky, William H. Ittelson and Leanne G. Rivlin (New York and London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), pp. 435-448 (p. 438)

freedom, autonomy, independence, stability, and prosperity that animate national life in the United States.'[79] As such, the detached single-family home can be seen as the best demonstration of having achieved the American Dream. As Chandler explains:

> «The American Dream» still expresses itself in the hope of owning a freestanding single-family dwelling, which to many remains the most significant measure of the cultural enfranchisement that comes with being an independent, self-sufficient (traditionally male) individual in full possession and control of home and family.[80]

Because of the centrality of the detached single-family home in American culture, it is no surprise that this importance is reflected in the ubiquity of such homes in American fiction. As Chandler states: 'It is hardly possible to cast the mind's eye over the broad landscape of American literature without seeing a series of imposing houses rising in curious shapes along its horizons'.[81] One such house is Gatsby's mansion, described in detail in the very first pages of the novel:

> The one on my right was a colossal affair by any standard – it was a factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool, and more than forty acres of lawn and garden. It was Gatsby's mansion.[82]

The house vividly represents the American Dream of making it in the world, and is used as such by Gatsby in his attempt to impress Daisy. It is a monument 'to the magnitude and persistence of ambitious dreams' as well as a sign 'of misplaced aspirations and ultimate defeat'.[83] Similarly, in *Gone with the Wind* Tara represents Gerald O'Hara's achievement of the American Dream – coming from a poor immigrant background and becoming a respected plantation owner – while Scarlett uses the house she builds when married to Rhett as a signifier of her status as the richest woman in town. Gerald highlights the importance of property of the land, stating: 'Land is the only thing in the world that amounts to anything.'[84] In his article 'Home Sweet Movies' Selcer argues that the phenomenal appeal of the film adaptation of *Gone with the Wind* stems from the fact that the idea of home is at the centre of the film, and that home 'has become more than a place to Americans; it is an institution'.[85] While I have looked at nineteenth-century fiction until now, the same holds true for contemporary American fiction. In his novel *The Corrections*, for example, Jonathan Franzen 'plays off the idealised suburban formula of the single family on its individual lot of land: single units of

79 John David Rhodes, *Spectacle of Property: The house in American film* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2017), p. viii
80 Chandler, pp. 1-2
81 Ibid., p. 1
82 Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (London: Marshall Cavendish, 1988), p. 4
83 Chandler, p. 19
84 Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (London: Macmillan, 1949), p. 39
85 Selcer, p. 55

family happiness' and shows how hollow that idea can actually be.[86] Moreover, as in *The Great Gatsby* or *Gone with the Wind*, Gary's house in *The Corrections* represents his achievement of the American Dream as is exemplified by the constant references to objects, and their size, when either Gary or his nuclear family is discussed, as shown by the following examples: 'on that particular afternoon, as he left *his big schist-sheathed house* on Seminole Street and crossed *his big back yard* and climbed the outside stairs of *his big garage*' and 'Caroline slumped on the *oaken king-sized* bed'.[87] Because of the central place of families in American culture, the American Dream is often associated with the idea of having a stable family, and children to whom one will impart one's possessions. This is slightly paradoxical, as the idea is to be a self-made man but at the same time to pass on one's success to the children who will therefore not be self-made themselves. The American Dream is also linked to family, as it entails the idea of a private home, and, as has been discussed in the first part of this chapter, the home is constructed in relation to family. By examining the home and American Dream in my three American works the issue of family is thus necessarily part of the discussion, as family is a notion common to both concepts.

The family home in *We Were the Mulvaneys* is strongly associated with the American Dream, its achievement and its subsequent failure. High Point Farm, as the very name indicates, is the high point in the life of the Mulvaney family. It announces the success of Michael to the outside world: he is the self-made man of the American Dream. Rhodes's comment that 'the private property of the house is already a spectacle. The house is a medium for making publicly visible the wealth of its owners and inhabitants' directly applies to one of the functions of the house in Oates's novel.[88] The first chapter of the novel is thus named 'The Storybook House' and the house is described minutely throughout. As a farm located several miles outside the town on top of a slope – a journey the narrator takes us on - the house is the epitome of the one family self-standing dwelling and is in stark contrast with the previous Mulvaney residence which is briefly mentioned in the novel: 'a rented duplex in an almost-slummy neighborhood near downtown'.[89] Not only is the first dwelling an apartment, but moreover it is rented, thereby twice negating the dream of the owned self-standing house. As the narrator makes sure to point out, 'High Point Farm was a well-known property in the Valley […] and «Mulvaney» was a well-known name'.[90] The house is thus very clearly identified as the signifier of the family's status in the world: they are a well-known, fairly well-to-do local family, all thanks to Michael's thriving roofing business. This status, and its

86 Bayley, p. 56
87 Jonathan Franzen, *The Corrections* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), p. 159 and p. 182. Emphasis is mine
88 Rhodes, p. ix
89 Joyce Carol Oates, *We Were the Mulvaneys* (New York: Plume, 1996), p. 109
90 Ibid., p. 4

importance, is overtly stated in the novel:

> The Mulvaneys were in fact «well-to-do». At least that was their local reputation. […] High Point Farm was spoken of in admiring terms, and Michael Mulvaney Sr. cut a certain swath in the county, drove new cars and dressed in stylish sporty clothes […]; he was generous with charitable donations, and each July Fourth he opened his front pasture to the Chautauqua County Volunteer Firemen's annual picnic. But in private he fretted over money, the expense of keeping up a farm like High Point.[91]

The idea of the home being linked to the identity of its inhabitant is a crucial and recurrent one, as Mallett notes:

> Many authors refer to the relation between home and identity and/or the concept of the self although few elaborate on the nature of this relationship. Some claim for example that the home, which they typically conflate with house, is an *expression* or *symbol* of the self. Accordingly the house itself, the interior design of the house, and the decorations and use of space all reflect the occupant's sense of self.[92]

This means that because the house we inhabit is our private space it reflects who we are as people. An aspect of this idea is explored by Denis Wood and Robert J. Beck, who see rooms as not only a physical space but one that expresses values and rules.[93] They argue that '*the room is an expression of values*' because the way people furnish them, as well as the rules they devise for the occupation of the space, reflect their background, social class and beliefs: in one word it reflects their identity.[94] Wood and Beck further state that, according to them, the distinction between house and home comes from these rules: 'without the rules the home is not a home, it is a house, it is a sculpture of wood and nails, of plumbing and wiring, of wallpaper and carpet.'[95] As Morley notes, Wood and Beck share with Bachelard 'an appreciation of how most banal domestic objects and structures are not only physical but also laden with values and symbolic meanings'.[96] Saunders and Williams argue in a similar fashion that the 'outside of the house is used to represent both a barrier and a signifier to the world beyond of the values and social placement of the household within'.[97] Thus, because the inhabitants of a house shape their home according to their own personal tastes and values, the home becomes a reflection of this identity. The above excerpt from Oates's novel yields truth to this theory as it shows how much the house in a way for Michael to show the wealth he acquired through his work, even if that means appearing to have more money than he actually does. Michael thus adheres very closely to the fixed notion of the American Dream as he is a perfect

91 Ibid., pp. 76-77
92 Mallett, p. 82
93 Denis Wood and Robert J. Beck, *Home Rules* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. xvi
94 Ibid., p. 6
95 Ibid., pp. 1-2
96 Morley, p. 20
97 Saunders and Williams, p. 84

example of it, as explained later on in the novel:

> Michael Mulvaney, a disowned son of a Catholic working-class family in Pittsburgh, had reimagined himself as a small-town American businessman who owned property, had money and influence, was «known» and «liked» and «respected» in his community. He'd been a loner in his late adolescence, and was now a «family man».[98]

The quotation marks around the words known, liked, respected and family man show that while Michael entirely conforms to this model, the narrator calls attention to the fact that those are all constructs. Michael is the family member who conforms to this model the most, and he is the driving force behind the family's adherence to it. Even though Corinne has also risen in social class – for example she is captivated by '«living in a place of history»! She'd been born on a small farm about fifteen miles to the south where farm life was work, work, work' – she is not straightforwardly subject to the American Dream in the way Michael is.[99] For example she shops at discount stores and is prejudiced against the Country Club to which Michael is desperate to be admitted.

As Michael is the main pursuer of the American Dream and the house is an embodiment of that dream, Michael is thus strongly identified with the house throughout the novel, as exemplified by this passage:

> Our house was a rambling old farmhouse of seven bedrooms, verandas and porches and odd little turrets and towers and three tall fieldstone chimneys. Dad said of the house that it had no *style*, it was *styles*, a quick history of American architecture. […] Dad kept the exterior in A1 condition, of course – especially the roofs that were covered in prime-quality slate of a beautiful plum hue, and drained with seamless aluminium gutters and downspouts. […] Dad […] repainted the wood sections, transforming them from gunmetal gray to lavender with shutters the rich dark purple of fresh eggplant.[100]

Michael is highly concerned with the outward appearance of the house, as the value system of the community indicates that the appearance reflects directly on him, on his capacity as a man, provider, husband and father. Michael is thus a perfect example, as is Corinne, of what Chandler describes as a tendency for American fiction to be 'a history of the project of American self-definition wherein house-building, and for women, house-keeping, have been recognized as a kind of autobiographical enterprise – a visible and concrete means of defining and articulating the self'.[101] The style of High Point Farm is one that Rhodes examines in close detail as one that 'has weighted importantly on cinema's imaginary', which he names the stick and shingle style, and describes as

98 *Mulvaneys*, p. 101
99 Ibid., p. 13
100 Ibid., pp. 12-13
101 Chandler, p. 3

'large houses made of wood, clapboarded or shingled, multistoried, surrounded, if only in part, by balustraded porches, possessed of at least one gable – probably more – or even a mansarded turret'.[102] According to Rhodes, these houses 'signify a kind of middle-class American prosperity' and it is thus no surprise Oates has chosen such a building to house the Mulvaney family.[103] Indeed, as a signifier of middle-class America, it is precisely the goal Michael has been working towards. The physical importance of the house as object is reinforced by the fact that its layout and furniture are precisely described, as shown here for example:

> At the bottom of the stairs […] I tiptoed though the dining room, pushed the swinging door open cautiously (it creaked!) and tiptoed through the kitchen […]. Off the back hall was a small bathroom, and across from it Mike's room, his door closed of course.[104]

In that sense, High Point Farm adheres entirely to Bayley's definition of the free-standing dwelling as encouraging 'unity of thought and feeling, a coherent domestic identity, and a typically American sense of individualism; a comforting singularity away from the world'.[105] Indeed, not only is High Point Farm isolated from immediate neighbours, but the Mulvaneys, before the dismantling of the family, are shown as cultivating an identity separate from everyone else.

High Point Farm is however more than the reflection of the family's social status and values. As I have discussed in the first part of this chapter, the home can also exist as synonymous with the family and reflect the relationships between its different members, which is the case in this novel. Indeed, the home is the only place where the family is seen together, outside they must stand on their own, and in this way the home is associated, and even equated, with the family. Furthermore, different parts of the house are identified with different members, Mike's room is the territory of a young adult where the 'photographs, clippings, plaques, [and] all sort of memorabilia of his four years as a star high school athlete' mark his status as the good-looking, athletic first born.[106] The kitchen, meanwhile, is both the domain of Corinne, in that adhering to traditional gendering of homes, but also, in Judd's words, the 'heart of our household; where we naturally gravitated to seek one another out'.[107] And the staircase is a representation of the whole family dynamic:

> You could do an inventory of the Mulvaney staircase and have a good idea of what the family was like. […] Our lower stairs […] were always cluttered to their edges, for here, as everywhere in the house, all sorts of things accumulated, set down «temporarily» and not picked up again, nor even noticed, for weeks.[108]

102 Rhodes, p. 157
103 Ibid., p. 157
104 *Mulvaneys*, p. 18
105 Bayley, p. 24
106 *Mulvaneys*, p. 158
107 Ibid., p. 45
108 Ibid., p. 18

That the home is exclusively the domain of the family as a unit is made clear by that fact that when the parents wish to speak privately they do so in the converted barn. The home is not the place for individuality but for the family community and functions as the embodiment of their belief that they are a united family who has achieved the American Dream. In this novel Oates thus adheres entirely to Somerville's thesis that the relation which plays a key role in ensuring the home's social importance is that of kinship and family. High Point Farm's existence thus rests on this assumption accepted by the whole family, which explains why it sometimes appears as not entirely real. This is most apparent in the following passages from the first chapter: 'When I think of us then, when we were the Mulvaneys of High Point Farm, I think of the sprawling, overgrown and somewhat jungly farm itself, blurred at the edges as in a dream' and 'In winter, the lavender house seems to float in midair, buoyant and magical as a house in a child's storybook'.[109] Even as its physicality is repeatedly reiterated the house possesses a not-entirely-real quality that alerts the reader to the fact that the American Dream, as held true by the Mulvaneys might actually be faulty. High Point Farm is quintessentially American, both in its architecture and in the dream it embodies for the Mulvaneys, and represents 'the high point of the family's happiness. In this storybook house, the Mulvaneys are a coherent family entity with a seemingly stable identity'.[110] The house thus functions, in the words of Chandler, as a 'structure that absorbs and records and reveals the rise and fall of a family's fortunes as well as its moral degeneration'.[111] And indeed, when the family dismantles they lose their home.

The novel shows that in order for the American Dream to truly succeed, flexibility is required; a flexibility that Michael lacks which thus leads to the dismantlement of the dream, the family, and the house as a symbol of them. Michael's lack of flexibility becomes apparent in his reaction to Marianne's rape and her refusal to report it: he refuses to accept another vision than his own for the family, leading to him and Corinne banishing Marianne. This rigidity is one of the ways in which the Mulvaney family dysfunctions. It is not operating as it should, protecting its members, and therefore becomes harmful. This fall from grace is announced from the very beginning of the novel, as the second paragraph states: 'From summer 1955 to spring 1980 when my dad and mom were forced to sell the property there were Mulvaneys at High Point Farm'.[112] This frames the events leading up to the sale of the house as only temporary, reinforcing the message that the American Dream is never achieved permanently. Michael's removal of the element – Marianne –

109 Ibid., p. 8 and p. 11
110 Brenda Daly, *Lavish Self-divisions: The novels of Joyce Carol Oates* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), p. 197
111 Chandler, p. 11
112 *Mulvaneys*, p. 3

that does not conform to his dream, his refusal to adapt to change, leads to the dismantling of the family, represented by the dismantling of High Point Farm. As Gavin Cologne-Brookes puts it in his analysis of the novel: 'Michael Senior's anger, frustration, and resentment at his inability to be that static vision of a FATHER leads him «to dismantle it» with nothing in its place.'[113] I would argue further that his static vision of father is linked to his static vision of the American Dream, of which 'father' is only one element. His destruction of himself and his family, is thus 'not just to do with the truth that happens to his idea, but with his failure to face the new facts that arise out of his attitude'.[114] As the house embodies the American Dream its failure is thus represented by the dilapidation of the house and its sale. Indeed, a 'conventional house and a rigidly static concept of self are mutually supporting' as Cooper states, but once rigidity goes too far it threatens the concept of self and thus the house.[115] The description of the house following Marianne's rape and banishment, and the consequent departures of Mike and Patrick, is therefore in stark contrast with its description at the beginning of the novel which I have previously quoted:

> High Point Farm would have to be sold. […] To pay off Dad's debts and keep Mulvaney Roofing afloat, my parents had been selling the property piecemeal, only four acres remained. The house, which Mom spoke of as a «historic monument,» and the outbuildings, most of which needed repair. […] The house that was so beautiful in our eyes wasn't beautiful really. The shutters had begun to sag, the slate roofs needed repair. The pale lavender color Mom loved so wasn't practical for our climate and faded after two or three years. It must have been at least five years since the house had been painted.[116]

Where the house once represented the unity of the family, its decrepitude represents the current state of the shattered family. The symbolism of the sale of the house is also made very clear, thanks in part to Judd's incredulity at the mere idea of it:

> I can't believe I'm hearing Mom utter such words *selling the farm* in a rapid stream of words as if they were of no more significance than the other words and all words sheerly air, gesture. […] As if *selling the farm* is already past tense, a kind of history not to be questioned.[117]

The repeated italicisation of 'selling the farm' makes it stand out as a phrase that Judd cannot use without distance, as the idea is so foreign to him. The significance of the sale is further reinforced by the repetition of the phrase 'High Point Farm was sold' in a short span of pages, as well as by Judd likening the house to their soul: 'Like selling your soul. Once you make the decision, sign the

113 Gavin Cologne-Brookes, *Dark Eyes on America: The novels of Joyce Carol Oates* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), p. 198
114 Ibid., p. 199
115 Cooper, p. 448
116 *Mulvaneys*, p. 258
117 Ibid., pp. 254-255

contract, you can't back out'.[118] Rhodes comments that the 'property *of* the house and *in* the house, is perhaps the most mysterious and desired feature of housing' but as he shows property 'is fungible and alienable; thus whatever is promised by the house is radically susceptible to violation, displacement, and loss', which becomes the case in *We Were the Mulvaneys* when the house has to be sold.[119]

As High Point Farm represents the American Dream, when it fails the characters are separated from one another and the houses they inhabit cannot be given the name home: they are merely dwellings. High Point Farm had symbolised the united family and, in turn, these other houses represent the state of each of the characters. For example, the radical difference between High Point Farm and Patrick's apartment in Cornell is exemplified in the description of the dwelling as an 'ugly, […] melancholy and *squat*' 'moldering stucco house' with a 'pervasive smell of mildew, mice, drains, Airwick', and in Patrick's comment: 'Not quite the «purple» house, is it?'.[120] Both Mike and Judd also occupy run down buildings: when the family falls apart the places the Mulvaney brothers inhabit represent their changed social status, as well as mirroring their internal state of loss, solitude and anguish. The house that best demonstrates the difference with High Point Farm, however, is the one Michael, Corinne and Judd move in to right after the family home is sold. Oates repeatedly refers to the house as a split-level ranch with quotation marks, in order to underline the foreignness it holds for the Mulvaneys. The house also offers a clear contrast with the original description of High Point Farm:

> A tacky «split-level ranch» with glary-white aluminium siding like corrugated metal, «simulated redwood» trim, «picture window», carport on a two-third acre lot. The cement block basement showed peculiarly like bared gums in a giant mouth, only a few scrawny bushes grew around the house and there could not have been more than five spindly trees on the entire property. […] Mom hadn't much space for her previous things in the «split-level ranch» which was primarily a single floor sprawled out in a formula rectangle, living room/dining room/kitchen/«rec room»/ three bedrooms at the rear of which two were small […]. There was an attic no larger than our corncrib at High Point Farm […]. All the rooms of the new house were full to bursting with familiar things made strange and disturbing by their crowdedness and juxtaposition in this new setting.[121]

This house is directly compared to High Point Farm in order to highlight the characters' feelings towards their new setting and how it mirrors their destroyed family. Furthermore, the novel insists that this might be a house, but it will never be a home: 'The split-level ranch with the glary-white aluminium siding was not *home* and would never be *home*', highlighting the difference I have

118 Ibid., pp. 356-358
119 Rhodes, p. viii
120 *Mulvaneys*, pp. 214-215
121 Ibid., pp. 359-360

established in Part I.[122] Michael's decline is mirrored in his subsequent dwellings as they progressively get worse. At each stage of his descent into alcoholism his dwelling reflects Michael's state and his distance from his previous embodiment of the American Dream. The break from the family is also made clear by the fact that all the Mulvaney brothers move into apartments, and not houses, eliciting the following reaction from their parents: 'Why the hell did Mike want to move to town, to an apartment! *A mere apartment*.'[123] On the contrary, Marianne, who has been exiled against her wishes, always lives in houses. Furthermore, Marianne repeatedly stays in houses that resemble her family home, thus highlighting her longing for the place. The Co-op, for example, described as 'a big old ramshackle inn with several greenhouses, two acres of good rich soil where they grew their own vegetables', is similar to High Point Farm but cannot replace it for Marianne, and its shortcomings are also depicted: 'The room Marianne shared with Felice-Marie was smaller than her room at home, with only a single window […]. There was a yeasty, not-very-fresh smell.'[124] Marianne's move from house to house after her expulsion from High Point Farm shows that her banishment from her home renders her unable to find a new one.

In *We Were the Mulvaneys*, the American Dream crumbles when Michael is not able to adapt to change and banishes his daughter, and thus the Dream can only be reached once more when the daughter is reintegrated into the family, when Michael allows change to take place. This happens at the end of the novel, when Michael is dying in the hospital, and is described as follows:

> So it was in Stump Creek Hill […] that Marianne was living when, at last, as she'd almost given up hoping, Corinne telephoned to say, in a voice trembling with excitement and dread, «Oh Marianne! Honey! Your father wants to see you! How quickly can you get here?» Marianne […] hesitated only for a moment, pressing the heel of her hand against her heart, and said, «I'll be right there, Mom! I'll leave right away.» […] Corinne said, «Honey wait – we're in Rochester. At the University Medical Clinic. *Hurry*.» So Marianne knew what it was, what it must be. *Hurry. Hurry. Hurry.* After twelve years of exile. *Hurry!*[125]

Because of Michael's final acceptance of flexibility, following his death the rest of the family can be reunited. As Cologne-Brookes notes: 'their best chance of happiness, and in some cases therefore of survival, lies with those able to evolve in the face of time and events.'[126] This then allows the family to find a new home, in the form of Corinne's new house, one that bears a strong resemblance to High Point Farm:

> Mom's new home, which she shared with her friend Sable Mills, was on a hillside on New Canaan Road,

122 Ibid., p. 366
123 Ibid., p. 179
124 Ibid., p. 213 and p. 263
125 Ibid., pp. 398-399
126 Cologne-Brookes, p. 196

about six miles south of Mt. Ephraim and eighteen miles southwest of High Point Farm. […] the place is attractive. The house and outbuildings and pastures, what you can see from the narrow country road. That pert little barn freshly painted an eye-catching royal blue […] Oh, it was just a coincidence, Mom insisted, that Alder Creek, beautiful Alder Creek, narrow and treacherously swift-flowing, was less than a mile away from the property, traversing New Canaan Road; the same Alder Creek that ran through our old High Point Farm property to the north. […] The house was two storeys, rotted-looking clapboard siding, a tilting stone chimney, badly sagging porch at front and rear.[127]

By writing 'Oh, it was just a coincidence, Mom insisted' Oates calls attention to the fact that Judd is not fooled by Corinne's denial, and neither should the reader. Corinne is the one able to build this new home, as contrarily to her husband she is able to adapt to change. I would thus agree with Cologne-Brookes that 'Corinne's possibly naïve faith helps her adapt where her husband's static perspective is destructive' and her adaptation allows not only her survival but for a new chance at happiness symbolised by her new home.[128]

Houses in *We Were the Mulvaneys* strongly reflect the characters' identity, and the original family home embodies the American Dream in which Michael believes. When the dream falls apart, due to Michael's refusal to adapt to change, the house reflects that failure, even in the characters' minds as shown by Corinne's fear: 'she saw High Point Farm on the very edge of High Point Road, the steep drop along its dangerous stretches, thinking *Why we will fall over, fall to the bottom and be lost*.'[129] In regard to the failure of the American Dream, Friedman comments that:

The paradox in much of Oates's fiction is that her characters push to transcend their circumstances, but it is their fate to discover that they are imprisoned in a dream polluted by the real circumstances of American life. Although the individual's dreams take the forms shaped by the ideals of his culture, the extent to which they are realizable is circumscribed by the realities of that culture.[130]

While I agree that the real circumstances of American life – rape, bankruptcy – do pollute Michael's dream in the novel and circumscribe the extent to which he can realise it, I would argue that the most important limit to his dream is in reality his own lack of flexibility in the shaping of that dream. Indeed, by refusing to relinquish his ideal of the American Dream, he believes that no alternative is possible, that nothing can bring him as much happiness, therefore not only establishing the dream as more important than reality, but as more important than the family which ironically is one element of the dream. I therefore agree with Friedman's statement that Oates's fiction 'documents the necessity for compromise, reconciliation, association, and reciprocity' reflected by the optimistic trajectory of Corinne and Marianne who are both able to compromise,

127 *Mulvaneys*, pp. 435-436
128 Cologne-Brookes, p. 204
129 *Mulvaneys*, p. 185
130 Friedman, p. 12

adapt and reconcile.[131]

Even though High Point Farm is shown to have been 'a communal fiction', home is still a very important concept in *We Were the Mulvaneys*, as it is in many of Oates's novels.[132] As Friedman points out: 'although her protagonists […] often leave home, «home» – and all that a definite place in the world implies – is a persistent concern of her fiction.'[133] Indeed, home is still the main point of reference for the Mulvaney children, even when they have been exiled or have left it. For instance, even though Marianne 'was so happy at the Green Isle Co-op […] sometimes she felt guilty about wanting in secret to go *home*. Not that she ever uttered the word *home* aloud' and similarly, once High Point Farm is sold, for Judd: '*Home* wasn't *home* and wasn't very real and that was fine with me.'[134] Oates also comments on the significance of home in American culture:

> It was fashionable among the Kilburn College students generally, Marianne noted, to complain of *home*, *family*. Her professors made witty jokes about «domestic American rituals» – Thanksgiving, Christmas, gift-giving, family summer vacations – in such knowing ways, everyone in class laughed; or almost everyone. Marianne perceived that to be without a family in America is to be deprived not just of that family but of an entire arsenal of allusive material as cohesive as algae covering a pond.[135]

Oates thus shows the weight carried by the concept of home and its ramifications, and her comments on house and home in her recent autobiography on her childhood are similar:

> A house is a structural arrangement of space, geometrically laid out to provide what are called rooms, and these rooms divided from one another by walls, ceilings, floors. The *house* contains the *home* but is not identical with it. The *house* anticipates the *home* and will survive it, reverting again to *house* when *home* has departed.[136]

These remarks apply directly to the houses she depicts in *We Were the Mulvaneys*: High Point Farm is a home, as well as Corinne's final house and Stump Creek Hill, while all the others are merely houses, 'structural arrangement[s] of space'. Oates thus ascribes entirely to the theory developed in the first part of this chapter that while a house and a home have something in common, they are not entirely equivalent concepts. Amid homes, the childhood one, the original one, is given special significance by Oates. Corinne's musing in *We Were the Mulvaneys* about how 'You never outgrow the landscape of your childhood […]. What's oldest in your memory you love best, cherish' echoes Oates in *The Lost Landscape*, as she writes that 'the houses of our earliest childhoods are houses of recurring dreams that are yet subtly altered, as if approximation of memory, or interpretations of

131 Ibid, p. 20
132 Cologne-Brookes, p. 196
133 Friedman, p. 2
134 *Mulvaneys*, p. 313 and p. 367
135 Ibid., pp. 313-314
136 Joyce Carol Oates, *The Lost Landscape: A writer's coming of age* (London: Fourth Estate, 2015), pp. 90-91

memory, and not memory itself'.[137] Home is thus significant in that it embodies the family as well as feelings of comfort and solace, but that is intrinsically linked to its status as a physical place, one that is predominant in the American Dream as it can be located and shown off.

The use of the family home in *August: Osage County* bears some similarity to its use in *We Were the Mulvaneys*, as the house is the place where much of everyday life is experienced. Rhodes notes that: 'Cinema, in seeking to represent this life and its effect and narrative incidents, must, perforce, make use of the house as a representational support. The house is the ground of realist representation and it is everywhere in cinema.'[138] This is very much the case in Wells's film, where the house appears in the first shots of the film and provides information about the Weston family. In the first few minutes the viewer thus learns that the film is set in rural Oklahoma and that the Weston are a middle-class family, as the outside appearance of the house – its style, its size – indicates. The shots of the inside of the house further reveal that the house belongs to educated people – Beverly's office contains many books – who have adult children – the photographs.

137 *Mulvaneys*, p. 123 and *Lost Landscape*, pp. 329-330
138 Rhodes, p. vii

A sense of isolation is also instilled as no neighbouring house can be seen, and few characters are actually present in the house.

The importance of the house as a physical object is thus underlined by the information it provides as a reflection of the identity of its owners. Like High Point Farm, as a detached single-family dwelling, the Westons's house is representative of the ideal conveyed by American culture. The style of the house, being of the stick and shingle type, is also similar to High Point Farm, and as Rhodes notes:

> stick and shingle styles allow cinema to show off its ability to play with scale and capture contingency. Stick and shingle style houses prove to be both durable and flexible as figures for American cinema's conflicted relation to history and to property, and to the class entitlements that property makes manifest.[139]

139 Ibid., p. 159

Indeed, as I have previously mentioned, the style of the house indicates the owners belong to the middle class. The importance of the house as a physical object is reinforced by the fact that its layout is well mapped out throughout the film: the viewer understands how the different rooms connect with one another marking the reality of the house as significant.

Contrary to Oates's novel, in *August: Osage County* the American Dream is never shown as achievable but as having already failed. Although Violet and Beverly have managed to build a home and a family, the flaws are apparent from the beginning and are best exemplified in the house itself. Indeed, the maintenance of the building does not appear to be of great importance to the couple as the paint is chipped, the fence that encloses the house is an unattractive metallic one and the garden looks like an abandoned waste land.

As Wells films these details in close-up and places them at the beginning of the work, it emphasises the derelict nature of the house and frames the entire narrative. The most obvious sign of the situation being amiss, however, is the darkness within the house itself as the shaded are tapped and only a diluted yellow light comes through.

As the following exchange shows, the darkness of the house is a direct reflection of the state of mind of its inhabitants:

Charlie: Do you know its purpose? You can't tell if it's night or day.
Ivy: I think that's the purpose.

Indeed, Beverly and Violet's decision to live shut off from the outside world, and even outside light, displays their depression, alcoholism and addiction to pills. In that way, the gloom of the house directly mirrors the couple's identity. Chandler writes that in American literature the 'house is frequently treated as a schematic reiteration of the character of the central figure in a story' and I would argue that can apply equally well to houses in cinema, as shown by the example of A*ugust: Osage County* here.[140] When discussing the original play Robert L. King identifies the house as a 'symbol of an enclosed, deteriorating country'.[141] He uses as a first example a line by Violet which is not spoken in the film – 'You know this house is falling apart, something about the basement or the sump pump or the foundation.' – but as I have discussed, the film shows the house being decrepit so there is no need for the character to state it outright.[142] The second exchange King mentions is present in the film, and extends the dereliction of the house to include Oklahoma. It is a line spoken by Barbara to Bill, as they are driving through an empty landscape: 'What were these people thinking? The jokers who settled this place? Who was the asshole who looked at all that flat, hot nothing and planted his flag? I mean, we fucked the Indians for this?'. The failure of the American Dream for Beverly and Violet thus extends further to show how it has been constructed against part of the population, the Native Americans. Indeed, as Chandler explains: 'For settlers, building on this

140 Chandler, p. 10
141 Robert L. King, 'Alternate Americas' in *North American Review*, Vol. 293, No. 2 (March-April 2008), pp. 41-43 (p. 43)
142 Tracy Letts, *August: Osage County* (New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc, 2009), p. 22

land meant […] suppressing the guilt attached to violent expropriation of land and entering a long struggle over the relations between political rights and property ownership.'[143] Therefore, Bayley's statement that 'America is new; to be American is novel' negates part of the history of the continent.[144] If for some Americans to be American is novel, that is not the case for another segment of the population. The film addresses this issue through the character of Johnna and her interaction with the house. Indeed, Johnna is hired by Beverly to look after their home and is then seen solely occupying the domestic space of the house. Aside from her room – which is located in the attic, at the top of a narrow and steep staircase – the character is only seen in the kitchen, and the veranda and dining room when she is serving others. Furthermore, she is shown overhearing, but not participating, in the following discussion between Violet and Barbara about Native Americans:

Violet: They aren't any more native than me.
Barbara: In fact, they are.

The depiction of the house in *August: Osage County* is thus bound with the depiction of the Westons, but also with the wider representation of the relationships between races. In that sense, the film tends to agree with Rhodes's argument that 'race and the raced body are fundamentally bound up in the spectacle of property, even when nonwhite bodies do not appear onscreen'.[145] If the American Dream has failed for the Westons it could be because the dream itself is premised on the domination of one group and thus has no valid foundation.

Beverly and Violet's construction of a home and a family is also doomed because of their inability to move past their traumatic childhood. Indeed, as in Oates where the American Dream can only be maintained if one is adaptive to change, in *August: Osage County* the impossibility for the parents to move beyond their past condemns their future. Thus, the film is riddled with the revelation of secrets, which showcase how the family is corrupted from the inside, as will be further discussed in Chapter IV. Many important conversations take place on the porch – the aforementioned discussion about Native Americans, the revelation of Beverly and Mattie Fae's affair – which is significant when one looks at Bayley's exploration of the porch as 'providing a partially enclosed space formed from an array of semi-permanent surfaces, the porch was designed to fend off the elements; a layer of skin between the body of the house and its internal organs'.[146] The porch therefore allows Mattie Fae to reveal her secret to Barbara as it is a space symbolic of protection and, further, one that 'lends itself as a performance space for the acting out of scenes and

143 Chandler, p. 1
144 Bayley, p. 46
145 Rhodes, p. x
146 Bayley, p. 76

rituals'.[147] Because the house is fundamentally flawed, it is a trap rather than a refuge for most of the characters, and especially so for the Weston daughters. For them, the return home is a return to 'a kingdom with its own presiding rules and rulers. The road that leads home leads back to a particular order: a certain way of doing things'.[148] Therefore none of the sisters seem at ease in the house and this forced return home appears to weigh on them. Barbara describes the house as 'this madhouse' while Karen's ignorance of the current state of the house is demonstrated by her surprise that the old fort had been taken down, even though according to Ivy it has 'been gone for years'. Karen attempts to feel some nostalgia for the house and for their childhood but her effort is squashed by her mother's violence and the evident lack of nostalgia her sisters have regarding their childhood.

The link between home and nostalgia comes up repeatedly in discussions of houses and homes. Mallett points it out, writing that 'References to the symbolic potency of the ideal or idealized home recur throughout home literature. […] Discussion of the ideal home generally focuses on nostalgic or romantic notions of home'.[149] The word nostalgia itself is associated with home, as it comes 'from the Greek words *nostos* («to return home») and *algia* («longing»)', as Moran notes.[150] Lukacs similarly comments that 'the very word *nostalgia* in Greek meant, literally, homesickness, a painful longing for a place like home, for something we have once known'.[151] This explains this recurrent longing for the return home which appears in the debates surrounding the notion of home. This idea of a return is linked with memories, the memory of the past that was, or has been reimagined, as a time of happiness taking place at home. Wood and Beck explore this idea of home and memory in the following passage:

> We conceive of a room […] as the instantiation of a kind of collective memory. […] it stores *in the arrangement of its parts* how, for instance, we sill sit with each other so that we do not have to figure it out every time anew. But, more fundamentally, we mean that, insofar as these arrangements emerge from the pasts of those living the room, the room is a *memory* of those pasts.[152]

This is also, of course, what many of Bachelard's ideas are premised upon, as he believes that 'grâce à la maison, un grand nombre de nos souvenirs sont logés'.[153] However, for him the memory is not collective, but singular. He is solely interested in the individual and writes that the house contains an individual's memories, and it is through dreaming that one can gain access to them once more. In that way memories are intrinsically linked to the house in which they were experienced, as the

147 Ibid., p. 75
148 Ibid., p. 172
149 Mallett, p. 69
150 Moran, p. 34
151 Lukacs, p. 625
152 Wood and Beck, p. xv
153 Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), p. 27

following passage makes clear: 'Habiter oniriquement la maison natale, c'est plus que l'habiter par le souvenir, c'est vivre dans la maison disparue comme nous y avons rêvé.'[154] What this passage also brings up is the importance of the original childhood home when one talks about a return to the house. The nostalgia for home is thus also a nostalgia for childhood. As Moran points out: 'Bachelard's house of dream-memory […] conveys the possibility of return to a pure point of origin.'[155] There is thus the idea of returning to purity, to times of pure happiness, and the house provides the embodiment of those memories (both real and fabricated); returning to the home therefore means returning to the past. As Bachelard puts it: 'Dans ses milles alvéoles, l'espace tient du temps comprimé. L'espace sert à ça.'[156] And indeed, because houses provide a physical place to associate with memories of events and experiences they necessarily become the symbol for those memories. As Moran puts it: 'houses provide us with a sense that the past can be preserved within the stable confines of their solid walls. […] the house reflects the dual status of everyday life, which combines, the concrete and textural with the contingent and ephemeral.'[157]

Although convincing, it is important to note that this view of the house as the site of memory and catalyser of nostalgia is dependent on a specific context. Indeed, as Moran remarks, houses 'communicate different kinds of memory and nostalgia depending on their relative reserves of cultural and economic capital'.[158] A house can only evoke nostalgia, and a longing for the past, if the memories they shelter are positive ones, in the same way that the home is only seen as a refuge if it does actually offer protection. Claiming that homes are universally refuges and evoke nostalgia is therefore dangerous, as it does not take into account the different experiences of homes that exist. Furthermore, it runs the risk of putting too much emphasis on the importance of childhood in one's life, a criticism that both Rachel Bowlby and Joseph Boughey have addressed to Bachelard, with the latter writing that 'Bachelard does not celebrate adult experiences of space, beyond the incorporation of childhood space into adult memory and daydreaming, or the intimacy, with space and with others, that may develop in adulthood'.[159] Through Karen's reminiscing about the old fort, *August: Osage County* toys with the idea that childhood homes are nostalgic but refutes it by reminding both the characters and the audience that childhood can be traumatic and that one does not necessarily feels nostalgic for the original home. Thanks to Violet the sisters cannot even entertain the deceit that they feel nostalgic, as she is too violent towards them.

154 Ibid., pp. 33-34
155 Moran, p. 34
156 Bachelard, p. 27
157 Moran, p. 42
158 Ibid., p. 33
159 Joseph Boughey, 'One Widower's Home: Excavating some disturbed meanings of domestic space' in *Our House: The representation of domestic space in modern culture*, ed. by Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 227-246 (p. 237). See also Rachel Bowlby, p. 76

Throughout the film the camera frames Violet as the domineering figure in most scenes; she is the owner of the house and as such looms over the visitors. Tellingly, the only moment that approaches tenderness shared by Violet and her daughters takes place outside of the house, in the garden, as if away from its walls they can all breathe better. Furthermore, it is during that scene that Violet recognises her enmity, as she states: 'My mama was a mean, nasty, mean old lady. I suppose that's where I get it from'. The sisters are thus being held hostage in their childhood home, which Bayley describes as 'the most damning of fates. It is to be ransomed to the past in the present as well as the future. And it is to make home the bitter gall of progress'.[160] Barbara is clearly depicted as a hostage of the home in the scene in which Ivy leaves: the camera frames her as being trapped in between the house, which looms behind her and takes up all the background, and the fence in the foreground which cuts her off from the rest of the world.

Violet is later framed similarly when Barbara leaves, with the difference that she is shot from the inside of the house, as if the house itself is watching her, and she stays separated from the outside world by the mesh of the porch – thus indicating the utter impossibility of her escape.

160 Bayley, p. 174

As Elisabeth Bronfen notes:

> Any imaginary notion of home, referring to a familiar haven of safety, could then be understood, from the start, to be inscribed by something foreign, and the articulation of this fundamental dislocation at the heart of the home is at stake in any experience of the uncanny.[161]

Indeed, in the case of the Westons, home is from the very beginning not a place of refuge but that of entrapment, of force being imposed. The film goes full circle showing the whole family coming to the home before leaving again, seemingly for good in the case of Barbara, Ivy and Karen. As Sebesta and Choate write in their review of the original play: 'The arc of the production's action demonstrated the way a home becomes impossibly full and then suddenly, blessedly or terrifyingly, empty.'[162] Once all her family members have left Violet is briefly reinforced as the owner of her house by dancing in the living room, but soon the house is shown to be a trap even for her, as she cries out for, and goes in search of Johnna. Ironically, the lyrics of the song Violet dances to – *Lay Down Sally* by Eric Clapton – , which is also used over the opening credits, are as follow:

There is nothing that is wrong
In wanting you to stay here with me
I know you've got somewhere to go
But won't you make yourself at home and stay with me?
And don't you ever leave

There lyrics thus call for togetherness while Violet is left with no family members. Even though Violet is one of the engineers of this home environment, she is nevertheless hostage to it as well.

161 Elisabeth Bronfen, *Home in Hollywood: The imaginary geography of cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 23
162 Sebesta and Choate, p. 105

She even states it outright, telling Barbara that part of the reason Beverly killed himself was that Barbara left and it was 'Just him and me in this house. Alone. In the dark. Abandoned. Wasted lifetime'. Their inability to move past their traumatic past thus condemns Beverly to suicide and Violet to being estranged from her daughters instead of living the American Dream, which from the outside they seem to have achieved by going from a poor background and becoming middle-class owners of their own home, and in the case of Beverly becoming a recognised poet.

The importance of place in *August: Osage County* is apparent in the title of the film itself which calls attention to the setting of the action. It is then reinforced several times in the film, as Barbara counters Bill when he calls Osage County the Midwest by saying: 'Midwest? This is the Plains. A state of mind, a spiritual affliction, like the blues'. Violet further states the importance of the place by telling Barbara: 'You never would've gotten Beverly Weston out of Oklahoma.' The centrality of the setting is reinforced by the choice of country music, and is also underlined by the inclusion throughout the film of long shots of the landscape, shown as pure nature devoid of human nature, save for lonely cars on roads that stretch to the horizon, as is the case in the final images which show Barbara driving away.

Bayley points to the importance of nature in the American imagination by stating that 'the American sense of manifest destiny has always relied upon an infinite and ensuing amount of space, an interminable stretch between home and horizon'.[163] The aridity and loneliness of the landscape in this film reflect that of Beverly and Violet's childhoods, and are mirrored by the similar qualities of their house. The home in *August: Osage County* therefore functions as a trap, an idea that several theorists have discussed and which I come back to when looking at Vigan's work. The confinement of the house mirrors the similar feeling of entrapment which the Weston sisters have towards their

163 Bayley, p. 154

family. If the family was functioning properly the house would not be a trap for its members, and the fact that it is thus alerts us to its dysfunctional character. As Sebesta and Choate state: 'In *August*, the Weston's house is everyone's home – a harrowing and hilarious portrait of the American family as our greatest blessing and our greatest curse.'[164] The house is primordial in the film as it physically represents both the dream Beverly and Violet aspired to and its failing: the large family home is shut off from the inside and acts as trap rather than a refuge.

The Savages presents a different vision of what a home is and questions the very notion of home itself. The lack of family unity in the film is reflected by the absence of a family home which could serve to bring Lenny, Jon and Wendy together. They all live in different cities and the siblings' dwellings, cluttered and mostly impersonal spaces, reflect their inhabitants' difficulty to be fulfilled by life. Jenkins's film thus offers an exploration of the home that departs from the ones in *We Were the Mulvaneys* and *August: Osage County*, but one that nevertheless touches on the American Dream, and it does so mainly through the focus on the two places Lenny stays in. The first one is the house in the retirement community in Arizona, presented in the opening sequence of the film, and typifying the difference between exterior and interior, between the dream and the reality. Indeed, the film first presents a seemingly idyllic retirement community, where elderly people are tanned, good-looking, laughing, and healthy enough to participate in activities such as dancing, golfing, cycling and water aerobics.

As the camera travels through the streets of Sun City, filming the houses, the atmosphere appears to be affluent and quiet.

164 Sebesta and Choate, p. 106

The general atmosphere adheres to the description of Sun City – a real retirement community in Arizona – as found on the company's website:

> Welcome to Sun City AZ, the Original Fun City! Most of what's featured in a 55+ active adult community originated right here in Sun City AZ. It all began with an idea to develop an entire community in the Southwest dedicated to a more leisurely lifestyle and unending choices of recreation for the retired, active adult. Through more than 50 years, Sun City AZ has flourished and become an unsurpassed leader in terms of value and vitality. Our legacy is to continue providing our residents with a place to live that is enriching, unique, and world-class, regardless of whether you are retired or continue to work well into your golden years.[165]

However, as soon as the camera travels inside Lenny and Doris's house, the reality is revealed to be entirely different. Both characters are frail, wearing pyjamas or underwear, Doris seems absent and needs to be looked after by an orderly and it quickly becomes apparent Lenny is experiencing dementia.

165 <http://suncityaz.org> [Accessed 8 February 2017]

They are a far cry from the people seen in the previous shots, or even from the photograph of the two of them seen on the refrigerator in which they appear smiling and healthy on a golf court.

The camera makes a point to linger on the picture in order to insist on the difference between what it shows and what the reality is. This contrast is reinforced through the use of light, colours and music. Indeed, the exterior sequence is basked in a warm, yellow light, the colours are bright and the music playing is soft while in the interior sequence the music has stopped, the light is dull and the colours muted, in hues of green and yellow. Having the exterior bear resemblance to an advertisement thus appears as an warning that what it is depicting is not the reality. Jenkins highlights the irony of believing these picture perfect images by displaying the film's title *The Savages* in a curly font above a group of smiling elderly women, who look anything but savage, as they are performing a dance choreography in front of a manicured hedge.

She further reinforces the contrast by having a soft song, *I Don't Want to Play in Your Yard*, playing over the sequence. This critique of retirement communities is echoed in Bayley's exploration of such places:

> America's corporate retirement communities testify to the nation's incipient fear of ageing, a fear managed by a prescriptive lifestyle of golf, bingo nights and trips to Wal-Mart […]. A simulated version of «hometown», the retirement village offers banal elevator music and outdoor green carpeting between buildings to enable slipper wearing inside and out. Simulated neighbourhood clubs offer bar snacks in china bowls monogrammed with the village logo, and like the pretzels served at the bar, the whole atmosphere is brittle with poor circulation and the dry breath of death. It is a place for people frightened by difference and change, which fortunately for the developers, holds captive the easily won majority of the elderly. America's retirement villages are colonies of knee-jerk capitalism where the community trails are safely predictable and easily followed. […] Retirement communities are a clear indication of the national preference for specialised spaces. Retirement in America means receding into the domestic distance – over the horizon of working life and into a sluggish rhythm of slow, unwinding leisure.[166]

The opening sequence of *The Savages* thus present the difference between the American dream of retirement, as described by Bayley, and the actual reality of ageing and death. Jenkins further highlights the hollowness of such a dream by showing it as dependent on one's income. Indeed, following Doris's death, Wendy and Jon find out that their father has no legal rights on the house: leisurely and peaceful retirements are only available to those who have the means to purchase it for themselves.

The Savages continue this exploration of the struggle between dream and reality throughout the film, through the hospital rooms and retirement homes Lenny visits. As Jenkins contrasts the exterior and interior in the opening sequence, she similarly contrasts Arizona in general with the hospital in which Wendy and Jon first meet their father, and the later retirement home they put him in in Buffalo. Susan Bainbrigge has commented on how this is achieved in stylistic terms, writing

166 Bayley, p. 165

that Jenkins

contrasts the bright, daylight shots of Sun City with sombre, impersonal depictions of nursing home and hospital interiors, providing swift changes in atmosphere and mood, from the almost manic good living of the retirement community to the depressing dullness of the depiction of the anonymous hospital rooms.[167]

Although I agree with Bainbrigge's analysis of the different styles, I would argue that when Jenkins depicts the 'good living of the retirement community' she is actually calling attention to the hypocrisy of such places. Jenkins continues her exploration of such an hypocrisy through Wendy's struggle to accept the retirement home Jon has found for their father. This storyline also serves to question the very notion of such places being called 'homes'. This is first explored in a phone call between Jon and Wendy when he calls to inform her he has found a place for their father:

Jon: This place they don't call it a nursing home.
Wendy: Well, what do they call it?
Jon: A rehabilitation center. It's called the Valley View.

At that moment the camera pans to the building in question, which had not been see beforehand, and which is revealed to be a generic brick building of three stories with no valley view to speak of.

167 Susan Bainbrigge, '*Les Belles Images?* Mid-Life Crisis and Old Age in Tamara Jenkins' *The Savages*' in *Existentialism and Contemporary Cinema: A Beauvoirian perspective*, ed. by Jean-Pierre Boulé and Ursula Tidd (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), pp. 149-159 (p. 151)

The snow and the muted light reinforce an atmosphere which is far from idyllic. The camera stays on the building as Wendy replies : 'That sounds nice', showing the distance between what she imagines and the reality. It also informs the rest of the conversation between the siblings:

Wendy: Is it?
Jon: It's a nursing home, Wendy.
Wendy: Does it smell?
Jon: Yeah, it smells. They all smell. Look this place has an empty bed, they take Medicaid and it's close to my house. Believe me, once you get inside, these places are all the same.

This sequence serves to establish the different approaches of Wendy and Jon, as well as to start the exploration of the reality of retirement homes. The depiction of nursing homes questions the very name 'home' being ascribed to them. The Valley View appears as a generic, impersonal place which does not conform to the concept of home and the values of identity, comfort and solace attached to it. As Bayley explains 'the first settlers chose to order their experience around an everyday reality: the belief in a natural order of things as reflected in daily life' and at 'the heart of this everyday experience of divinity was the American home', and thus it is at home that 'things become invested with personal meaning'.[168] But retirement homes, as shown in the film, are not invested with personal meaning, thus rendering the use of the term 'home' incorrect and hypocritical. Indeed, Wendy buys a lamp and pillows seeking to make their father's shared room more personal, but her attempt is shown as hollow as Lenny does not appear to care about his room. The scene following Lenny's passing, in which Wendy and Jon pick these objects up, reinforces their ultimate uselessness in the face of death. Jenkins shows there is a wish to believe that retirement homes can be 'homes' but that their reality defies that dream. The 'house as symbol-of-self is deeply engrained

168 Bayley, pp. 1-2

in the American ethos' and the film prompts us to examine what happens when people age and they cannot stay in their home.[169]

The reality of ageing and death is further explored in Wendy and Jon's argument following Wendy's lies about her father's dementia in an attempt to get him a place in a more luxurious nursing home:

Jon: Why are you wasting our time on fantasies?
Wendy: […] I mean, Jesus, I'm just doing it for Dad.
Jon: Dad's not the one who has a problem with the Valley View.
Wendy: I'm just trying to improve his situation. Is that a crime?
Jon: There's nothing wrong with Dad's situation. Dad's situation is fine. But he's never going to adjust to it if we keep yanking him out of there. And actually, this upward mobility fixation of yours it's counterproductive, and, frankly, pretty selfish.
Wendy: Selfish?
Jon: Yeah. Cause it's not about Dad. It's about you, you and your guilt. That's what these places prey upon.
Wendy: I happen to think it's nicer here.
Jon: Well, of course you do. Because you're the consumer they wanna target, you're the guilty demographic. The landscaping, the neighbourhood's of care, they're not for the residents they're for the relatives. People like you and me who don't want to admit to what's really going on.
Wendy: Which is what Jon?
Jon: People are dying, Wendy! Right inside that beautiful building, right now, it's a fucking horror show! And all this wellness propaganda and the landscaping is just there to obscure the miserable fact that people die! And death is gaseous and gruesome, and it's filled with shit and piss and rotten stink.

During this sequence Lenny is sitting in the car while his children argue a few feet away. At times, the camera forays inside the car to show Lenny's point of view, as well as offering a shot of him sitting in the car behind Wendy which reinforces his lack of voice in this debate.

Wendy and Jon present the struggle of caring for an elderly relative, while the treatment of this

169 Cooper, p. 437

struggle comments on the place of old age and death in the American society. People wish to believe in the dream of the retirement communities and upscale nursing homes, but as Jon brutally reminds Wendy 'death is gaseous and gruesome'. The films seems to argue that accepting the reality is the only way to improve it. Indeed, it is only when Wendy accepts Valley View that she is able to see the positive side of it, namely the nurses and orderlies. They are shown as caring and Wendy briefly strikes a friendship up with one of them. Jenkins takes this opportunity to address issues of race in the United States, as the nursing home staff are all black, demonstrating that physically demanding, low-pay jobs are ascribed to a certain part of the American population. She also makes this point when Doris dies in a nail salon staffed by young Asian women. This is similar to the exploration of the place given to Native Americans in *August: Osage County*, and both films show that the American dream, should it exist, is only available to a certain population. *The Savages* attempts not only to show the reality behind the dream, but also argues that one needs to accept reality in order to transcend it. This is true for Wendy and the nursing home, as I have just discussed, but more generally for Wendy and Jon's relationship with their father. Indeed, it is only by accepting his shortcomings that they are able to have a few meaningful moments with him. Although caring for their abusive father is not initially a responsibility Jon is keen to accept, by doing so he becomes closer to his sister, and the end of the film offers hope for both of them. Home in *The Savages* is thus a pretext to examine the difference between the American Dream and its reality, and is linked to the wider exploration of ageing and death in the film.

The three works I have examined offer significant explorations of the role of homes in American literature and cinema. Chandler comments on American literature that it 'reiterates with remarkable consistency the centrality of the house in American cultural life and imagination', and I would argue this is also true of its cinema.[170] In both houses stand 'at stage center as a unifying symbolic structure that represents and defines the relationship of the central characters to one another, to themselves, and to the world'.[171] It is worth noting, however, that some recurring contemporary themes are not addressed by those three works. Two of those are the current interest in suburban America, which is depicted in the works of Jonathan Franzen and Jeffrey Eugenides for example, as well as female writers' exploration of the home as a site of conflict for ownership and freedom, as shown in the works of Marilyn Robinson and Annie Ernaux for example.

As we have seen, houses and homes in the literature and cinema of the United States are used for several purposes such as providing a sense of identity, conveying ideas of characters,

170 Chandler, p. 1
171 Ibid.

offering meaningful symbols of social status, as well as acting as 'a prism for focusing and diffracting the concerns of the world in which they were built'.[172] They are dynamic narrative elements, which 'like a fictional character is endowed with proairetic capacity and thus acts upon the events. The house becomes an animated being whose space not only contains – it actually *houses* – the plot but guides and conditions it'.[173] In the three works I have examined they specifically serve to embody and question the American Dream. In doing so, they show that in order for a future to be built, reality, whether it is his daughter's refusal to report her rape for Michael, their traumatic childhood for Beverly and Violet, their abusive father and the reality of ageing for Jon and Wendy, has to be accepted. The American Dream is revealed to be just that: a dream, which cannot translate into reality without adaptations. As the home is the space of the family and as part the American Dream is the dream of a united family, this exploration has started to reveal the ways in which adults question their childhood home and their family in my corpus. My analysis has also shown the importance of the home as a physical object in American fiction. As Selcer notes, the 'family home has always been central to American life, much more so than in Europe' and this is reflected in novels and films.[174] The homes in Oates, Wells and Jenkins are important in their physicality, which is linked to 'the project of building and settlement' in American history and culture.[175] They are indeed real objects which serve as symbol of social status, they are 'built to be lived in, but also to be looked at', and thus as signifiers of one's identity.[176] As I will now demonstrate, however, the use of home is different in French contemporary fiction, although there are also many similarities.

172 Phyllis Richardson, *House of Fiction: From Pemberley to Brideshead, Great British Houses in Literature and Life* (London: Unbound, 2017), pp. xiii-xiv
173 Saggini and Soccio, pp. 5-6
174 Selcer, p. 54
175 Chandler, p. 4
176 Rhodes, p. 12

III. Home in French Fictions

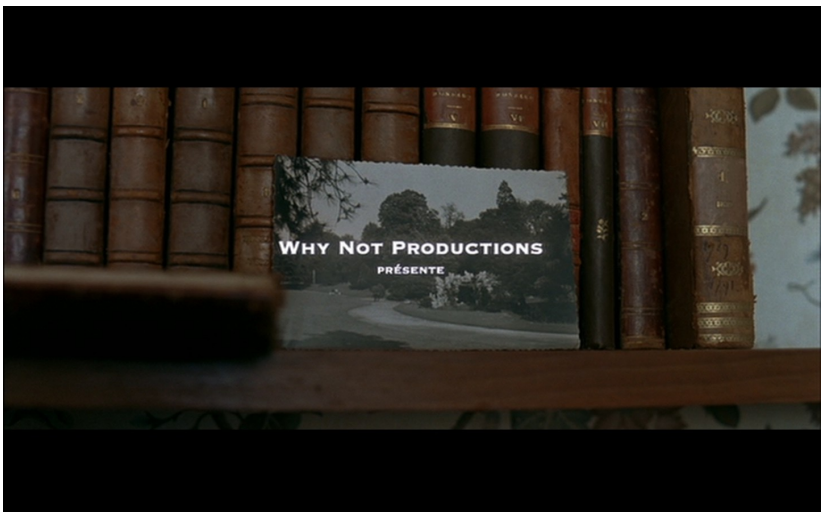
As the history of France is different from that of the United States, the physicality of the home is not as important in France as it is in America, but homes are nevertheless central to French fiction. This is apparent in some seminal French novels, such as in Balzac's *Le Père Goriot* in which the Maison Vauquer is used as a mirror of its inhabitants, or in Proust where memories are intrinsically linked to houses, as the famous madeleine passage shows:

> dès que j'eus reconnu le goût du morceau de madeleine trempée dans le tilleul que me donnait ma tante […], aussitôt la vieille maison grise sur la rue, où était sa chambre, vint comme un décor de théâtre s'appliquer au petit pavillon, donnant sur le jardin, qu'on avait construit pour mes parents sur le derrière.[177]

The home in Combray is the first thing to unfold when the narrator is transported back into time by his memory, clearly marking its significance. This importance of the home as a link to the past and as an archetype of the psyche is mirrored in French criticism. Bachelard, for example, writes of the house that: 'Elle est corps et âme. Elle est le premier monde de l'être humain. […] Et toujours, en nos rêveries, la maison est un grand berceau.'[178] The house is especially important when it is the childhood one, the 'maison natale' which has been written about repeatedly. By examining the homes in Desplechin, Vigan and Delpy, I will seek to show that the home in French fiction is less important as a physical object, and more often explored as a mental concept linked with family and childhood.

In *Un Conte de Noël*, the family home acts as the space for the characters to confront their past and one another, and in doing so allows them to construct their future. The majority of the action of the film takes place within the family home in Roubaix; it is only inside this house that all the characters are together, when they are out of it they are either on their own or split in smaller groups, as is the case in *We Were the Mulvaneys*. The film opens on images of the house, thereby establishing its centrality in the story to come.

177 Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p. 145
178 Bachelard, p. 26



It partly serves the traditional function of giving information about its owners, the size and style in which the house is decorated and furnished indicating it belongs to educated members of the middle class. Michaël Delavaud notes that 'le théâtre irrigue un pan de la filmographie d'Arnaud Desplechin' and that the house in *Un Conte de Noël* is 'comme une salle de théâtre à plusieurs niveaux, comme on pouvait en trouver dans le Londres élisabéthain'.[179] In that sense the house in Desplechin is similar to the one in *August: Osage County* as during the run of the original play, the scene was set as a house and the script gives precise instruction as how to stage it.[180] From the start the house in *Un Conte de Noël* is linked to the past as the first few shots of the film I discussed previously are followed by a photograph of the deceased brother Joseph.

179 Michaël Delavaud, 'Imitation of Life' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No. 52 (2013), pp. 68-73 (p. 68)
180 See Letts, pp. 9-10

Later on in the film portraits of Abel's mother, Henri's first wife and Simon's father, all deceased, are shown. Junon further establishes the home as a place of history for the family, when she addresses the camera and states:

Cette maison appartient à mon mari. Il en a hérité le jour de notre mariage, et nous y avons vécu depuis. Au fil des années nous avons fait bien des travaux et la maison est devenue très confortable. Abel et moi sommes âgés aujourd'hui mais nous y habitons toujours. […] Nos enfants n'habitent plus avec nous maintenant, ils viennent parfois en vacances et mes petits-enfants vont jouer au grenier comme leurs parents le faisaient à leur âge.

This treatment of the house as an embodiment of the family and its past is similar to Oates's treatment of High Point Farm in *We Were the Mulvaneys*. Although Junon states that Abel and her are the sole inhabitants of the house, at no point during the film are they shown being there alone. Before the family-wide reunion, Ivan's two sons are staying with them, and Paul and Simon stay on once the other family members have departed. The home is thus firmly the space of the family, as the space where 'family histories and legacies are written: stored up and remembered', tending to prove the theory discussed in the first part of the chapter that home and the family are often closely linked.[181]

The home exists for the characters to confront their past by coming together and re-examining it. As Rhodes points out:

The house is where most of us first learned to navigate space. Its space, and the hierarchies, pleasures, and prohibitions that obtain and transpire in them, give us a medium through which to test and make sense of how to move from one point to another, how to know inside from out, up from down, safe from dangerous, private from public.[182]

181 Bayley, p. 3
182 Rhodes, p. 25

It is thus no surprise that in Desplechin it is necessary for the characters to come back to the family home in order to make sense of their present. This is the case for Henri, who comes back after five years of banishment, and attempts to re-establish his presence in the home, and thus in the family. By revisiting the site of the family he is able to confront his sister over her decision to exile him, and appears to find a semblance of peace at the end of the film. The house is also the structure that allows Sylvia to confront her past, as it is by visiting the Roubaix home that she discovers that what she thought of as her personal choice to marry Ivan, was in reality manipulated by Simon, Henri and Ivan. For Paul, the stay at his grandparents' offers the possibility of rest, and grants him a discussion with his uncle during which Henri declares to his nephew that Paul is not sick but rather that his mother is, thereby unloading him of his extraneous mental charge. The home becomes the place 'where certain kinds of trouble and conflict have to be fought out and resolved', troubles which are both communal as the characters struggle 'with each other over the meanings of the space which they must share with others' as well as profoundly individual.[183] The home thus functions as a structure for the characters onto which they project their fears and anguishes and compare them with their past, in the hope of being rid of them; 'coming home helps make sense of things'.[184] In that sense nostalgia is played slightly more straightforwardly in this film than in *August: Osage County*, as Henri tells Faunia 'c'était bien avant ici … Ça a changé !'. However, the time before Henri's banishment can only be seen as nostalgic to a small extent as the audience knows that tensions already existed in the family then. As things evolve in the film, characters confront their past and as Elise Domenach puts it: 'Pour chacun des personnages, la demeure familiale de Roubaix, en cette veille de Noël, c'est l'Amérique, le lieu de la quête d'un meilleur état du moi.'[185] In that sense the physicality of the house is not important as such but merely as it embodies the characters' past thus allowing them a space to confront it.

This idea of the home being bound up with the identity of its inhabitants is discussed in many theories on the home. The home is the place of habit, it is made up of the everyday and of repetition, and in that sense it reflects its inhabitants' lives, as Bachelard comments: 'la maison natale est physiquement inscrite en nous. Elle est un groupe d'habitudes organiques.'[186] However, the home can be inhabited by more than one person, in which case what is reflected is not only the identity of the one but of the many, and specifically the relationships that exist between them. Morley makes that point, noting that 'the home is for many people […] a physically contested site

183 Morley, p. 57
184 Bayley, p. 172
185 Elise Domenach, '*Un Conte de Noël*. La nouvelle Arcadie d'Arnaud Desplechin' in *Esprit* (Août/Septembre 2008), pp. 191-207 (p. 203)
186 Bachelard, p. 32

which has to be shared with others with whom one is often in conflict'.[187] In that sense, the home reflects identity in the sense of the relationships between the members of the household. I would interpret Bammer's comment that home 'might be thought of as an enacted space within which we try on and play out roles and relationships' in a similar fashion.[188] The home thus reflects its inhabitants' identity as it is a vehicle for their values, rules and relationships, but some authors argue that the identification between people and homes goes much farther than that.

The most famous author to have done so is Bachelard who states that 'l'image de la maison devien[t] la topographie de notre être intime' because 'la maison est notre coin du monde. Elle est […] notre premier univers. Elle est vraiment un cosmos'.[189] For him the house therefore represents the foundation of a person's identity, and reflects their interiority. Clare Cooper also argues that the house and the self are closely linked, writing that since the house is made up of an interior and a façade, 'the house reflects how man sees himself' in that men have 'both an intimate interior, or self as viewed from within and revealed only to those intimates who are invited inside, and a public exterior […] or the self that we choose to display to others'.[190] In his works Jung uses the house as an equivalent for the structure of the soul, writing:

> Qu'on me permette la comparaison suivante : nous avons à décrire un bâtiment et à l'expliquer; son étage supérieur a été construit au XIXe siècle, le rez-de-chaussée date du XVIe siècle et l'examen plus minutieux de la construction montre qu'elle a été faite sur une tour du IIé siècle. Dans la cave, nous découvrons des fondations romaines et sous la cave se trouve une grotte comblée sur le sol de laquelle on découvre, dans les couches supérieures, des outils de silex, et dans les couches plus profondes, des restes de la faune glaciaire. Telle serait à peu près la structure de notre âme.[191]

Bachelard similarly links the house and the soul as he affirms that 'Notre âme est une demeure', but also that 'les images de la maison marchent dans les deux sens' meaning that not only is our soul a 'maison' but the 'maison' is our soul.[192] Freud uses a similar comparison when talking about symbolism in dreams, writing that, when dreaming, 'the one typical – that is regular – representation of the human figure as whole is a *house*'.[193] It therefore becomes apparent that the very strong identification between people and houses dates back and has appeared in many different authors. Gilbert Durand remarks on this, stating that: 'Les poètes, les psychanalystes, la tradition catholique comme la sagesse des Dogon font chorus pour reconnaître dans le symbolisme de la maison un

187 Morley, p. 57
188 Bammer, p. viii
189 Bachelard, p. 18 and p. 24
190 Cooper, p. 436
191 Carl G. Jung, *Essais de psychologie analytique* (Paris: Stock, 1931), p. 86
192 Bachelard, p. 19
193 Sigmund Freud, 'Symbolism in Dreams' in *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), pp. 149-169 (p. 153)

doublet microcosmique du corps matériel comme du corpus mental.'[194] What these authors argue goes beyond the notion that a physical house represents the identity of those who inhabit it but leans towards the idea that the house as a concept functions as a symbol of self for people. People and houses being seen as so closely linked paves the way for Aviezer Tucker's definition of the home, which departs from the physical one, as he views home as 'a multi-level structure that combines several *single-level homes*, such as an emotional home, a geographical home, a cultural home etc'.[195] The idea that a home represents one's identity is thus widely spread, even if authors diverge in the details of how they believe this to be the case. Desplechin's film appears to illustrate Bachelard's comment that 'la maison natale est physiquement inscrite en nous' as in Roubaix some of the characters seem to revert to old and habituals ways of acting. For example, when Henri climbs down the window on Christmas Eve it seems to be an action he has performed many times before. The film also seems to agree with Morley that the home is 'a physically contested site' as the narrative is punctuated by arguments during which characters fight for their place.

The architecture of the home is typical of Northern France, a narrow but tall brick house, and thus visually signifies the location of the action in Roubaix. In an interview with Emmanuel Burdeau, Desplechin explains the significance of this choice as follow:

Burdeau: *Un Conte de Noël* est donc encore un film sur l'Amérique ?

Desplechin: Plutôt un film sur le pays. Initialement le film devait s'appeler « Nos Arcadies » […]. Lorsque Faunia arrive, elle est accueillie par un « Bienvenue en Arcadie ». C'est quoi ? C'est l'Amérique. […] Les personnages habitent dans une ville qui est neutre, Roubaix, juste une absence de campagne. Mais pour eux c'est l'Amérique.[196]

For Desplechin, Roubaix thus represents a kind of utopia, of elsewhere, which allows it to be the place of self quest I have discussed above.[197] It is both the past and also the promise of a better future. These kind of houses, and Roubaix itself, is omnipresent in Desplechin's filmography from the very beginning. Similar homes exist in *La Vie des morts*, the director's first film, *Rois et Reine*, his biographical documentary *L'Aimée*, as well as his last two films to date, *Trois souvenirs de ma jeunesse* and *Les Fantômes d'Ismaël*.[198] An interesting shift in the depiction of the Roubaix family

194 Gilbert Durand, *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire: Introduction à l'archétypologie générale* (Paris: Bordas, 1969), p. 277

195 Aviezer Tucker, 'In Search of Home' in *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1994), pp. 181-187 (p. 181)

196 Emmanuel Burdeau, 'Nouvelle Arcadie. Entretien avec Arnaud Desplechin' in *Cahiers du cinéma*, No. 634 (May 2008), pp. 39-42 (p. 41)

197 For a discussion of America in *Un Conte de Noël*, see also Alain Finkielkraut's *Répliques* (France Culture, 12 July 2008)

198 For a discussion of the house in *La Vie des morts*, and its resemblance with the one in *Un Conte de Noël* see Rémi Gonzales, 'Comment (dés)investir l'espace familial' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No. 52 (2013), pp. 94-103

home takes place in Desplechin's latest film *Les Fantômes d'Ismaël*. Until this film the Roubaix home had always been the site of the family, populated by numerous characters, a link to the past but also a place of life, but in *Les Fantômes d'Ismaël* it has become a boarded-up, empty house in which Ismaël descends into madness. It remains to be seen whether this is a permanent shift in Desplechin's depiction of the home, but the centrality of the Roubaix house in his filmography is made very clear by its repeated appearances.

The status of the home as a mental construction in *Un Conte de Noël* is made apparent in the fact that although the house is shown on screen repeatedly it is almost impossible for the spectator to construct its layout clearly. This becomes even more striking when one learns that the film was shot in a real house.[199] This choice of filming in a real setting is recurrent in Desplechin and, as Jean-Baptiste Renault explains: 'Le refus du studio […] chez Arnaud Desplechin, est significatif d'une inscription dans un héritage réaliste: il s'agit de profiter de tout ce qu'un décor réel peut nous offrir comme supplément d'âme perceptif, comme effet de réalité.'[200] There is thus a realist relationship with the setting, as Desplechin himself states: 'la maison ressemble à un lieu réel. C'est éclairé au plan, naturellement […]. Avec le souci d'éviter tout rapport théâtral au décor.'[201] The house is depicted as a realist one, and yet it appears tortuous and labyrinthine. This is due to the fact that a profusion of rooms, corridors, staircases and landings are seen in the film, but the links between these different spaces is never clearly established, the viewer does not know how they connect with one another. As Burdeau notes: 'La maison a des allures de château, elle est pleine d'alcôves et de recoins.'[202] The home is further established as an almost mythical space with the telling of the story of Anatole, the wolf who supposedly lives in the cellar. As Burdeau describes it: 'Un monstre nommé Anatole hurle à la cave, Joseph lui-même secoue ses chaînes entre deux portes.'[203] The home thus becomes much more than a physical location, but one that mirrors the tortuousness of the characters that populate it, once again proving the theory that homes can be the reflection of their inhabitants. The profusion of spaces delivered by the Roubaix home is only equal to the profusion of characters and stories that the film introduces us to. Michel Ciment has described Desplechin's cinema as 'arborescent', stating that 'ses films se développent avec un côté romanesque, beaucoup de personnages et d'épisodes'.[204] The house in *Un Conte de Noël* embodies this arborescent quality, which is also a defining aspect of the film in general. The tortuousness of the house mirrors the tortuous relationships between the Vuillard family members, and in that sense

199 Burdeau, 'Nouvelle Arcadie' p. 41
200 Renault, p. 232
201 Burdeau, 'Nouvelle Arcadie' p. 42
202 Emmanuel Burdeau, 'Donnez-nous du deuil' in *Cahiers du cinéma*, No. 634 (May 2008), pp. 36-38 (p. 36)
203 Ibid., p. 36
204 Michel Ciment, 'Mercredi Cinéma', *Le Réveil culturel* by Tewfik Hakem (France Culture, 21 February 2018)

it becomes a 'three-dimensional graph of the dynamics of family life'.[205] Henri has troubled relationships with both his mother, sister and his brother-in-law, and they are all explored in different spaces of the house: Henri and his mother announce their hatred of one another in the garden, he physically fights Claude in the kitchen, and his main argument with Elisabeth takes place on a landing. Sylvia's closeness with Ivan is established in their bedroom, while she confronts Simon in the kitchen, and they make love in his room. Junon often occupies the living room, and is seen worrying about her illness in hers and Abel's bedroom. For Paul the house becomes a frightening place where he hallucinates a wolf. These are just a few examples to show that the accumulation of spaces in the house mirrors the accumulation of experiences that each character has there. As they each have different experiences the house is therefore different for every one of them, they all have their own truth about the home. In Paul's case this is shown, for example, by the fact that he is often shot in dark rooms, whereas for other characters, such as Junon, the house is warmly lit.

205 Chandler, p. 11

This profusion of points of view is reinforced by the camera work and editing which, as always in Desplechin, multiply meanings instead of restricting the spectator to a single one. One example of this is the shift between Henri and Elisabeth's argument and the Christmas performance written by Ivan's sons. By alternating between Henri and Elisabeth's harsh words and the fanciful play about a disagreement between a brother and a sister, the film demonstrates the children's awareness of the adults' drama while at the same time adding a layer of absurdity to said drama: Henri is equated with a prince whose crimes are stealing the peasants' money and sleeping with a goat.

In *Un Conte de Noël* the importance of the home relies on it being the site of the family, thus agreeing with Somerville's theory, and as such a central mental space for the characters. It is because the house is synonymous with family that they can return to it and use it to evaluate their progress or stagnation in the world. The home allows them to perform and resolve their challenges, while also mirroring them. This resonates with Mezei and Briganti's analysis that 'the spaces of domesticity and of fiction shape the people who inhabit them' and that 'conversely, people and characters create and shape the spaces they inhabit'.[206] As I have discussed here, the idea that houses are bound up with the identity of their owners is a widespread one and Desplechin's film appears to embrace it. In its tortuousness the home allows the characters to act out their own tortuous relationships with one another, while also reflecting them in its layout, as Durand puts it: 'la maison redouble, surdétermine la personnalité de celui qui l'habite.'[207] I would therefore argue that the home in this film is the archetype of the psyche of the Vuillard family, which is as multiple and fragmented as Desplechin's cinema is. Here the mental aspects of the house are thus more important than its physical one.

The homes in Delpy and Vigan occupy less important positions than in Desplechin, but they also show how in French fiction the house is mostly important as a mental construct. The house in *Le Skylab* appears often onscreen but never takes precedence over the characters as it does in *Un Conte de Noël*. Its function is purely to house the family reunion. Because it is not a childhood home, but rather the house of the eldest daughter, the characters do not have a particular emotional attachment to it, which is mirrored in the way the house is shot in a detached manner.

206 Mezei and Briganti, p. 840
207 Durand, p. 278

This tends to prove the theory discussed at the beginning of the chapter that a house and a home are two separate, but overlapping concepts. Indeed, while the house in *Le Skylab* is Suzette's home, it is merely a house for the relatives she hosts. As the narrative focuses on the group rather than on Suzette specifically the house does not have a lot of significance attached to it, beyond the fact that it helps creates the atmosphere of the late 1970s through its design and furniture. In the following shot, for example, along with the characters' clothing, the wallpaper and tablecloth mark the time period.

Throughout the film the music and extracts from old television programs further display Delpy's precision in the recreation of the period. The house's sole purpose is to provide a setting for the family reunion to take place, and in that sense its particulars are unimportant. Delpy's use of setting in this film is similar to that of her filmography more broadly. The homes are often not significant in themselves, the importance of Marion's flats in *Two Days in Paris* and *Two Days in New York*

reflect her status as the main character in both films, but are used mainly as settings and as markers of her identity rather than as themes to be explored.

In *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* the different flats and houses occupied by the narrator's mother, and the narrator herself, each correspond to a specific period in the family's history. The physical attributes of these homes are never important in themselves but in how they reflect the family's identity at each specific moment in time. And indeed, each separate period in the family's life is referred to by the name of the location of their home at that time. For example, Vigan writes: 'Dans le fichier Word où j'ai retranscrit l'ensemble des entretiens que j'ai menés, « la rue de Maubeuge » figure comme un thème à part entière. Liane et Georges y ont emménagé en 1950 […] et l'ont quittée en 1960.'[208] Each time she will subsequently refer to that period in the life of her mother's family she will thus call it '« la rue de Maubeuge »', the quotation mark indicating an official title used for that period in her family. This is true in turn of the other dwellings she describes, such as the ones in Versailles, Yerres, Bagneux and Paris. As Vigan states twice in the novel: 'les époques se résument au lieu qui les contient.'[209] Each time she narrates the family moving from one home to another she offers a short description of the new dwelling, as if to set the scene for that portion of life. For example, she describes the Versailles house as follows:

> La maison était haute de trois étages et entourée d'un jardin sage, clos de mur. La famille de Lucile s'empara donc des quatorze pièces […] Du plus grand au plus petit, chacun des enfants avait choisi sa chambre. Lucile, Justine, Violette et leurs parents avaient investi le premier étage. Milo, Jean-Marc et Lisbeth le deuxième, et Barthélémy, tel qu'en son fief, s'apprêtait à régner pour quelques années sur l'étage le plus élevé. Pour la première fois, Lucile disposait d'un territoire propre, auquel nul autre n'avait accès.[210]

Here, the importance lies not so much in the house itself, Vigan keeps its physical description to a minimum, but in how it reflects the current status of the family. What the house tells the reader is that the family is doing well financially, and that the children, and Lucile especially, are enjoying their independence from one another and from their parents. The house is significant only so far as it offers a physical incarnation of the characters' state of mind. This is similarly true for the Yerres period, which is described as:

> Yerres fut pour nous le commencement d'une vie nouvelle, dans mon souvenir entourée d'un halo étrange et lumineux. Lucile et Tibère peignirent le parquet du salon en blanc et les matelas posés à même le sol, qui faisaient office de canapés, furent teints en vert. Peu à peu, notre pavillon fut envahi d'un bordel joyeux et

208 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 85
209 Ibid., pp. 85-86 and p. 196
210 Ibid., pp. 120-121

incalculable, à l'image de notre mode de vie.[211]

In Yerres, Lucile is thus at peace for a time and her positive state of mind is reflected in the house itself. I would argue that the way Vigan uses homes in her novel illustrates Mezei and Briganti's statement that 'literary houses and their spaces constitute archetypes of the psyche' and connects with the idea that homes reflects people's identity.[212] For instance, Lucile's flat in a council building represents freedom for the character and thus mirrors Lucile's state of mind. Vigan describes it as follows:

> Lucile obtint un deux pièces dans une HLM du 19e arrondissement. Ce fut pour elle un immense soulagement. De tout temps, Lucile avait été angoissée par l'idée de ne plus pouvoir subvenir à ses propres besoins. L'attribution de ce logement lui offrait sur ce point un confort psychologique sans précédent, une garantie précieuse sur l'avenir. Manon, qui venait de terminer une formation de peintre en décor, prit l'appartement de Lucile comme chantier d'expérimentation. Elle transforma l'endroit sans âme en un havre de couleurs et de lumière, où fresque, patines et trompe-l'oeil se disputaient le regard. Lucile s'installa dans son antre aux murs somptueux […] Lucile avait trouvé son refuge.[213]

The flat's precise physical appearance is once again unimportant, its main function is as a signifier that Lucile is starting to overcome her mental troubles, as an embodiment of her new-found balance.

There is one house that occupies a special position in the novel: the family home in Pierremont. It is the only constant throughout the several moves, the one to which the characters keep coming back to, and the one to which all generations have a specific emotional attachments. It is the only house to which Vigan devotes an entire chapter, in an attempt to describe it in detail. She starts six succeeding paragraphs with 'Dans la salle de bain bleue de Pierremont', using it to evoke the entire way of life in the house and employing the anaphora to draw attention to the importance of the place.[214] The chapter then ends with another long attempted description of the house:

> Je voudrais savoir décrire cette maison que j'ai tant aimée, les dizaines de photos de nous tous, à tous les âges et à toutes les époques, […] la collection de cloches de Georges, entreposée dans l'entrée, la pléthorique batterie de cuisine de ma grand-mère […]. Je voudrais savoir décrire cette maison ouverte aux quatre vents et en perpétuels travaux, cette vieille dame irascible et fatiguée que rien, aucune entreprise de peinture, de réfection, de rénovation, pourtant maintes fois menées au fil des années, et parfois à grand renfort humain, ne put jamais satisfaire. Telle que je l'ai connue, avec sa peinture écaillée et ses toiles d'araignée, la maison de Pierremont est restée une sorte de ruine magnifique, pétrie de rhumatismes et traversée de courants d'air, dans laquelle venaient régulièrement s'empaler les camions.[215]

211 Ibid., pp. 190-191
212 Mezei and Birganti, p. 841
213 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 375
214 Ibid., pp. 306-309
215 Ibid., pp. 311-312

Vigan's use of the conditional tense with 'je voudrais' and the répétition of 'je voudrais savoir' shows that she feels she is falling short of describing the house accurately. I would argue that this is because she wishes to vividly depict not only the house itself but all the moments she experienced in it, all her memories set in or linked to Pierremont. The Pierremont house is thus given a special status in the work as it is the one that embodies the family's identity, both in its positive and negative aspects. Indeed, it is in Pierremont that Georges sexually abuses two of his daughters, Lucile and Justine, as well as family friend Camille. Furthermore, in Pierremont the ghosts of the deceased children of the family live in the kitchen: 'à l'intérieur des portes d'un vaste placard qui a longtemps servi de passe-plat, étaient inscrites les dates de naissance – et de mort, le cas échant – de tous leurs descendants.'[216] Vigan's inability to describe the house in the way she would like can thus also be linked to its somber history. Indeed, for all the joyful memories she has of Pierremont, it is also the place which materialises the secrets the family would rather avoid looking at: the house is therefore a manifestation of the family's dysfunctions. All the homes in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* reflect the family's mental structure, but Pierremont is the most important one as it fully embodies the family's psyche.

As the house, or home, is so closely liked to an individual's identity it has often been perceived as a haven or refuge. Mallett identifies further reasons for the identification of the home as a refuge:

> This understanding of home is founded on several related ideas, most obvious among them, the distinction between public and private, and the inside and outside world. […] Related to this view of home as a refuge is the idea that it is a private, often familial realm clearly differentiated from public space and removed from public scrutiny and surveillance.[217]

Bachelard, for one, indiscriminately subscribes to this idea of the home as a refuge. He even states the aim of his work as examining 'les images de l'*espace heureux'* which are 'des espaces de possession, des espace défendus contre des forces adverses, des espaces aimés. […] des *espaces louangés*' who all possess a 'valeur de protection'.[218] In his view, the house, or at least the original house, is therefore solely positive in that it 'abrite la rêverie, la maison protège le rêveur, la maison nous permet de rêver en paix'.[219] Tucker also shares this view of home as a refuge, even though in his case home is not a physical place, as can be seen in his definition of the term:

> Home is where we could and can be ourselves, feel at ease, secure, able to express ourselves freely and fully,

216 Ibid., p. 51
217 Mallett, pp. 70-71
218 Bachelard, p. 17
219 Ibid., p. 26

whether we have actually been there or not. Home is the reflection of our subjectivity in the world. Home is the environment that allows us to fulfil our unique selves through interaction with the world.[220]

Thus, for both Bachelard and Tucker, as well as for several others, the home is ascribed entirely positive association, which make it a place of refuge from the rest of the world.

As we saw when discussing *August: Osage County*, however, this view of home as a haven is too narrow and does not account for when the home becomes a trap rather than a refuge. As Mallett notes: 'Challenges to the view that home is universally understood and/or experienced as a private haven abound in research literature. […] All [these critics] reject the idealized view of home perpetuated by such ideas.'[221] Tamara K. Hareven explains that this view 'emerged in the lives of bourgeois families in eighteenth-century France and England, and in the United States among urban, middle-class families in the early part of the nineteenth century' and that its 'development was closely linked to the new ideals of domesticity and privacy', which goes back to the arguments made by Lukacs, Rybczynski and Ariès which I previously presented.[222] Although this explains how the notion of home as refuge arose, an idealised view of the home still does not correspond to the reality of many people's experiences. Rachel Bowlby, for example, states that in Freudian psychoanalysis the house:

> is irredeemably riven by the presence of ghosts, its comforting appearance of womblike unity doubled from the start by intruding forces, such that human life can never securely make a return to a place untroubled by the untimely and dislocating hauntings of other times and places, and other presences that interfere with the imagined separateness and identifiability of places and people who are known and loved. […] in psychoanalysis, the home is no place of harmony […]. The home is where the muddle begins and continues.[223]

And indeed, given the works in my corpus, I believe this view of the home to be much needed, and to hold more truth for some people that the uncomplicated vision of the home as a haven. Bammer similarly argues that the home is somewhat sinister, as she writes that the 'historical link between «home» and «sickness», nostalgia and loss, suggests that home, in a sense, has always been «*unheimlich*»: not just the utopian place of safety and shelter for which we supposedly yearn, but also the place of dark secrets, of fear and danger'.[224] This is shown in my corpus in *August: Osage* County as well as with the Pierremont house in Vigan which is populated by ghosts and is also the place where incest takes place.

220 Tucker, p. 184
221 Mallett, p. 71
222 Tamara K. Hareven, 'The Home and the Family in Historical Perspective' in *Social Research*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 253-285 (p. 258)
223 Rachel Bowlby, p. 77
224 Bammer, p. xi

Conclusion

The childhood home as the place which houses or used to house the family necessarily plays an important role for the adults who are exploring their relationship with their family of origin. As the works in my corpus focus on this quest for meaning, the setting for the narrative is the childhood home in more than one work. It is the case in *August: Osage County* and *Un Conte de Noël*, as well as in *We Were the Mulvaneys* and *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* to a more limited degree, since the two novels explore more than one location. The narrative also takes place in a house in *Le Skylab*, but this one has a different status than the houses in the other works as it is not the childhood home of the characters. The absence of a childhood home in *The Savages* is highly significant as it symbolises the absence of relationships between the Savages when the film begins. This absence, however, does not prevent Jenkins from exploring the significance of home, which she does by looking at the homes people inhabit when they begin to age. In this chapter the ways in which the families are dysfunctional start to emerge. The families in Oates, Wells and Vigan fail to protect their members, which should be one of the functions of a family: Michael banishes his daughter, the house becomes a trap for the Weston sisters, while Pierremont holds the evidence of the deaths and sexual abuse in Vigan's family.

This chapter sought to show that there is a difference of nuances in the way the American and the French fictions use the home. Although homes are featured in works from both countries, in fictions from the United States the home is important as a concrete reality, whereas in France the home as object is less significant. As Rhodes points out 'the American house embodies a peculiar claim to and fantasy of ownership', which is reflected in how it is used in American films and novels.[225] That does not mean, however, that homes in American fiction are merely used as setting, but on the contrary they are 'powerful, value-laden, animated agents of fate looming in the foreground, not the background, of human actions'.[226] In both literature and cinema they occupy a central place and, in the works of Oates, Wells and Jenkins that I have looked at, they are used specifically to closely examine the American Dream, its failure and its lies. My discussion of homes in French fictions has been shorter as it reflects the less central role homes play in France. Indeed, they function mainly as mental structures which both reflect and embody the characters' psyche. But as they are so intimately linked with family, it can become hard to differentiate one from the other, and the homes have a tendency to disappear behind the families who populate them. As Morley notes, the 'home does not simply harbour or provide a background context for these sentiments

225 Rhodes, p. 2
226 Chandler, p. 4

[privacy, security, family, intimacy, comfort, control] – rather, it embodies them in its physical structure'.[227] Despite this difference, however, there are many similarities in the ways French and American fiction approach the home. This distinction is indeed not definitive and relies on nuances of emphasis rather than on an absolute. For example, High Point Farm mirrors the Mulvaneys's rise and fall in the same way that the Roubaix home in *Un Conte de Noël* represents the Vuillard family. Furthermore, all the works tend to look at similar concepts surrounding the home, concepts which I have tried to explore.

Throughout this chapter I have shown how there is no one single definition of home but how the concept is built in opposition with and around other concepts such as the house, the outside and the family. Drawing from many different fields this examination of theory alongside the works of my corpus has demonstrated that home is a fluctuating notion which varies according to the individual. Since the works I look at are preoccupied with the family, it should be no surprise that the homes in the works are strongly linked with the family. Another recurring idea in the works is that the home is linked to the identity of its inhabitants, both in the sense that it reflects their values and status but also in that it reflects their individuality and personality. Furthermore, the homes I examine become mirrors not only of the individual inhabitants but also of the relationships between them. In *Un Conte de Noël*, for instance, the profusion of spaces in the house mirrors the profusion of characters, of storylines and even of the multitude of thoughts which seem to assail the protagonists. *The Savages* offers a different way of thinking about the link between home and identity as it shows how so-called nursing homes are in reality impersonal and bear very little similitude to the places we usually call home. The examination of my corpus has thus shown the nuances that exist in the different concepts gravitating around the home, revealing that home is, after all, a concept that is shaped intensely by personal and individual histories. In this chapter I have not discussed the relationship between gender and home, as this is something I explore in the third chapter when looking at meals.

One of the question that emerges in this first chapter is: what makes someone part of a family? Indeed, Johnna in *August: Osage County* lives with the Westons, cooks and cleans for them, but she is firmly perceived as an outsider, especially by Violet. Similarly, the Savages have little contact with one another at the beginning of the film, which begs the question of whether relatives are a family when they are not in touch? I will come back to this question throughout the thesis, as my analysis of the works progresses. It also appears that there is an ambiguity in whether the parents' house is the adult children's home, or whether their home is now elsewhere. In *We Were the Mulvaneys*, it is clear that High Point Farm remains the home even after its sale. Indeed, Judd

227 Morley, p. 24

states: 'even now, so many years later, I'm at my place of work […] and I'll glance up […] and I think about going home – *home*: to High Point Farm.'[228] On the opposite, in *August: Osage County*, the Weston daughters clearly do not consider their parents' house their home, expect perhaps for Ivy until her decision to leave. It would also appear that despite a strong attachment to the Pierremont house, Vigan does not consider it to be home, and neither did her mother. In *Un Conte de Noël*, the distinction is less clear: the Roubaix house has a special status as the family and childhood home, but the children have also created homes elsewhere. In *Le Skylab*, as discussed, the house is not a family home and therefore this ambiguity does not exist, nor can it in *The Savages* as there is no childhood home mentioned.

This ambiguity about which place is the home is linked to another question about whether the family is a refuge or a trap. Indeed, this chapter revealed that in some of the works the family home becomes a trap, and is not always the locus of nostalgia, as is often argued. High Point Farm is the only house to elicit straightforward nostalgia whereas the feelings of the characters are more mixed in the other works. In *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit*, for example, Vigan appears to feel some nostalgia towards Pierremont while describing the presence of deceased children there, and acknowledging it as the setting for Georges's abuse of his daughters. Similarly, in A*ugust: Osage County* Karen's attempt at nostalgia falls flat when it reveals her actual distance from the house while eliciting more abuse from her mother, which showcases that childhood is not always the utopia it can be made out to be. In that film, the home resembles more a trap than a refuge for the Weston daughters, thus disproving Bachelard's theory that all homes are refuges. I would therefore argue that no vision of the home that is either too positive or too negative can be truthful as the home is a more complex concept which possesses both positive associations, where the home can be seen as a refuge, as well as negative ones, where it can be understood as the place one needs to run away from. As Smyth and Croft put it, there is an 'inherent ambivalence informing the idea of the house – its function, in other words, as a site of peace and sanctuary, on the one hand, and of danger and incarceration, on the other'.[229] As such, coming back to the family home, a place where the adult children no longer live in, leads to a confrontation with the past, the present and the future of the family, a confrontation I examine in the following chapter.

228 *Mulvaneys*, p. 257
229 Smyth and Croft, p. 24

Chapter II. The Reunion

The interrogation about families of origin which preoccupies contemporary fiction is often explored through family reunions. Indeed, as most adults do not live with their parents or siblings the reunion is the only time when people are together, for a few hours or several days. During reunions family members are therefore forced to interact with one another and to confront the reality of their family. This explains why this trope is so often present in films and novels about families both in France and in the United States, as exemplified by Franzen's *The Corrections* or Klapisch's *Un Air de famille* for instance. Furthermore, in most families reunions are an integral part of life, whether they occur regularly or not, and reunions thus naturally feature prominently in films and novels looking at families. In this chapter I argue that such reunions question the validity of traditional or established family rituals and reveal the family systems connecting the individual members of a family. Indeed, when the family is together the traumas of the past resurface, and consequently what is at stake during reunions is not only the future of the characters, but also their past. Furthermore, reunions generate fights, as members are not necessarily used to spending time with one another and may have differing values: being together can therefore reactivate the roles and alliances which exist in all families. The reunions also question who is a part of the family. Indeed, just as the adult children in the corpus no longer live with their parents and may or may not consider the parents' house to be 'home', as discussed in the previous chapter, so those who are related by marriage rather than blood may not consider themselves, or be considered by others, to be 'family'.

This chapter is divided intro two parts. In the first one I examine the reasons that prompt a family reunion: a majority can be categorised as established social or familial ritual, but reunions may also arise through the need to look after a sick relative. In discussing family reunions as established rituals, I will also look at the aims of such rituals, and argue that they are used to ensure the survival of the family. In the second part I explore how authors and filmmakers use reunions as a means to reveal a hidden family system. Using concepts drawn from family therapy I examine the functioning of these uncovered family organisations, and ask whether this approach is equally productive in the analysis of all six works of my corpus. I will also examine whether these works show family reunions to be successful or unsuccessful.

I. Ritual and Medical Reunions

Reunions are crucial in the six works, as they bring together family members who live apart. These reunions can take place for different reasons: while some are part of established recurring ritual events, others occur because of the need to care for elderly parents. The first kind of reunion corresponds to the categories of family celebrations and family traditions identified by Linda A. Bennett and Steven J. Wolin in their article 'Family Rituals'. They define family celebrations as 'those holidays and occasions that are widely practised throughout the culture and are special in the minds of the family'.[230] These include rites of passage such as weddings and funerals, annual religious celebrations such as Christmas and secular holiday observances such as New Year's Eve or Thanksgiving. Although family celebrations are not occasions specific to a single family, each family has a different take on them and they thus feature their own specificities. In that way, family celebrations 'convey both the commonality of the family with the culture, and its uniqueness'.[231] Family traditions are defined as occasions more specific to each family, and less organised than celebrations; these can include summer vacations, parties or birthdays for example.

Many of the reunions in my corpus correspond to these definitions of family celebrations and family traditions. Reunions centre around family celebrations in *Un Conte de Noël*, in which the Vuillards celebrate Christmas while in *We Were the Mulvaneys* the reunion in the epilogue revolves around the celebration of the United States's Independence Day and in *August: Osage County* the Westons reunite for the patriarch's funeral. What Bennett and Wolin call family traditions are also present in Oates's novel, where the Fourth of July cookout doubles as Judd's birthday celebration and in *Le Skylab* where the family celebrates the matriarch's birthday. The many reunions mentioned in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* are also both family celebrations and traditions, as the following passage makes clear:

> A Noël, à Pâques, pour le pont de l'Ascension, celui de la Pentecôte ou de la Toussaint, nous continuions d'aller à Pierremont, où notre famille se retrouvait généralement en grand comité, oncles, tantes, frères, soeurs, cousins et cousines, auxquels s'ajoutaient toujours quelque ami(e) un peu pâlichon(ne), dépressif(ve) ou carencé(e) en globules rouges. Liane et Georges n'ont jamais perdu le goût des grandes tablées. Quand il y en avait pour quinze, il y en avait pour vingt.[232]

The novel also mentions several family vacations, often taking place in La Grande-Motte. In her work on family rituals in contemporary America, the historian Elizabeth H. Pleck defines a family

230 Linda A. Bennett and Steven J. Wolin, 'Family Rituals' in *Family Process*, 23:3 (1984), pp. 401-420. Accessed via SOLO online, with page numbers running from 1-13 (p. 2)
231 Ibid., pp. 2-3
232 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 306

ritual as 'a highly stylized cultural performance involving several family members that is repeated, has a formal structure, and involves symbolic behavior'.[233] A definition which corresponds to the reunions in Delpy, Oates, Desplechin, Vigan, and Wells's works. This definition can be complemented by Barbara H. Fiese's comment that rituals 'involve symbolic communication and signify «this is who we are as a group»'.[234] Indeed, rituals are important to groups in general, and to families in particular, because they contribute to the group's sense of identity, and thus give 'all members a shared and necessary sense of belonging'.[235] Their recurring nature also provides stability over time, as Bennett and Wolin put it: 'in the face of external changes, ritual gives the family a stable way of recognizing itself.'[236] A ritual is also important as it brings the family members together, and thus 'expresses and reaffirms relationships within the family'.[237] Rituals are therefore important to families as they help build a sense of identity, while also fostering relationships between members and providing stability. However, as the second part of this chapter will make clear, some of the reunions in the six works fail in respect to these supposed aims. In that respect, rituals function similarly to the home. The analysis of home in the previous chapter indeed revealed a tension between home as a refuge and as a trap, and there is a similar tension with rituals: they oscillate between being comforting and imprisoning.

In most works, however, the ritualistic instances are merely the pretext for the reunion, while the real reasons are more personal to each family. This is the case in Desplechin's film as the main reason for the reunion, and especially for Henri's presence, is Junon's illness and her need for a bone marrow transplant. In *August: Osage County*, the reunion is also prompted by the care for parents, as Barbara comes to her parents' house following her father's disappearance to both look for him and support her mother. The reunion is completed with Karen and Little Charles's arrivals, following the discovery of Beverly's death. As in Desplechin's film, in *August: Osage County* the reunion revolves around both a family emergency and a celebration. *The Savages*, on the other hand, focuses exclusively on the non-ritualistic part of caring for an elderly parent, as Lenny's funeral is not shown. A parent's imminent death is also a theme in *We Were the Mulvaneys*, where it prompts the reunion between Michael and his daughter Marianne; a reunion Marianne has been hoping for for several years. Fabien Gris comment that in literature an illness 'en tant que moment de crise, […] intensifie les liens ; en tant que possible annonce de la disparition, […] provoque un

233 Elizabeth H. Pleck, *Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 10
234 Barbara H. Fiese, *Family Routines and Rituals* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 10
235 Bennett and Wolin, p. 1
236 Ibid., p. 8
237 Riitta Jallinoja and Eric D. Widmer, 'Introduction' in *Families and Kinship in Contemporary Europe: Rules and practices of relatedness*, ed. by Riitta Jallinoja and Eric D. Widmer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 3-12 (p. 6)

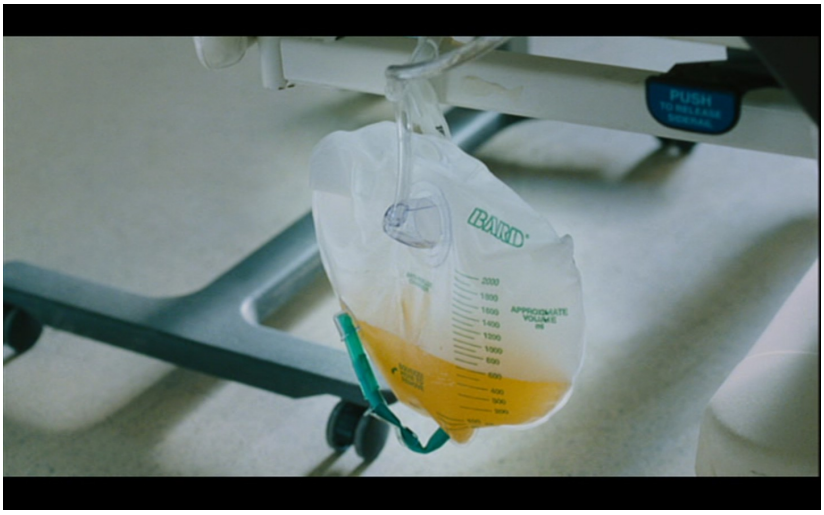
retour sur le passé familial et interroge les notions de générations et ou d'héritage', which is the case in Desplechin, Wells, Jenkins and Oates's works.[238] Indeed, in the films the parent's illness is the starting point of the narratives, while in Oates it plays a pivotal role.

The importance of old age and illness in those works is mirrored by the irruption of medical events in the narratives. In Jenkins it is exemplified by Jon and Wendy's discussion with the doctor in Arizona, during which the camera focuses on the scan of Lenny's brain while the doctor's voice becomes drowned by the hue of the machine.

The camera then turns to Wendy's face, showing her confusion and upset at her father's declining health.

238 Fabien Gris, 'La maladie d'Alzheimer et l'oubli de la famille' in *Le Roman contemporain de la famille*, ed. by Sylviane Coyault, Christine Jérusalem and Gaspard Turin (Paris: Lettres modernes Minard, 2015), pp. 79-93 (pp. 79-80)

The specific medical details are shown to be unimportant: they are drowned out, and the focus remains on the emotional impact of the siblings. It is at this point Wendy and Jon realise they are in charge of their father, a burden which they have not chosen, and which will radically alter the Savages's family ties. Their first encounter with their father drives home his physical vulnerability, as he is lying on the hospital bed, restrained by cuffs on his wrists. In that scene the close-up on Lenny's urine bag serves a double purpose purpose of highlighting Lenny's fragility, while the camera's lingering on the realities of old age expresses Jon and Wendy's discomfort. The editing shows this clearly by juxtaposing the two following shots:



Furthermore, the advertisement playing on the television throughout the scene is for a brand of laundry detergent, which is a way to signal that society is not comfortable with the physical evidence of old age. As Bainbrigge remarks, the advertisement 'further reinforces the cultural taboo

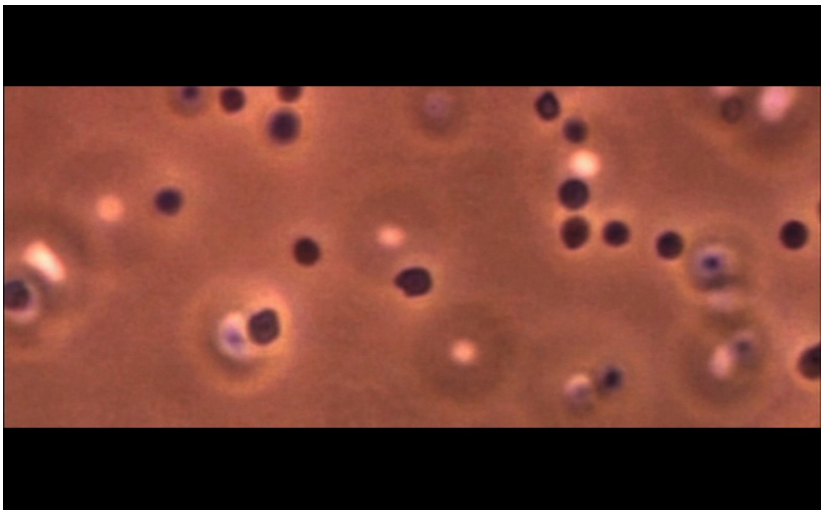
surrounding soiling and staining, and the necessary sanitation of such evidence'.[239] Lenny's vulnerability is contrasted with his aggressive manners, especially towards his children, as his first utterances to them in the film are words of reproach. Wendy and Jon's dilemma is thus their duty to a father who has not taken good care of them in the past.

There is a similar dilemma in *August: Osage County* as the sisters ponder their duty to an abusive mother. In Wells's film, medicine is present through Violet's consumption of pills, and also serves to highlight her dependence on her daughters, as shown during a visit to her doctor. In that scene Barbara's rage comes out as she throws the bottles of pills at the doctor and berates him from prescribing so many to her mother.

Her rage is directed at the doctor for enabling her mother, but it actually stems from her anger towards her mother, and the frustration of having to care for her well-being, when Violet makes no effort to look after herself.

In Desplechin medicine plays an even more important role, as when images of cells interrupt the narrative, mirroring the invasion of the medical in the Vuillards's life. These images of cells also link Junon's illness with Joseph's: they first appear during the narration of Joseph's death, and reappear during Junon's visit to the hospital.

239 Bainbrigge, p. 152



Desplechin's interest in medicine is present in many of his films. In *La Sentinelle*, for instance, Mathias is a medical examiner, and scenes often take place in his labatory, while in *Rois et Reine* most of Ismaël's narrative is set in a psychiatric ward. Céline Saturnino comments that there is an 'implication systématique [du corps] dans les thèmes récurrents de l'oeuvre de Desplechin que sont la mort, la maladie et les conflits familiaux. Le corps est comme pris à partie'.[240] Indeed, here the fragility and foreignness of the sick body is represented by the irruption of the medical in the narrative. Desplechin also uses the transplantation as a way to mirror family ties, something I will discuss in more detail in the fourth chapter.

Medical events also invades the narrative in *We Were the Mulvaneys*. During the reunion between Marianne and her father, it shocks Marianne by its harsh reality, as it does Wendy and Jon in Jenkins's film:

240 Céline Saturnino, 'États d'âme, états des corps' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No. 52 (2013), pp. 20-29 (p. 20)

Marianne found herself inside not a room but a cubicle staring at a person in a raised bed amid glittering beeping instruments. Why, he was no one Marianne knew – was he? […] A transparent tube ran into his left nostril and tubes were attached to his shrunken arms and disappeared beneath the bedclothes covering his flat, yet bulky body. Marianne stared in disbelief […] The air hummed with cold, with ventilators, with machines; a computer screen registered nervous zigzaggy blue lines.[241]

Marianne's alarm at the sight of her dying father makes their reunion more touching, as it will be the last time they are together, while also highlighting the waste of the years spent apart. Jenkins, Wells, Desplechin and Oates use medical events to interrupt the characters' reality as a way to highlight and symbolise some of their works' most important themes. In the three films this has to do with the anguish and duty that caring for an ageing and ill parent carries, which in turns leads to confrontation between the family members as to how best take care of the situation. Wendy and Jon have a different sense of duty and ways of shouldering that burden, and Wendy is partly in denial as to her father's state. In Wells's film, the sisters argue over who should stay behind and look after Violet, and in Desplechin the mother's illness becomes Henri's chance at regaining legitimacy, thereby leading to fights with Elizabeth, who considers him the bearer of evil in the family. In Oates's novel, Michael's declining health mirrors the damages he inflicted on his family by banishing his daughter, and the family only reunites after his death.

As I have shown, in most of the works some of the reunions adhere to a ritualistic model of family celebrations or traditions. This gives added weight to the reunions as they become part of a system of family uniting, with the expectations that such a system carries. *The Savages* is the only work that does not rely on that type of ritual, which mirrors the fact that the film explores a family where almost all communication has ceased, where all the rituals have broken down. By comparing Jenkins's film with the others, the absence of family rituals – and meals as we will see in the next chapter – becomes even more apparent, and such an absence is informative. Yet, *The Savages* has in common with some of the works that the motivation for the reunion is the care for a parent, which is also the case in *August: Osage County*, *Un Conte de Noël* and *We Were the Mulvaneys*. In some ways, it is also true in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit*, as Vigan's work can be seen as motivated by the care for her mother, and a willingness to understand, rehabilitate and honour her. I have mentioned when defining rituals that they are meant to build a sense of identity for the family, foster relationships between its members and provide stability, but it will become apparent in the second part of this chapter that the reunions often fail in these functions.

241 *Mulvaneys*, p. 425

II. Family System

Introduction to Family Therapy

Reunions bring together members of a family, and can shed light on the ways in which the family operates, in the same way that homes are mirrors of family dynamics. In order to explore the different family systems which are uncovered during the reunions, this chapter calls upon the discipline of family therapy, which studies the family as a system, rather than the sum of its individual members. From the 1940s onwards several psychotherapists, especially in the United States, recognised the influence of the family on the individual and introduced family therapy instead of, or in addition to, individual therapy.[242] Family therapy was developed by several psychologists, who often had a background in psychoanalysis, such as Nathan Ackerman, Murray Bowen, Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, Carl Whitaker, Don D. Jackson and Salvador Minuchin, who all started studying the family around the same time.[243] Although family therapy has evolved with time, many of its most important concepts come from these early pioneers, and I will thus be mainly drawing from their writings. The changes that have taken place in the field throughout the years come mostly from feminism, and from an awareness of the importance and impact of social class and ethnicity. I would argue that these changes, however, are mainly relevant for clinical practice, and have not affected the core original concepts.[244] As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, most of the literary criticism regarding families focuses on dyads and I have decided to use concepts drawn from family therapy to compensate this lack, and better examine relationships between family members in fiction.

The most influential concept produced by the family therapy movement is the systemic shift, whereby the family is examined as a system. David Kantor and William Lehr define a system as a set of different parts where 'the parts are directly or indirectly related to one another in a network of reciprocal causal effects'.[245] Family therapists have defined how family systems can operate both in healthy and unhealthy ways. Don D. Jackson identifies homeostatic mechanisms which regulate the system so that internal conditions remain stable, and these mechanisms 'operate to restrict behaviour

242 For an overview of the development of family therapy, of its most important pioneers as well as its major trends and concepts see Dorothy Stroh Becvar and Raphael J. Becvar, *Family Therapy: A Systemic integration*, 8th ed. (Harlow: Pearson, 2014) or Michael P. Nichols, *Family Therapy: Concepts and methods*, 10th ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2013)
243 Ibid., p. 164 and p. 25
244 For a discussion of the new aspects being explored at the moment in family therapy see William M. Pinsof and Jay Lebow, 'A Scientific Paradigm for Family Psychology' in *Family Psychology: The Art of the science*, ed. by William M. Pinsof and Jay Lebow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 3-19 (pp. 10-18)
245 David Kantor and William Lehr, *Inside the Family* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975), p. 10

to a much narrower range when the interactional system has stabilised into a family system than when the relationship was first being worked out'.[246] Murray Bowen explains how 'a change in one part of the system is followed by compensatory change in other parts of the system'.[247] This means that if one part of the system (i.e.: one family member) dysfunctions, another part (i.e.: another member) will compensate by over-functioning. Bowen identifies this as a normal and healthy way to operate when the dysfunction is temporary and the system is flexible: for example if one spouse is ill with the flu the other one will take over the first one's duties temporarily. Present in this theory is therefore the idea that a family can function properly or, on the other hand, dysfunction which I started exploring in the previous chapter. Bowen notes that problems arise when the dysfunction and/or over-function is constant, making the system no longer flexible, and thus unhealthy.[248] Similarly, Nathan Ackerman explains that the family system can malfunction if 'it suffers a loss of any of its vital functions, if it safeguards some at the cost of others, if it over-asserts some while underestimating others, if it distorts or sacrifices functions indispensable to its own continuity'.[249] Like Bowen, he comments that this leads to increased rigidity, a constriction of behaviour and an overall paralysis that are symptoms of malfunction. Ackerman notes that, at its best, the family should be an evolving system in which the parents shape children and vice-versa, and not a static one.[250] These notions are useful when attempting to uncover the family system that exists in the works in my corpus, for instance when identifying certain characters that are under- or over-functioning, and what repercussions that has on the other family members. In this part, then, I will use concepts drawn from family therapy to examine the systems revealed by the family reunions depicted in the fictions of my corpus. As we will see, in some cases the concepts drawn from family therapy will prove helpful as the author or filmmaker has chosen to use the reunion as a revealer, while in others they will be less relevant as the creator's main focus is not the family system.

Archetypal Roles

One of the key ways in which a family system is organised is by attributing roles to each family member. Family therapy identifies two kinds of roles, which I look at in turn. The first kind is a triad of archetypal roles, and the second kind is the personality assigned to each member. Ackerman identifies the three archetypal roles that intervene in family conflicts as the healer, the

246 Don D. Jackson, 'The Study of Family' in *The Interactional View: Studies at the Mental Research Institute, Palo Alto, 1965-1974*, ed. by Paul Watzlawick and John H. Weakland (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 2-20 (p. 13)
247 Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1978), pp. 154-155
248 Ibid., pp. 155-156
249 Nathan Ackerman, *Treating the Troubled Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 63
250 Ibid., p. 61

attacker and the scapegoat.[251] For the purposes of this thesis, I will treat the characteristics of these role as self-evident. In family therapy these roles are not necessarily attached to a specific individual but can shift with time, or depending on the conflict. Several characters in the works of my corpus could be read as healers, including Simon and Abel in *Un Conte de Noël*. Indeed, they claim no part in the conflicts but instead attempt to appease Elizabeth and Henri. Liane in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* could, on the surface, also be seen as a healer. She is described as 'lumineuse et belle', as a 'lutin facétieux' and appears as a benevolent figure next to her husband Georges.[252] However, like the rest of the family she ignores Lucile's letter alleging her father's incest and fails to protect her daughters against him. Liane is, as Dominique Conil describes her, the 'Clé de voûte matriarcale, elle est aussi femme d'un seul homme, aveugle s'il le faut'.[253] In that respect Liane is similar to Corinne in *We Were the Mulvaneys*, who also appears to be a comfort and a refuge for her family and yet sacrifices her daughter for her husband. Both mothers thus prioritise their husband over their children, thereby revealing family systems which are unhealthy, according to Ackerman's definition, as they safeguard one member at the cost of the others.

Mothers in *August: Osage County* can more easily be identified with the role of the attacker, as shown by Violet and Mattie Fae's aggressions of their children. Indeed, they are quick to defend one another, but equally quick to attack their respective children. Their alliance against the next generation takes its roots in their difficult childhood but also in a feeling of unfairness, and possibly resentment, over their belief that their children's lives are easier than their own. In the Weston family, a main area of tension is indeed created by the dynamics of power relations and the fight for power, which Violet tries to retain by mercilessly teasing, humiliating and belittling her relatives, and especially her daughters. As Charles Isherwood notes in his review of the play, Violet 'possesses […] a sixth sense for finding and exploiting the sore spots and secret hurts of everyone around her', thus asserting her power over the other family members.[254] But as James L. Framo explains in his research on family dynamics, the role of leader in a family is a shifting one, and more than one member can try to claim it.[255] This is clearly exemplified in *August: Osage County* as Violet and Barbara fight for the leadership of the family, and most of the film's fights revolve

251 Ibid., p. 83
252 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 24 and p. 49
253 Dominique Conil, 'Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit' in *Mediapart*, 23 September 2011 <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/edition/bookclub/article/230911/rien-ne-soppose-la-nuit> [Accessed 7 September 2018]
254 Charles Isherwood, 'Mama Doesn't Feel Well, but Everyone Else Will Feel Much Worse' in *The New York Times* (Theatre Reviews, 5 December 2007), <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/05/theater/reviews/05august.html> [Accessed 31 May 2018]
255 James L. Framo, 'Systemic Research on Family Dynamics' in *Intensive Family Therapy: Theoretical and Practical Aspects*, ed. by Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and James L. Framo (New York: Hoeber Medical Divison, Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 407-462 (p. 414)

around them. Violet starts as the leader, but by creating a climate of violence she makes her relatives defensive and willing to retaliate. Barbara does so several times by confronting her mother, but Violet appears to enjoy the ensuing chaos, as shown by her glee during the meal following the funeral. It appears that she strives on conflict and 'finds vindictiveness irresistible'.[256] In Desplechin's film it is the elder sister Elizabeth who acts as the attacker, having her brother banished from the family. However, Elizabeth believes herself to be a victim, and Henri becomes the attacker when Junon's illness brings him back into the family's fold. This shift appears unavoidable in the light of Bowen's comment that one change in one part of the system brings forth change in another. In both films, the role of attacker thus shifts from one character to another – from Violet to Barbara, from Elizabeth to Henri – exposing a system where aggression is one of the accepted modes of communication of the family.

Henri in *Un Conte de Noël* is designated as Elizabeth's scapegoat, and more generally that of the whole family. Having a scapegoat allows the rest of the family to function properly, since they can project their frustrations on a single person. In her article on *Un Conte de Noël*, Loetitia Papion explores this 'mécanique victimaire' by which Henri becomes the scapegoat, showing how 'le bouc-émissaire doit *être* ou *avoir l'air d'être* responsable du conflit' and that only Elizabeth possesses the conviction that Henri is responsible, imposing her belief on the others.[257] Using René Girard's work, Papion notes that 'la violence se détourne sur un bouc émissaire, afin de sceller la réconciliation de tous contre un seul, jugé responsable tant de la crise antérieure que de sa résolution'.[258] And indeed Henri becomes responsible for Joseph's death: Henri was conceived to save Joseph but his plasma is not compatible. As Papion notes: 'Henri n'est pas accueilli dans la famille pour lui même, mais comme objet conçu pour réparer le mal.'[259] This is something I will explore in more detail in Chapter IV, but for now let us note that Elizabeth banishes Henri, whom she sees as 'le mal' he failed to cure. Indeed, when talking to her analyst Elizabeth says: 'Henri est terriblement prévisible, comme le Mal.' The banishment, shown in a flash-back, takes place in the highly symbolic place that is the tribunal. Elizabeth thus transforms the commercial Court into a family Court, to the astonishment of the magistrates who tell her: 'Madame, vos vies privées ne sauraient faire l'objet d'une décision de justice.' As Domenach comments, in Desplechin 'la famille est moins foyer que tribunal'.[260] But, as Girard notes, the scapegoat is not merely a powerless victim: 'dire que le bouc

256 Tom Cornford, '*August: Osage County* is less than the sum of its parts' in *The Conversation* (2014) <https://theconversation.com/august-osage-county-is-less-than-the-sum-of-its-parts-22797> [Accessed 22 June 2018]
257 Loetitia Papion, 'Une mécanique victimaire' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No. 52 (2013), pp. 76-83 (p. 77)
258 Ibid.
259 Ibid., p. 76
260 Domenach, p. 202

émissaire passe pour cause unique de fléau, c'est à dire que ce fléau devient littéralement sa chose et qu'il en dispose à son gré pour punir ou pour récompenser suivant qu'on lui déplaît ou lui plaît.'[261] And indeed, Henri's status as the unruly outsider allows him more freedom than any of the other family members seem to have, and he uses his feelings of betrayal and unfairness to attack his relatives.

In *We Were the Mulvaneys* Marianne can also be read through the role of scapegoat, as she is banished from the family when her father cannot deal with his daughter's rape and his own reactions to it. Indeed, as Cologne-Brookes notes, instead of helping his daughter, Michael 'takes the mantle of victim for himself' and makes Marianne the scapegoat.[262] This status is commented upon in the novel itself, as Patrick tells Judd: 'Always at the back of my mind I see Marianne – abused, vilified, exiled *even by her family*. Like we're some primitive tribe, for Christ's sake! Like our sister has become a carrier of taboo!'.[263] The importance of Marianne's rape as a turning point is exemplified by the fact that her watch cracks during the attack: time quite literally stops at that moment.[264] There is a similar use of a watch marking the time of trauma in Vigan as Lucile gets a tattoo of a watch marking ten past ten on her wrist, which is, as she explains 'l'heure à laquelle je me suis réveillée dans leur chambre après avoir passé une nuit avec lui et qu'il m'a peut-être violée'.[265] In both Oates and Vigan, the time of the trauma thus acquires a specific importance, as the point of no return, where the lives of the protagonists is changed for ever. The designation of Marianne as the scapegoat, whereas until the rape she was perceived as the perfect daughter, exemplifies how the rigidity of the Mulvaneys's family system leads to its dismantling.

This exploration of the archetypal roles of healer, attacker and scapegoat in my corpus sheds light on the family systems that are at work in the families presented in the works. In *Un Conte de Noël* the entire triad is present with healers (Simon and Abel), attackers (Elizabeth and Henri) and a scapegoat (Henri). The fact that there is more than one character for most roles shows that, as Ackerman explains, the roles of attacker, scapegoat and healer in a family are not ascribed to one member for eternity but instead shift from person to person.[266] Indeed Henri moves from the banished sibling to potential saviour of the mother, while in *August: Osage County* Ivy is at first the victim of her mothers' humiliation but the end of the film sees her attacking her mother instead. The tools provided by family therapy thus allow for an exploration that reveals the hidden organisation

261 René Girard, *Le Bouc émissaire* (Paris: Grasset, 1982), p. 71
262 Cologne-Brookes, p. 202
263 *Mulvaneys*, p. 284
264 Ibid., p. 67
265 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 251
266 Ackerman, p. 83

of the families. However, the triad of roles can prove too rigid for a nuanced analysis, as it does not allow for a wide range of behaviour. Moreover, the fact that it is not present in either Jenkins or Delpy's films tends to indicate they are only applicable to certain families. Looking at the triad should thus not lead to overlooking the other kind of family roles.

Family Roles

Family therapists have indeed also theorised a different category of roles which exists within families. Jackson defines them as a 'model [that] describes certain expected, permitted, and forbidden behaviours for the person in that role'.[267] Horst-Eberhard Richter adds to this definition, stating that roles are 'the total structure of the unconsciously determined expectations that parents place in a child'.[268] I would extend that description to include the expectations not only of the parents, but of the entire family: siblings and other relatives included. Family members can thus be assigned a role within the family, which can have both positive or negative connotations. This role will, in effect, limit the range of behaviours they are allowed to exhibit. Robert D. Hess and Gerald Handel explain that such roles are constructed because 'the individuals in a family each develop an image of what the other members are like. This image comprises the emotional meaning and significance which the other has for the member holding it'.[269] Such roles can sometimes arise from a positive wish of the parents to avoid sibling rivalry. As Judith Viorst explains, in order to avoid the children competing with one another, parents can use – not necessarily consciously – a process called de-identification by which they allocate opposite sets of characteristics to each sibling.[270] However, although it might be effective in preventing conflict, it can also trap the individual in the allocated role, preventing them from knowing who they are without their relatives' projection. When the roles become constrictive the family starts to be dysfunctional: when the system is rigid it becomes unhealthy, as Bowen states. These roles are imposed upon the family member but often the role will be assimilated by the individual, to variable extents, and will become the individual's identity. I here use identity according to Anthony F. C. Wallace and Raymond D. Fogelson's definition as: 'any image, or set of images, either conscious or unconscious, which an individual has of himself.'[271] This notion of roles illuminate the interpersonal relationships as well as the fights

267 Don. D. Jackson, p. 17

268 Horst-Eberhard Richter, 'The Role of Family Life in Child Development' in *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, Vol. 57, Part 4 (1976), pp. 385-395 (p. 387)

269 Robert D. Hess and Gerald Handel, 'The Family as a Psychosocial Organization' in *The Psychosocial Interior of the Family: A Sourcebook for the study of whole families*, ed. by Gerald Handel (London: Allen and Unwin, 1968), pp. 10-24 (p. 14)

270 Judith Viorst, *Necessary Losses: The loves, illusions, dependencies and impossible expectations that all of us have to give up in order to grow* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 225 (p. 88)

271 Anthony F. C. Wallace and Raymond D. Fogelson, 'The Identity Struggle' in *Intensive Family Therapy*, ed. by Ivan

occurring in my corpus.

It is possible to use family therapy to make apparent the roles in the family depicted in *Un Conte de Noël*. Indeed, in that film, each family member has an attributed role. Junon is the all-powerful matriarch who passes judgement on everyone else, and the family revolves around her: it is her illness which reunites the family. Her position is further made clear by the fact that she is one of few characters – the others being Elizabeth and Henri – to address the camera directly. She does this when introducing her house and the family's life: from the beginning she is unquestionably one of the organisers of the narrative. The figure of the harsh mother is a recurring one in Desplechin's works, in *Trois souvenirs de ma jeunesse*, for example, the mother threatens her children with a knife. As Lieb notes, in Desplechin 'évanescentes ou imposantes, les mères sont le rappel à la réalité, à l'âpreté de la vie tandis que l'illusion, la poésie et le savoir sont transmis par les pères'.[272] Which is verified in *Un Conte de Noël* as Abel is a benevolent figure who loves music and reads Nietzsche to Elizabeth.

In the Vuillard family, the existing family myth at the beginning of the film is that Henri is the unruly son. The notion of family myth has been developed by family therapists, and is defined by Antonia J. Ferreira as:

> a series of fairly well-integrated beliefs shared by all family members, concerning each other and their mutual position in the family life, beliefs that go unchallenged by everyone involved in spite of the reality distortions which they may conspicuously imply.[273]

The family myth represents the idea that the family has of itself, encompassing 'the beliefs and expectations which the family members entertain about each other and the relationship'.[274] As such it has both a positive and a negative side. It is positive as it provides rituals and areas of mutual expectations and agreement within the family; it works to keep the family united. However, it also has a negative side in that it is made up of 'ultimate truths beyond challenge or inquiry', and the myth tends to distort reality, without the members realising it does so.[275] Indeed, the origin of the myth is usually lost – it is often passed down from one generation to the next – making it harder to challenge. This distortion of reality means that it is possible, for example, for the family myth to

Boszormenyi-Nagy and James L. Framo (New York: Hoeber Medical Division, Harper & Row, 1965) pp. 365-406 (p. 380)

272 Marie-Anne Lieb, 'Naitre au monde. Le cinéma de Arnaud Desplechin' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université de Caen, 2010), p. 321

273 Antonio J. Ferreira, 'Family Myth and Homeostasis' in *Archives of General Psychiatry*, Vol 9 (1963), pp. 457-463 (p. 457)

274 Antonia J. Ferreira, 'Family Myths' in *The Interactional View: Studies at the Mental Research Institute, Palo Alto, 1965-1974*, ed. by Paul Watzlawick and John H. Weakland (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 49-55 (p. 51)

275 Ibid.

assert that a father and a son get along perfectly well when in reality their relationship is strained and permeated by conflict. In such cases, the myth will prevent the family from seeing the relationship as it truly is, and will thus prevent change, leading to a static family system. And, as previously discussed, dysfunctions and unhealthy patterns appear when the family system becomes rigid. In the case of the Vuillard family, the myth is that Henri is harmful and a trouble-maker, which is not entirely demonstrated by his actions in the film. He is obviously unruly and impulsive, but none of his actions seem horrible enough to justify his banishment. And indeed, no clear explanation is ever given of why Elizabeth expelled him from the family, although the issue is raised several times in the film. But his status as the outsider is very clear and linked with Judaism, a recurring theme in Desplechin's filmography. As Enrique Seknadje remarks: 'l'exclu', Henri, 'n'est pas juif, mais considéré métaphoriquement et de façon insistante comme tel' through Junon's harsh nickname for him 'mon petit juif' and his association with Faunia who is Jewish.[276] This connection to judaism is perhaps not surprising considering Henri's role as the scapegoat. Henri is thus marked as the outsider of the family, but also linked to his father Abel, who is the figure of the Jewish father, according to Alain Finkielkraut and Gérard Wajeman.[277]

Around Junon, both Elizabeth and Henri fight in order to assert their authority and legitimacy, as Henri accuses his family of having given Elizabeth all the power at the detriment of his legitimate place within the family. For example, in a scene between all the men, he yells at Ivan: 'Toi et Abel vous l'avez sacré Pater Familias et ça l'a rendu dingue', getting at the issue lying beneath his fight with his sister. As Pleck comments, the reunion is a trigger for fights, as 'some actors have larger parts than others' which leads to confrontations that would not have arisen had the family not been brought together.[278] Analysing the two sequences that introduce Henri and Elizabeth separately, Saturnino notes that their difference is evident in the 'mode d'apparition et d'approche des personnages'. Indeed, Henri is presented as a 'corps burlesque' through a spectacular fall, while Elizabeth is first seen in her psychoanalyst's office, marking her as an 'esprit névrosé'.[279] This establishes a clear distinction between the siblings, Henri as the body and Elizabeth as the mind, which is carried on throughout the film. Henri's legitimacy is further challenged by Junon and her assertion that she does not love him. In Desplechin's film the reunion acts as a trigger for fights, since the close quarters means that Elizabeth cannot avoid Henri, despite her desire to do so. This fight for power is also apparent in the specific authority figures which Henri time and again associates with his mother and sister: 'Pater familias', 'con-capitaine' and 'con-lieutenant', for

276 Enrique Seknadje, 'Judaïsme et judéité' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No.52 (2013), pp. 144-150 (p. 144-145)
277 Finkielkraut
278 Pleck, p. 10
279 Saturnino, endnote 17 p. 27

example. In the first scene to bring Elizabeth and Henri together she joins the assembled family in the living room but her eyes carefully avoid Henri, even as she sits down directly across from him, and she gives no reply to his mumbled 'Bonjour'.

However, they can not avoid one another for long and the rest of the film features several fights between them. But as Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy points out: 'there is always cross-complicity in what people do to each other, (...) the giving, getting, and withholding is reciprocal' and neither of them is innocent in this sibling rivalry.[280]

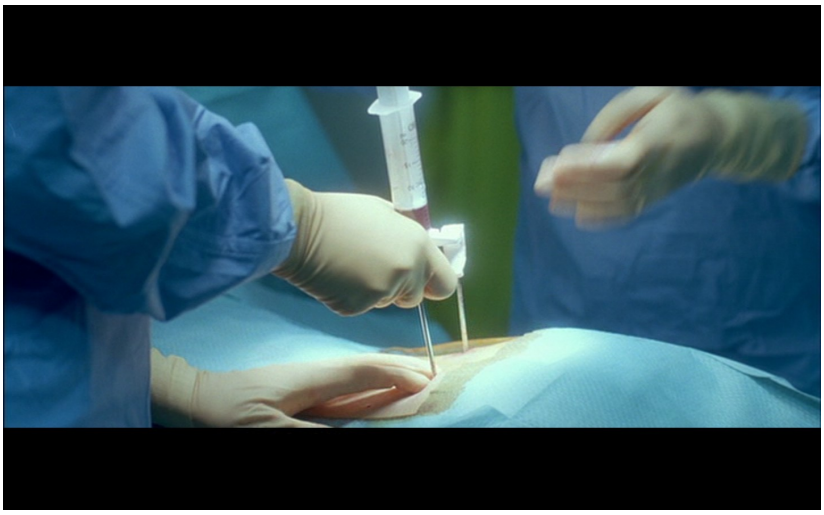
This repartition of roles leads to alliances between family members, alliances which can shift with time because, as Framo explains, 'each of the […] family members has his own gambits, plays, and strategies'.[281] In *Un Conte de Noël* the main alliance for most of the film is that of Junon and Elizabeth against Henri. The special bond of the mother-daughter duo is expressed in visual terms, for instance through their similar hairstyles. A slick chignon in the scene where Elizabeth gives Junon Paul's transplant authorisation:

280 Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, 'Introduction' in *Intensive Family Therapy: Theoretical and Practical Aspects*, ed. by Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and James L. Framo (New York: Hoeber Medical Divison, Harper and Row, 1965), p. xvii.
281 Framo, p. 416.

Their hair is down when Elizabeth pleads Junon to pick Paul for the transplant rather than Henri:

And a half-ponytail during the Christmas Eve dinner:

As these screenshots show, they also wear similar clothes and colours. In addition, they are often lighted and framed in the exact same way, for instance in the first two screenshots above Elizabeth replaces Junon on the screen in almost the exact same position. The division thus observed between mother/daughter and son highlights one of the most important themes of the film: that of belonging to one's family. Henri's struggle being that his desire to be part of the family collides against Junon and Elizabeth's will to exclude him. However, alliances shift as the action progresses and Henri reasserts his legitimate position by donating his bone marrow which Junon chooses over that of Paul. The transplant shows the beginning of a restored bond between Henri and Junon, and the family more generally, as mother and son become equated visually, as shown by the following two shots.



The first is from Junon's first visit to the doctor, while the second comes from the sequence in which Henri's bone marrow is being collected. Their similarities – the close-ups on the hands, the vial being filled with blood or marrow – finally establishes a bond between the mother and son, as they become linked by the transplant both visually and emotionally.

The role of each member is also manifest in the different status for the blood relations and for the children's partners. Faunia and Claude are the only two characters who can come and go as they please, as is explicitly shown by Claude's multiple arrivals and departures. They are not bound by the same ties as the others, and Henri even tells Claude: 'Oui mais toi tu ne comptes pas.' Faunia is the figure of the outsider as she is the newcomer in the family, and, as Seknadje notes, '[elle] se met volontairement en dehors de la communauté' by leaving before Christmas and announcing that she does not exchange presents.[282] Claude and Faunia's roles in the family is thus clearly that of outsiders, while Sylvia's one is more ambivalent. Pictures show she has been part of the family for a

282 Seknadje, p. 145

long time, and she is more integrated than Claude or Faunia, and yet Junon is hostile to her. On the other hand, Simon's status is never questioned and he is an integral part of the family, even though he is only the children's cousin. This adoption of the cousin by the family is a trope in Desplechin and is also present in *Rois et Reine* as well as in *Trois souvenirs de ma jeunesse*. The ambivalent status of Sylvia, Claude and Faunia as well as the exclusion of people not part of the family – family friend Spatafora is not asked inside the house – gives credit to Roland Hauri's comment, in his study of Christmas celebrations, that 'family assemblages at Christmas particularly show which individuals are part of the family world'.[283] Here, the children's partners are not, voluntarily or not, fully fledged members of the family.

The difference between the characters is also signified by the music as each character is associated with a specific music; Henri's, for instance, is an Irish melody while Junon is accompanied by an Indochinese theme.[284] Each music gives information about its assigned character, for example Grégory Rattez notes that Faunia's music informs the audience of her status as a foreigner to the family.[285] The clear role attributed to each family member in *Un Conte de Noël* goes hand in hand with a multiplication of characters, music and points of view which becomes for Desplechin 'un principe de mise en scène'.[286] Indeed, this accumulation, which is present in most of Desplechin's films, highlights the family members' solitude by isolating them from one another. However, the family system, which has been static and harmful for years, starts evolving once Henri regains legitimacy by being a match for Junon's transplant. This newfound flexibility leads to an amelioration of the characters' relationships visible at the end of the film. Indeed, Elizabeth's final voice-over shows she has found some peace, and, as Papion notes: 'la greffe marque la fin d'une ère et la naissance d'un nouveau monde, à travers le sang régénéré de la déesse mère.'[287] Elizabeth's prevision that 'la greffe va prendre' seems to apply both to Junon's transplant and to the new status quo of the family. This analysis of roles, alliances and family myth in *Un Conte de Noël* illustrates the notions developed by family therapists, and tends to endorse their theories. Indeed, in this film roles are prescribed behaviours which are assimilated by the individuals. Furthermore, Desplechin's work seems to agree that roles only make sense in the context of the family – for instance Henri's role as a villain can only be understood when examining his relationship with his sister and mother – and that they can end up trapping the individual. The film also endorses the

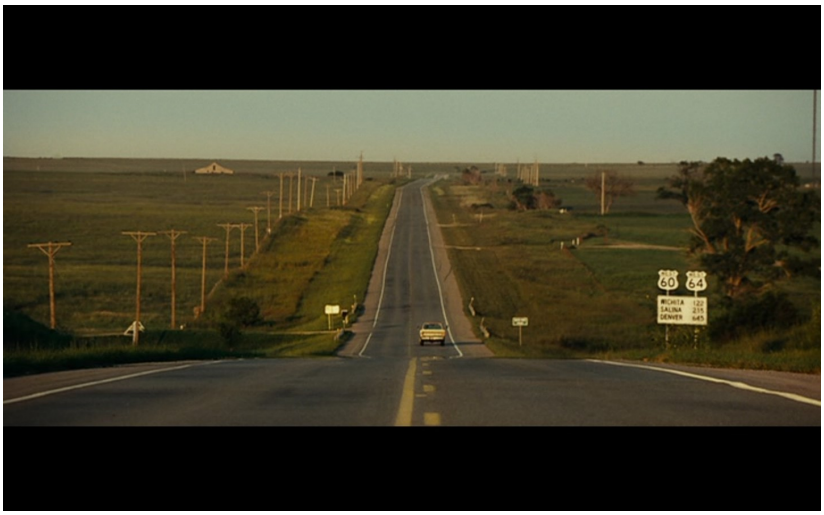
283 Roland Hauri, 'Christmas Celebration, an Annual Family Gathering' in *Families and Kinship in Contemporary Europe*, ed. by Riitta Jallinoja and Eric D. Widmer, pp. 45-62 (p. 60)
284 For a full list of characters and their melodies see Marie-Anne Lieb, 'Figures temporelles dans le cinéma arborescent d'Arnaud Desplechin' in *Décadrages*, No. 28 (2014), pp. 79-94. Accessed online, with page numbers running from 1-12 (p. 7) <http://decadrages.revues.org/766> [Accessed 24 October 2017]
285 Grégory Rattez, 'Though this house give glimm'ring light' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No. 52 (2013), pp. 114-119 (p. 117). See also for an analysis of Junon's melody.
286 Domenach, p. 193
287 Papion, p. 82

family therapists' theories as it shows a family system that has been rigid, and thus unhealthy, for a long time, as Elizabeth has been over-asserted at the detriment of Henri, but which by the end of the film starts evolving again.

In *August: Osage County* each family member is also assigned a role. Violet, just like Junon, is an all-powerful matriarch, while Little Charles is designed as the slightly simply-minded relative. This is signified through his clothes and clumsiness but also by the way other characters treat him. During the film Ivy and Barbara both rebel against the roles that have been ascribed to them and that they have thus far accepted. For example, at first Ivy plays her part as the dutiful daughter, who is mocked and pitied by her mother, however she later rebels against that role by announcing her decision to move to New York. Barbara's struggle with her prescribed role, that of the authoritative elder daughter, is even more apparent. This role is made clear several times, as when Violet affirms that only Barbara can be of help to her towards the beginning of the film, or when Mattie Fae discloses her secret to Barbara. At first, Barbara is seen to be adhering to this role, and imposes her will on her mother and sisters. But by doing so she increasingly resembles her mother. As the action progresses she becomes more aggressive and cutting, and the most telling scene in this respect is the meal she shares with Violet and Ivy. In that scene, Barbara's similarity to her mother is reinforced by their wearing very similar clothes and colours, which also sets them apart from Ivy who wears white and stands out against the dark background.

Ivy also highlights Violet and Barbara's similarity: as she is leaving the house she points at her mother and sister telling them: 'you're monsters' and a few seconds later she tells Barbara that 'there is no difference' between Barbara and their mother. This shows that trying to conform to her role of

leader is rendering Barbara mad and her realisation of just that, explains why the end of the film sees her escaping the house and leaving her mother behind, thus escaping her family role as well. In that last shot the open landscape highlights this sense of freedom, especially as it contrasts with the claustrophobic house.



The last shot of Barbara reinforces her difference from Violet as their respective last shots offer radically contrasting visions, as well as her similarity with Ivy as their last shots are strikingly similar. Violet's last appearance shows her in a narrow and dark stairway, whereas Ivy and Barbara are last seen at the wheel of their respective cars, driving away from their parent's house.

While Violet is shot in a medium-close-up which gives a sensation of confinement, both daughters are shot in extreme long shot, reinforcing the impression of space given by them being outside the house. Moreover, the colours in Violet's shot are dark and dull, whereas for both Ivy and Barbara

there is light and the colours are vibrant. These contrasting shots visually reinforce the dismantling of the family, while the similarities between that of Ivy's and Barbara's shots highlight their resemblance even as they are breaking apart.

Barbara's journey is also evident in the alliances she forms with her relatives. While at first she is allied with Ivy and Karen in order to control their mother, she then aligns with Violet to prevent Ivy from leaving and, finally, discards all the alliances in order to escape. These shifts in Barbara's alliances mirror her journey from being trapped to being free from her family. In his work on schizophrenia Bowen suggests that it always comes down to the father-mother-patient triad and that siblings are usually withdrawn from these conflicts.[288] But I would argue instead that the conflicts include the entire family, as is shown in Wells and Desplechin's films. In *August: Osage County* the family fights can be understood through the characters' adherence to and rebellion against the roles assigned to them. As Sebesta and Choate put it in their review of the play: '*August: Osage County* exploded the myth that so many families try to project to the outside world: the fiction that nothing untoward occurs within the walls of the home.'[289] Indeed, an analysis of roles in the film reveals a rigid family system which is incapable of evolving without imploding.

In this film women play a greater role than men, as exemplified by the fact that none of the alliances include men. The men are either absent, such as Beverly, or subdued by the women, in the case of Bill, Charlie and Little Charles. For example, when Violet reprimands the men at the funeral lunch and orders them to put their jackets back on, they all sheepishly obey. This establishes the idea that the real family is the one related by blood, which only the women (save for Johnna of course) and Little Charles are. Indeed, the only scene in the film which does not involve one of the six women – in which Charlie picks up Little Charles at the bus station – features Little Charles, who is Mattie Fae's son. Thus, the only scene to seemingly shift the focus away from the women actually reinforces the idea that family is defined by blood ties. It is worth noting that this scene did not exist in the original play, and is part of the film's effort to move outside the house. An attempt which Tom Cornford believes fails and creates a film which is indecisive, 'which belongs in the house but wishes it could get outside'.[290] Although I agree that some of the exterior scenes are superficial and make the film less subtle than it could be – for instance the shots of Beverly getting in his boat prior to his death being announced – I would argue that the landscape shots at the beginning and end of the film help to root it in its geographic setting. By physically representing the outside world the film both emphasises the Weston's isolation, as the exterior shots are devoid of

288 Murray Bowen, 'A Family Concept of Schizophrenia' in *The Etiology of Schizophrenia*, ed. by Don D. Jackson (New York: Basic Books, 1960), pp. 346-372 (p. 364)
289 Sebesta and Choate, p. 105
290 Cornford

human presence, save for the Westons themselves, and makes the sisters' escape more powerful.

The foray outside the house also allows for the use of cars to reinforce the centrality of the reunion in the film. Indeed, as a temporary moment in time and space, a reunion is a place of transit rather than immobility – for a reunion to take place, the characters have to be apart before and after. The many scenes featuring transit, arrivals and departures by car therefore mirror the transience and liminality specific to the reunion. Apart from Beverly, Violet and Johnna, all the other characters are first introduced in their cars, or a bus in the case of Little Charles, which serves to highlight his inadequacy. Furthermore, the scene in which Beverly's death is announced opens with a shot of the police car driving in the night.

This use of cars also highlights the fact that all the characters are in transit not only in a physical sense, but in an emotional and mental one as well. Indeed, the film looks at the changes brought about by a confrontation with one's family, and the reunion maps out these shifts. There is a symmetry in how characters arrive at the house group by group and are then seen leaving again, sometimes in a configuration different from how they came – Bill and Jean leave without Barbara for instance. This mirrors the shifts in alliances and adherence to roles.

In *August: Osage County* the individual characters seem to collide with the family-unit system. A complex network of alliances and shifting behaviours and perceptions makes it difficult to navigate being part of the family-unit while maintaining smooth interpersonal interactions and a sense of individual identity. Furthermore, some characters, most specifically Ivy, behave in different ways depending on who they are with. Ivy is indeed far more assured and comfortable with Little Charles than she is with Violet or Barbara. This seems to illustrate Nathalie Fontane Waker's statement that 'la fratrie constitue une entité qui met en péril chacun de ses membres' as the

group 'pervertit l'identité individuelle, fait obstacle à la quête de singularité, et se joue des lois et de la morale'.[291] Indeed, Violet constantly denies her daughters their individuality, leading them to escape her and the family. While in *Un Conte de Noël* it was the sacrifice of Henri which has rendered the family system rigid and dangerous for its members, in Wells's film it is the over-assertion of the parents at the detriment of their children which makes the system unhealthy. Family dynamics in *August: Osage County* can thus also be profitably analysed with recourse to family therapy concepts of roles and alliances. Indeed, the individuals adopt roles which are determined by the expectations of the other family members, as Richter describes, and which can ultimately become traps. This adherence to roles, at least at the beginning of the film, makes apparent the family myth as the members share believes about 'each other and their mutual position in the family life'.[292]

In *We Were the Mulvaneys* there is also a strict repartition of roles within the family, as each child has a specific personality. Mike is the least present in the novel as he is already a young adult and lives his own life at the time of Marianne's rape: 'Mike, the oldest child, was special, and had had special privileges for years.'[293] He is the athletic child, the one who most resembles his father. Patrick is the lonely, haughty and intelligent second son, described as 'poor sweet-shy short-tempered'.[294] Marianne is given a special status as the only daughter; she is sweet, pretty and studious, and described in the following terms: 'Marianne simply *could not lie*. […] And she was so pretty! So radiant.'[295] Lastly, Judd is the baby of the family, who states: 'They loved me so, when they paid any attention to me at all'.[296] As Ferreira explains, each role attributed to a member implies a counter-role assigned to another, and thus in Oates's novel Patrick 's intellectualism is the counter-role to Mike's athleticism.[297] Each child is thus assigned specific traits, and there is little overlap between the siblings: they are each instantly recognisable. This seemingly endorses Viorst's theory on the avoidance of sibling rivalry, since they are not competing on the same ground. It is not only the children, but also the parents who are ascribed a specific role in the family. Indeed, Corinne is the one in charge of the family, the 'mother of the household, keeper of High Point Farm'.[298] She is described as possessing 'a mysterious and unquestioned authority' and distinct from

291 Nathalie Fontane Waker, 'La Fratrie. De la fusion à l'enfermement et l'aliénation' in *Le Roman contemporain de la famille*, ed. by Sylviane Coyault, Christine Jérusalem and Gaspard Turin (Paris: Lettres modernes Minard, 2015), pp. 287-297 (p. 287)
292 Ferreira, 'Family Myth and Homeostasis', p. 457
293 *Mulvaneys*, p. 18
294 Ibid., p. 29
295 Ibid., p. 30
296 Ibid., p. 3
297 Ferreira, 'Family Myths', p. 52
298 *Mulvaneys*, p. 30

her husband as, according to Judd, 'Dad was the boss, but Mom was the power'.[299]

This separation of roles goes hand in hand with the myth that they are a perfect, happy family, which becomes even more rigid once it becomes patently untrue: after Marianne's rape and the slow dismantling of the clan. As discussed in Chapter I, High Point Farm is an embodiment of this family myth. When Corinne tells her sons she has taken Marianne to live elsewhere, she fixes them 'with a beaming neon smile' as if pretending nothing is wrong makes the situation better.[300] Furthermore, Patrick comments directly on this pretence, telling his sister: 'All that pride we had, at home, and anxiety. Keeping up some kind of – I don't know – model family life. Not that we were aware of it, even Dad and Mom. Especially Dad and Mom.'[301] Viorst identifies 'the myth of the united, harmonious family' as one of the most harmful family myths, as it requires 'a desperate denial of all dissension and distance among the members of the family unit'.[302] In *The Leaves of Spring* Aaron Esterson gives a striking example of how this family myth can affect an individual through the case of a schizophrenic patient whose schizophrenia is shown to be linked with the contrary injunctions and examples given by her parents and brothers, which are hidden under a family myth asserting harmony.[303] In Oates's novel the myth could be categorised as harmful in that it prevents Marianne and her brothers from directly challenging their parents' decision to exile Marianne: it is impossible to address a problem which everyone pretends does not exist.

We Were the Mulvaneys offers a different take on alliances from Desplechin and Wells's films, as the only one is between Corinne and Michael, not against but at the expense of their children. Indeed, Marianne is sent away by her mother because her father cannot bear to see her anymore, and until her husband's death Corinne's loyalty is always first and foremost to Michael. This is clearly shown by two passages. In the first one Corinne and Michael make a pact 'never to favor one [child] over the others; never to love one of their children the most, or another the least', and yet later on in the novel Corinne realises that Michael is 'her first love, her first born' and that she does place him above their children.[304] Given that the father is placed above the offspring, it is no surprise that the reunion of the mother with her children can only take place after Michael's death. The implosion of the family is thus directly linked to Corinne's decision to protect Michael at the expense of their children.

In the novel, however, a period of rigidity leading to the breaking apart of the family is followed by evolution, which allows the characters to reunite. It is indeed explicit in the epilogue

299 Ibid., p. 62
300 Ibid., p. 186
301 Ibid., p. 219
302 Viorst, p. 225
303 Aaron Esterson, *The Leaves of Spring: A Study in the dialectics of madness* (London: Tavistock Publication, 1970)
304 *Mulvaneys*, p. 31 and p. 185

that change has taken place and that the family system is no longer static. For example, Marianne tells Judd that 'maybe Mom doesn't want to be 'Mom' right now. Maybe she's taking time out', showing that Corinne has moved away from her previous position.[305] This change is brought on by Michael and Marianne's reunion, on the former's deathbed, and this reunion paves the way for the entire family to reunite in the epilogue. The epilogue makes this connection between the father's death and the reunion clear, as Judd remarks:

> No wonder I was a little drunk, such a humming buzzing day! Thinking *How did we get to this? – how do we deserve this?* In late October it would be five years since Dad died. Five years. For Mike's and Marianne's children, who'd never known their grandfather, a lifetime.[306]

Indeed, only Michael's imminent death pushes him to reunite with his daughter, thereby healing the wound inflicted by Marianne's banishment, and authorising a family reunion. Oates's decision to skip directly from the scattering of Michael's ashes, for which Patrick is absent, to the Fourth of July cookout, which takes place five years later, reinforces this connection. It makes it evident that the death has had the direct effect of prompting the reunion, even if the two events are separated by a few years. The siblings evolve during their time apart and, in the epilogue, no longer fit in the constraints of their previous roles. Patrick, for example, becomes an athletic man who no longer lives alone. This is made clear when Judd and Patrick meet, as Judd narrates:

> The pitcher was a stranger, or so I thought […] – *My God could this be Patrick? – my own brother?* – the thought flashed to me yet somehow in the excitement of the moment did not adhere. […] of course it was Patrick, who else but my lost brother Patrick? […] Patrick turned blinking to see me, and ran over at once, and grabbed me in a bear hug like no imaginable gesture of P.J's, still less Pinch's, saying, his voice choked with emotion, «Jesus, kid! You're all grown up.»[307]

Two statements highlight how this complete family reunion, and the return of Patrick, are synonymous with the return of harmony and happiness for the Mulvaneys: 'Patrick had become a Mulvaney at last, after his long exile from home' and 'Now he'd come back to us, it was as if that old Patrick, and those old sorrows, had never been'.[308] The importance of the reunion in the epilogue is also signalled by its foreshadowing in the first chapters of the novel. Indeed, there is a mention of a Mulvaney's Fourth of July cookout to which Michael invited a hundred and fifty people, which the cookout of the epilogue is reminiscent of.[309] Moreover, in the epilogue Corinne is ringing the cowbell to announce diner, a cowbell which is described in the exact same words as the one in High

305 Ibid., p. 437
306 Ibid., pp. 445-446
307 Ibid., pp. 441-444
308 Ibid., p. 447 and p. 448
309 Ibid., p. 5

Point Farm: 'gourd-shaped cowbell', and which is associated with joy – 'there was Corinne Mulvaney, sixty-two years old! Laughing like one of her own grandchildren, the color up in her cheeks, tugging the cord of the old gourd-shaped cowbell' – as the one in High Point Farm one is – 'the sound of the cowbell at High Point Farm was understood to be code for *Who's in the mood for an outing? a nice surprise?*'.[310]

The family members evolve individually, becoming less rigid, and there is a similar evolution from thinking that the family needs to be allied against the world in order to survive to the realisation that isolation is harmful. Judd develops this awareness during the Fourth of July family reunion. At first he feels 'a pang of hurt, childish disappointment' thinking 'why had Mom promised a Mulvaney family reunion, when so many strangers were being invited, too?', but later this great gathering of people comes to symbolise pure happiness.[311] In that sense Oates's novel agrees with *Un Conte de Noël* and *August: Osage County* that people who are not blood relations are not entirely 'family', but at the same time insists on the importance of family encompassing more than blood relations. As the novel shifts its focus from one character to another – for example Patrick in Part II “The Huntsman” and Marianne in Part III “The Pilgrim” – the common thread that emerges is the importance of family and the anger and sadness brought by its disintegration. The last sentence of the novel makes clear that (part) of the purpose of the work is to follow the evolution of the family: 'I laughed, poking Patrick in the arm, had to laugh at that expression in his face he'd had when we were boys, when we were the Mulvaneys.'[312] This evolution is portrayed in a positive light as it is the only chance of survival of the family, which confirms the family therapists' theory that a system needs to be flexible in order to be healthy and, ultimately, survive. Oates's novel also seems to adhere to the concepts of family myth, roles and alliances developed by family therapy, as it shows the roles are unconsciously adopted by the family members, and that it slowly entraps them.

In *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* the family myth is similar to the one in Oates in the pretence that Vigan's family are a happy, rowdy large family. It is, as Ferreira describes, as if the myth 'were some sort of ultimate truth […] beyond challenge or inquiry'.[313] In Vigan the myth does not seem to be entirely unfounded, as the narrator writes about joyful times, especially summer holidays, and describes her mother's family as possessing a 'vitalité bruyante et excessive'.[314] However, this myth cannot but startle the reader in light of the deaths, sexual abuse and psychiatric issues which define the family: this discordance shows how family myths can distort reality entirely. Indeed, several

310 Ibid., p. 32 and p. 444
311 Ibid., p. 441
312 Ibid., p. 454
313 Ferreira, 'Family Myths', p. 51
314 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 169

children die or narrowly escape death, and moreover these events tend to take place during family reunions.[315] Furthermore, the author writes that

> Quand j'étais enfant, les photos d'Antonin et de Jean-Marc, les fils disparus, étaient posées côte à côte sur la bibliothèque, dans le salon de Pierremont. Plus tard, un portrait noir et blanc de Milo est venu les rejoindre. Lors des vacances scolaires, nous – mes nombreux cousins, ma soeur et moi – avons passé des semaines entières dans l'ombre mystérieuse de ces morts.[316]

Far from the joyous façade that the family works to project, this shows that death is omnipresent and imposed on younger generations. The author comments on this directly as she starts the story of her uncle being left as a child on his own for several days in a psychiatric ward by the words 'derrière la mythologie'.[317] Furthermore, the family adheres to the myth so much that they ignore Lucile's denunciation of her father's sexual abuse and carry on as if nothing happened. This shows how devastating a family can be when it safeguards one member – here the father – at the cost of others. As Conil puts it: 'Les familles spectaculaires peuvent être championnes du silence.'[318] The real weight of the family is also shown through Lucile's discomfort during family reunions as described here:

> Lorsque nous allions à Pierremont avec elle, pour un week-end, une fête de famille, ou quelques jours de vacances, Lucile semblait évoluer en territoire hostile. A Pierremont, Lucile se repliait, se montrait sous son jour le plus défensif, le plus agressif. Au sein de sa famille, elle redevenait cet être sur le qui-vive, à fleur de peau.[319]

That the family myth can be extremely damaging to members is made evident in Vigan's work when the author narrates the gap between her mother's distress and the seemingly happy family that surrounds her. An episode makes it especially clear, about which the author writes 'lorsque je songe à cette époque, me revient un souvenir dont le goût, encore aujourd'hui, m'est amer'.[320] She explains that her mother used to watch *Dallas* and that

> pour faire sourire Lucile […] il suffisait de lui chanter la chanson du générique. Et tout le monde, mes cousins, mes tantes, Georges lui-même, de reprendre en coeur. […] Alors Lucile, qui avait lu Maurice Blanchot et Georges Bataille, Lucile dont le sourire était si rare, souriait de toutes ses dents, se marrait même, et me déchirait le coeur. Dans une colère aveugle, je rêvais de les piétiner et de les transpercer de coups de poing, je les haïssais tous, car alors me venait à l'idée qu'ils étaient coupables de ce qu'elle était devenue, et qu'ils en riaient à gorge déployée.[321]

315 See Antonin's death pp. 32-34 and Violette's accident p. 133
316 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 153
317 Ibid., p. 87
318 Conil
319 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 363
320 Ibid., p. 317
321 Ibid., pp. 318-319

This episode shows how the family reunion can be toxic and crush members, as is the case with Lucile. In some ways Vigan's novel is a methodical debunking of the family myth which had prevented her mother and her relatives from facing the true nature of their family. She does so by exposing all the secrets and dark events that have taken place.

Vigan describes alliances between some family members, for example between the parents to hide Georges's aggressions or between Milo, Niels and Baptiste who make a suicide pact. However, these are not central to the narrative, nor are the family roles that potentially exist. This can alert us to the fact that although they are useful for the analysis of Desplechin, Wells and Oates's works, these concepts should not be applied to literary criticism in blanket fashion. Indeed, Vigan's book retraces the history of a family without attributing too much importance to the notions of roles or alliances.

Those notions are useful to analyse *Le Skylab*, but to a smaller degree. Indeed, in the film each family member has an assigned role, but these are not overly restrictive and the family system is not as rigid as in *August: Osage County*. Albertine's parents are the bohemian penniless left-wing artists who contrast with the other siblings, be it Suzette's family – practising catholics and more traditional in outlook – or Frédo the right-wing ex-army brother. Those differing values lead to explosive fights, as Isabelle Regnier notes: 'entre les personnalités les plus extrémistes, il ne faut que quelques verres de vin pour mettre le feu aux poudres et faire exploser des engueulades homériques.'[322] Had Anna and Jean been showed with friends, their political convictions would be less striking than they do here, surrounded by people who think differently. Similarly, Roger's beliefs about the Algerian War and the death penalty might well not be considered extreme in another context. Furthermore, several characters, especially Anna and Roger, enjoy being provocative, and thus reinforce their differences. In that sense, while each does indeed believe in the arguments they make, they push the conversation too far in order to force the others to react. As Boszormenyi-Nagy notes: 'no matter how mature some people seemed to be in ordinary social relationships, certain childish features of their personality emerged only when they [are] in the presence of members of their family.'[323] Delpy's film, like Vigan's work, warns us not too over-assert the importance of roles, while also showing that roles are not necessarily traps so long as they are not excessively rigid.

Indeed, in Delpy's film the family is not the source of unhappiness, but rather somewhere for

322 Regnier
323 Boszormenyi-Nagy, p. xvii. See also Bowen, *Etiology of Schizophrenia*, p. 350

its members to find support, as Roger does with Fredo during their nighttime conversation in the kitchen. Even when Jean and Anna's mothers lament their children's chosen profession, and Lucienne states 'comédienne, c'est pas vraiment un métier', it appears to stem from worry rather than spite, as they feel they have made sacrifices to help their children get easier lives, and do not understand how they could choose a profession that is as uncertain as acting. The camerawork mirrors this family togetherness, as it unites the characters rather than divide them. This is apparent in the aforementioned scene between Roger and Frédo, as they always appear together in the frame.

It is true in the rest of the film as well, as the film is made up of many group shots, and when the camera comes closer there is often more than one character in the frame. This is evident in the examples below:

In that sequence the camera carefully groups the characters together, and is fairly mobile, moving from one group to another, and coming back to the same ones again, mirroring the flow of the conversation. Even though the characters' clothes and attitudes mark their differences – Anna's hair is loose, and her dress leaves her arms and the upper part of her chest bare, while the more conservative Linette has her hair up and wears more formal clothing – the camera and editing insist on their unity. This unity extends to both blood and marriage relations, as in Delpy the conception of family is far-reaching, much more so than in *August: Osage County* or even *Un Conte de Noël*. Indeed, the children's partners are not apart from the others, and the audience has to be attentive on a first viewing in order to understand who is one of Amandine's children and who the partners are.

Le Skylab's approach to family is more positive than in the other works: families are shown to be messy – fights occur but they are quickly resolved and resentment does not linger – but not crushing, as they can be in Vigan or Wells. Many of the differences between Delpy's film and the other fours come from the fact that it is comedy rather than drama. The tone is thus lighter, and the

conflicts revolve around differing values rather than real systemic family problems. Instead, through the gallery of characters that she presents Delpy offers an overview of French society and the different views and principles held by its members. But none of these differences put the family at risk as the fights they generate never reveal deep and hidden family issues. Indeed, the reunion in the film shows that, despite some tensions, the family members share a profound bond, and feel satisfied with the family. Unlike the other works, *Le Skylab* represents a healthy family system which functions as it should. The film does not present a strong focus on roles and alliances, and there is no apparent family myth, thereby signalling that the importance of such concepts should not be over-estimated as they do not allow the understanding of each and every family.

The Savages is also less concerned with roles and family myth than Desplechin, Wells and Oates's works, and focuses instead on the recreation of a family unit which has ceased to exist. Indeed, its reunion points to an established family system that functions on absence and staying away from one another. It appears that Wendy and Jon are not particularly close to one another, and they have not been in contact with Lenny for years: when the film begins they do not know where he currently lives. But all three characters appear to be lonely in their own life, and their reunion can thus be read as the collision of these lonelinesses. Because of this absence of family structure, the characters seem to have less clear attributed roles than in the other works. Both Wendy and Jon appear lost and fragile. However, the siblings react differently to the situation they are presented with, leading to several confrontations between them. Their fights tend to revolve around their different values and experiences which become apparent when they have to make joint decisions about their father. This experience is often observed since 'this caring responsibility means continual negotiations between the different members of the family', as people have widely different ideas of what would be appropriate care.[324] This is apparent in *The Savages* when Wendy maintains that the choice of nursing home is an important one, whereas Jon thinks that all nursing homes are the same.[325] The fight that ensues, which I have already discussed in Chapter I, sees Jon telling Wendy that her concern over the home is a manifestation of guilt rather than solicitude, as he tells her: 'It's not about dad, it's about you and your guilt.' Wendy's guilt is also evident in an earlier scene: as they are leaving Lenny in the nursing home for the first time, Wendy cries in the parking lot while repeating 'We are horrible, horrible people.' Although Jon does not attempt to comfort her in the moment, he later tells her: 'We are doing the right thing Wen. Taking better care of the old

324 Claude Martin and Blanche le Bihan, 'Caring for Dependent Elderly Parents and Family Configurations' in *Beyond the Nuclear Family: Families in a Configurational Perspective*, ed. by Eric D. Widmer and Riitta Jallinoja (Bern & Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 59-76 (p. 60)
325 For a discussion on the tension created by mismatch in values among siblings see Fiese p. 64

man than he ever did of us.' This shows that Jon does not feel as duty-bound as Wendy does, but also highlights another issue: the reversal of roles between Lenny and his children.[326] As Christine Jérusalem notes: 'la maladie modifie toutes les structures familiales', and in this case Wendy and Jon are forced to act as the parents to their elderly father.[327]

This is complicated by the fact that Lenny never played such a role for them when they were children. Indeed, Wendy's delight at finding a box of mementos of their childhood is not shared by Jon who tells the story of how his teeth are still crooked as Lenny did not pay the doctor for his braces. The contrast between the two siblings is clear as Wendy is happily reminiscing while looking at pictures and drawings:

while Jon is impatient to discuss nursing homes.

326 For a discussion on the sense of duty to care for an unwell parent, see Janet Finch, *Family Obligations and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989), p. 241
327 Christine Jérusalem, 'Introduction' in *Le Roman contemporain de la famille*, ed. by Coyault, pp. 13-16 (p. 13)

Bainbrigge comments on Jenkins's stylistic choices in this scene, writing:

> Wendy is in a warm sunny spot resplendent with blue skies, deluding herself into thinking that her father can be supported in an assisted living residence whereas Jon is in a snowy Baltimore in winter clothes, recommending nursing homes in a more matter-of-fact way, and talking about dementia without baulking.[328]

It highlights the difference between the siblings: Wendy is more ready to forgive their father, or at least she feels more tender towards him and their childhood than Jon does. For Jon what this brings to mind is the ways in which Lenny failed them when they were younger. What the reunion does here is force the siblings to confront their difficult childhood, while dealing with different senses of duty and guilt. This is similar to *August: Osage County*, where the issue of the care for elderly parents also creates tension between the daughters, as exemplified in the scene in which the sisters talk on the veranda at night. The scene starts as a pleasant moment between sisters, they laugh and recall amusing memories, but then takes a bad turn when they start discussing arrangements for Violet's care. Underneath the question of which sister will care for the mother, the issues of their ascribed roles is palpable and serves to deepen the tension. In that way, the reunion in both films force the children to confront their feelings about their parents, and what they feel they owe them, or do not owe them, which is of course different for each sibling.

The reunion in *The Savages* is thus unavoidably punctuated by fights as Wendy and Jon learn how to look after their father as well as reconnect with one another. Tensions are also created by their unhappiness with their own lives, their sense of being unfulfilled, both professionally and emotionally. This leads to jealousy between the siblings, as shown through the fight around Wendy's grant. Wendy's impulse to lie about the grant can be understood in the light of Jon's more successful career, and, in turn, Jon's jealousy when learning Wendy has won a grant he has failed to

328 Bainbrigge, p. 156

secure is apparent. Wendy's lie is thus understandable in the specific context of her competition with Jon, in her desire that he recognises her as talented and worthy. When in contact with one another the siblings, as the siblings in Wells and Desplechin, seem to push for their identity to be recognised, but in such a way that their identity ends up being lost or altered in the process. However the confrontation is ultimately fruitful in *The Savages*, as Jenkins herself states: 'They really are yin and yang, and without each other they wouldn't be able to handle it.'[329] The evolution of Jon and Wendy's relationship is clearly shown in their increased physical comfort around one another. In the scene previously discussed in which Wendy cries on the parking lot Jon stands awkwardly away from her

while at the end of the film, they hug one another before parting.

329 Huntington

Their hug is a visibly warm one, and the editing insists on it by first showing Jon's face before moving to Wendy's one: both seem at ease and embrace the other wholeheartedly. Just as in the rest of the film, colours and lights play an important role here. In the scene set in the parking lot, the siblings are wearing dark clothes, and are almost entirely in the dark, while the second scene is much brighter, and Wendy wears a light green jumper. Furthermore, the camera keeps its distance in the first scene, framing the characters in a medium shot and mirroring the distance between the siblings, whereas the second one is shot in close-up, reflecting the siblings' closeness. Even though families are shown to be complicated in Jenkins's film, as in Delpy's, they are ultimately portrayed as positive, and the Savage siblings need one another in order to get through the ordeal. The film displays the positive evolution of the family, but also that of Wendy and Jon as individuals. An analysis of Wendy's first and last appearances makes clear the contrast between the states of Wendy's life prior and subsequent to her reunion with her brother and father.

In the first shot the light is dull and everything is in the same shade of blue. Furthermore, Wendy is static, hidden behind her cubicle's wall, and only her head is apparent. This is in clear contrast with the last scene, where she is in movement, out of doors, and where the light and colours are warmer and more vibrant. These two shots epitomise the effect that the family reunion has on Wendy.

This discussion shows how the authors and filmmakers use the reunion as a tool to reveal the family systems at play. Using concepts drawn from family therapy has allowed for an in-depth examination of the ways in which families are shaped by the family myth, the roles assigned to each members, as well as by the impact of alliances. The analysis of *Un Conte de Noël*, for example, shows that when Henri challenges the family myth he is at the same time reinforcing it, being therefore caught in the role and the myth that he is trying to dismantle. This displays the powerful force of family roles and myths within a family dynamic. However, their importance should not be over-asserted, as previously discussed. Indeed, although using them to analyse Desplechin, Wells and Oates's works asserts their relevance and endorses them, the analysis of the works of Vigan, Delpy and Jenkins shows that there are other ways to approach the topic of families and family reunions.

What the reunion does is force the family members to confront not only the identities of their relatives, but their own identity as well. As Gris puts it, in a family 'chacun s'efforce d'imposer sa présence et sa singularité, tout en se heurtant à l'étrangeté d'un être dont la familiarité semblait être une évidence'.[330] The characters therefore do not act in the same way with every member of the family. It is very clear in *Un Conte de Noël* where both Elizabeth appears more fragile and hesitant when not in the presence of Henri. Similarly in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* it is said that Lucile

330 Gris, p. 296

'préférait voir ses frères et soeurs en tête à tête' rather than be with them all at once.[331] This indicates that being in contact with their family pushes the characters to more extreme behaviours, possibly as a way to differentiate themselves from one another, and to claim some of the family attention for themselves. Furthermore, the way in which the characters are perceived also changes. For example, Little Charles sees Ivy as brave and his champion while Violet considers her weak. Each reunion thus forces the characters to confront the way in which they are seen by their family, which is part of how they build their identity. Ferreira comments that 'the role that the individual plays is meaningless until and unless viewed in the framework of the [family] relationship' which the examination of my corpus confirms.[332]

This analysis of my corpus has shown that the works illustrate the notion that when a family system is rigid it becomes unhealthy and harmful for its members whereas a flexible one is healthier. Indeed, it is only when the system regains some flexibility that the family systems in *Un Conte de Noël* and *We Were the Mulvaneys* appear to function properly, whereas the rigidity of the Westons leads to the implosion of the family. In the first part of this chapter I wrote that rituals are meant to provide stability over time, a sense of belonging and a reaffirmation of relationships. This is not proven true in all works however and some display the failure of rituals rather than their success. This is the case of *August: Osage County* where the family ritual that is a funeral fails at bonding the relatives together but instead precipitates their dissolution. Similarly, the many family reunions in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* only bring the family closer on the surface but also encourages a toxic family system. In *We Were the Mulvaneys* rituals are shown as both failing and succeeding: the funeral of Corinne's mother does not bring the family back together but the Fourth of July cookout does, demonstrating that a ritual holds no power if the family system is not working properly. Desplechin, Jenkins and Delpy's films are more optimistic. In *Un Conte de Noël* the Christmas celebration generates many fights but also allows for the system to start evolving again, leading to an improvement by the end of the work. In *The Savages* while there is no ritual in play, the reunion brings Jon and Wendy closer together and their relationship is much improved at the end. *Le Skylab* is the only work which unequivocally shows a ritual which provides stability over time, a sense of belonging and a reaffirmation of family relationships. James H. Bossard and Eleanor S. Boll summarise the ambivalence of rituals by stating that 'a ritual, appealing in content and manipulated wisely, becomes a powerful and constructive weapon in the integration of a family; and an ill-adapted ritual or a good ritual misused may become an agent in its disintegration'.[333] Indeed, when rituals fail they create stress, conflicts and lead people to feel

331 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 364
332 Ferreira, 'Family Myth and Homeostasis', p. 463
333 James H. Bossard and Eleanor S. Boll, *Ritual in Family Living: A Contemporary Study* (Philadelphia: University of

excluded and let-down, whereas when they are successful they fulfil their aims of regulating social conflict, promoting social cohesion and providing a sense of group identity and solidarity.[334]

Pennsylvania, 1950), p. 202
334 Pleck, p. 19

Conclusion

The place of the reunion differs in each work. The fact that the fours films revolve entirely around the family reunion, while the two novels are more far-reaching, while featuring reunions, tends to suggest that cinema is more focused on groups, whereas literature examines individuals more closely. This is in part due to the difference in medium: cameras can capture several people's reactions at once, while a novel necessarily treats one thing after another. For example in *We Were the Mulvaneys* Judd is the main narrator, and he opens and closes the novel, but the narrative explores the consciousness of the other characters as well. However, each event is only seen through one person's point of view; for instance the epilogue is only seen though Judd's point of view while the dinner after the rape is through Marianne's. The group is important in the novel as it is significant for the characters, but the narrative presents an ensemble by way of exploring each character individually. The novel goes from individual to familial and not the other way round. This is not to suggest that cinema is always interested in groups and literature in the individual, but there is a natural affinity of each medium with one. An affinity which is especially taken advantage of in the four films examined here, as they explore families, which are, by nature, a group. In some cases the reunion is provided by the work itself, as is the case with Vigan and Delpy's works. Indeed, the whole of Vigan's book is a reunion with her deceased mother: the narrative appears as a way for Vigan to reunite with her mother through her exploration and writing of the latter's life. In *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* the act of writing itself becomes a reunion, whereby the author is reunited with her deceased mother, and with her own history. It is similar in *Le Skylab* as the film is influenced by Delpy's family, and her recreation of her childhood through the film is a way of reuniting with her mother following her passing, and her past in general. This is similar to Vigan's book, as both work are structured by the need to reunite with a deceased parent, and the will to understand how one's past bears on the present.

The families' dysfunctions continue to become apparent in this chapter. As Bowen explains, a family dysfunctions when the system becomes too rigid, which is the case in Oates, Vigan, Wells and Desplechin. Indeed, in Oates and Vigan's novels the family myth traps the characters, while in Wells and Desplechin's films the members fight against roles which become constrictive. These families are not working properly, at least at some points in the narratives, as they prevent growth and evolution. The dysfunction in *The Savages* comes from the fact that the system is almost non-existent at first, and in that sense does not operate properly. Furthermore, it is clear that the family was also dysfunctional in the past, as Lenny did not look after his children in the way he should have. On the contrary, dysfunction is not present in the family depicted in *Le Skylab*, where the

roles are not restrictive and the system fairly flexible. This family functions in the sense that it unites its members without entrapping them.

This chapter has shown how the reunions in my corpus are used to uncover the family system at play. As reunions incorporate so many feelings of tension and happiness they provide filmmakers and writers with powerful narrative and structural tools. Indeed, reunions, and family life in general, are an 'endless process of movement in and around consensual understanding, from attachment to conflict to withdrawal' which makes for layered and intriguing fiction.[335] Using concepts drawn from family therapy has been fruitful in displaying the family myths, roles and alliances which are not always evident on the surface but which drive the entire family dynamic. But this analysis has also shown that their relevance to every family should not be over-asserted. During most of the reunions fights occur, created by the proximity the characters are forced to be in with one another. These fights, however, do not necessarily announce the dissolution of the family, and an absence of fight can be much more brutal. Indeed, there is no fight in *We Were the Mulvaneys* when Marianne is exiled, and yet this action leads directly to the dismantling of the family. This is similar in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* where the absence of fights during reunions masks the avoidance of dark secrets. On the opposite the abundance of fights in *Un Conte de Noël* signify that the family system is starting to evolve again, leading to an amelioration of relationships by the end of the film.

Following on from the previous chapter, this one enriches the discussion of who is part of the families. In Delpy, the family is not restrictive, but encompasses all of the children's partners. Indeed, as I have mentioned, it is not clear from the start which of the family members are Amandine's children and which are the children's spouses, and the camera unites them indiscriminately. This is also the case in Vigan, as the author notes: 'Il [Georges] invitait des clochards à sa table, hébergeait des réfugiés de toutes origines, emmenait les enfants des autres en vacances'.[336] On the contrary, in *August: Osage County* not only is Johnna not considered family, as discussed in the previous chapter, but only the blood relatives are seen as really part of the family, as displayed by the difference of treatment between the women and the men. *We Were the Mulvaneys* and *Un Conte de Noël* are in between those two extremes. In the former, people who are not blood relatives are not really considered as family, but their importance for the maintenance of the family is emphasised, while in the latter the children's partners are not full members of the family, but there is flexibility as Sylvia is very much incorporated in the fabric of the Vuillards's life since she has been with Ivan for a long time. The discussion of whether the family is a trap or a

335 Hess and Handel, p. 10
336 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 65

refuge also progresses as rituals and roles display the same blend of comforting and imprisoning which the home did in the previous chapter. In Desplechin, Wells and Oates, roles appear to entrap the members who need to find some flexibility in order to evolve. Indeed, both Henri and Elizabeth seem to be paralysed by their roles as scapegoat and attackers until the dynamics change, while in *August: Osage County* her role drives Barbara on the brink of madness. Similarly, during their time apart, the members of the Mulvaney family are able to change and they no longer fit in the previous roles by the epilogue. The characters also appear to be trapped by their duty to the family, and especially to their ageing parents, as is the case for the Weston daughters as well as for the Savage siblings. *Le Skylab* is one work in which roles do not appear to be unduly restrictive, or entrap the members.

In the same way, the rituals which are meant to be comforting can feel suffocating to the family members. Indeed, rituals can be both supportive as they 'hold meanings of belonging to the group and emotional commitments' as well as disruptive as 'opportunities for exclusion and devaluing the opinions and feelings of others'.[337] The outcomes of the reunions in my corpus show that both possibilities are explored by the works. In *August: Osage County* the ritual is disruptive and fails to bring the family members closer together. However, even though the film ends with the dismantling of the family it is possible to see this dissolution as a positive outcome, since Ivy and Barbara appear to free themselves from the burden of their family. In Vigan's work the ritual of family reunions for holidays and celebrations is shown to be partly empty. Indeed, even though Vigan talks fondly of family holidays, the spectre of the hidden sexual abuse floats above all of them, and the rituals thus serve to maintain the family in a rigid system. Rituals are more hopeful in both *The Savages* and *Un Conte de Noël*. Indeed, *The Savages* starts with an absence of family ritual and almost all family connection but the forced reunion brings Wendy and Jon closer together. I thus disagree with Helgola G. Ross and Joel I. Milgram's assessment that in the case of a parent's death siblings are only brought together if they were already close, and driven apart if conflict and rivalry existed, as the siblings in *The Savages* prove the opposite can be true.[338] Instead, I agree with Martin and le Bihan who argue that dealing with an elderly parent can 'increase siblings' relationships which were rare or weak', which is the case with the Savage siblings.[339] Furthermore, the reunion also helps both of them move forward in their professional and romantic lives. Similarly, the ritual of a Christmas family reunion is successful in *Un Conte de Noël* even though it includes many fights. Indeed, at the end of the film Elizabeth's son stays in the house with

337 Fiese, p. 24
338 Helgola G. Ross and Joel I. Milgram, 'Important Variables in Adult Sibling Relationships: A Qualitative Study' in *Sibling Relationships: Their Nature and Significance Across the Lifespan*, ed. by Michael E. Lamb and Brian Sutton-Smith (London: Erlbaum, 1982), pp. 225-249 (p. 242)
339 Martin and le Bihan, p. 61

Henri when she leaves which is in direct opposition with her previous behaviour, avoiding any contact between Henri and her son, and even telling her brother: 'N'offre pas de cadeau à mon fils. Et je préférerais que tu ne lui adresses pas la parole.' In *We Were the Mulvaneys* the rituals are shown to be working positively only when the original problem – Marianne's exile – has been resolved. Indeed, reunions fail to happen throughout the novel but when they finally do they are presented as positive. The reunion in the epilogue not only reunites the Mulvaneys with one another but with rituals as well, rituals that were central to their life as a family and are precisely described (the preparation of food, the ways in which they address one another) but which disappeared following Marianne's banishment. *We Were the Mulvaneys* therefore moves in the opposite direction from *August: Osage County*, going from dissolution to reconciliation. *Le Skylab*, like Oates's novel, presents an example of a working ritual as the reunion around Amandine's birthday bonds the family together. This analysis shows that 'family members may have more or less positive feelings about the celebrations in their family, but there is little dispute about the emotional significance'.[340] Rituals are ambivalent as they can both be felt as a refuge or as a trap. In the next chapter, I explore how the characters' relationship with food is also a way of confronting their family.

340 Bennett and Wolin, pp. 2-3

Chapter III. Meals

In this chapter I set out to explore how the characters' relationship with food can be a symbol for their relationship with their family, and thus how their acceptance or refusal of food works as a mirror to their acceptance or refusal of the family. The complexity of the characters' relationship with their family is reflected in the ways in which family meals are incorporated in the different works. I also examine in this chapter the rituals that surround family meals, and their symbolic significance as well as the relationship between eating disorders, trauma and power. There are many works which discuss the subject of food and eating in both literature and cinema. The function of food in literature has been established as an 'objet littéraire' which 'n'a cependant jamais pour seule fonction d'assurer la subsistance des personnages, mais est entourée de signes qu'il s'agit pour le lecteur de déchiffrer'.[341] Indeed, food is always more than mere physical sustenance in fiction, as Henri Lafon notes:

> l'objet-nourriture, dans le roman, nous emporte, comme beaucoup d'autres, toujours au-delà de lui-même, il n'est jamais borné à sa seule fonction d'assurer la subsistance du personnage, il est toujours aussi un indice. On ne mange jamais pour manger mais pour que le lecteur perçoive quelque chose dont le manger est le signe.[342]

What I seek to show in this chapter is that in works which focus on families, food, and thus also meals, become embodiments of the characters' connection with their families. Because food is far-reaching and touches upon many different aspects of human life, it is indeed a useful tool in fiction to embody some of the works' main themes. In that sense I agree with Sarah Sceats's argument that 'food itself is not bound within any single discourse, but becomes impregnated with meanings from the many and various frameworks within which it figures – and this is a major reason why it is so rich a resource for writers'.[343] This is of course true of both literature and cinema. Until now however, there has been an intense focus on French realist and naturalist novels in critical works which look at the place of food in literature, whereas in the domain of cinema works on the topic have tended to focus on the genre of food-films rather than on the use of food in other genres.[344] Food-films are films which focus on the topic of food, cooking and eating, some of the most

341 Catherine Gautschi-Lanz, *Le Roman à table: nourritures et repas imaginaires dans le roman français* (Geneva: Slatkine, 2006), p. 19
342 Henri Lafon, 'Du thème alimentaire dans le roman' in *Dix-huitième siècle*, No. 15 (1983), pp. 169-182 (p. 170)
343 Sarah Sceats, *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 126
344 For critical works on food in French realist and naturalist novels see for example Goutaland, Geneviève Sicotte, *Le Festin lu: le repas chez Flaubert, Zola et Huysmans* (Liber, 1999) and Christopher Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992)

commonly discussed being *Like Water for Chocolate* by Alfonso Arau and *Eat Drink Man Woman* by Ang Lee.[345] In this chapter I propose to focus on the examination of the various instances of family meals in my chosen works, rather than looking at food in general. Indeed, meals allow for the gathering of the family members, providing a space for confrontations to take place and for connections to occur, thereby moving the plot along. In that respect, meals function as self-contained family reunions. As food and meals are topics which reach far outside the realm of literature and cinema, this chapter will make use of the writings available in different fields, and especially in anthropology and psychology.

This chapter is divided into two parts: in the first one I demonstrate the importance of food and meals for Western societies, and thus for families, using the writings of Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu, Mary Douglas and Margaret Visser. I also examine the roles meals play as structuring devices in some of the works in my corpus. In the second part of the chapter, I examine in detail the instances of meals present in the works, and how they relate to the family dynamics.

345 For works on food-films see for example Tom Hertweck, *Food on Film: Bringing something new to the table* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2015) and Laura Lindenfeld, *Feasting Our Eyes: Food films and cultural identity in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017)

I. The Importance of Family Meals

Food is more than physical nourishment. It is not only material but possesses a surcharge of meaning. As Claude Lévi-Strauss argues, it is a language through which societies express themselves, and thus a means for studying cultures. Lévi-Strauss's writings on food shaped the way for all subsequent researchers, especially his argument that cooking, along with language, 'constitue une forme d'activité humaine véritablement universelle: pas plus qu'il n'existe de société sans langage, il n'en existe aucune qui, d'une façon ou de l'autre, ne fait pas cuire certains au moins de ses aliments'.[346] He argues further that food brings to light the underlying structures of human societies, stating that the contrasts found in the organisation of meals are

> superposables à beaucoup d'autres, dont la nature n'est pas alimentaire, mais sociologique, économique, esthétique ou religieuse : hommes et femmes, famille et société, village et brousse, économie et prodigalité, noblesse et roture, sacré et profane … Ainsi peut-on espérer découvrir, pour chaque cas particulier, comment la cuisine d'une société est un langage dans lequel elle traduit inconsciemment sa structure, à moins que, sans le savoir davantage, elle ne se résigne à y dévoiler ses contradictions.[347]

Lévi-Strauss thus 'establishes food as a tool for reading culture', as Ruth Cruickshank explains, as he states that the differentiations between modes of cooking 'reflect universal structuring principles found across human societies'.[348] His writings are thus essential when looking at food, as he is the one to establish that food transcends its material function of nourishment, and is a tool of communication central to human societies.

Roland Barthes's writing on food were informed by Lévi-Strauss's arguments, and like him he 'looked for a fixed grammar underlying the food preferences of different societies'.[349] Indeed, Barthes claims that:

> c'est toute la nourriture qui sert de signe entre les participants d'une population donnée. Car dès qu'un besoin est pris en charge par des normes de production et de consommation, bref dès qu'il passe au rang d'institution, on ne peut plus dissocier en lui la fonction du signe de la fonction.[350]

And he further states that 'ces institutions impliquent fatalement des images, des rêves, des tabous,

346 Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'Le Triangle culinaire' in *Food and History*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2004), pp. 7-19 (p. 10)
347 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologiques. L'Origine des manières de table* (Paris: Plon, 1968), p. 411
348 Ruth Cruickshank, 'Eating, Drinking and Re-thinking: Marguerite Duras's *Moderato Cantabile*' in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (2013), pp. 300-312 (p. 303)
349 Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and tasting in England and France from the Middle Ages to the present* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 12
350 Roland Barthes, 'Pour une psycho-sociologie de l'alimentation contemporaine' in *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, No. 5 (1961), pp. 977-986 (p. 980)

des goûts, des choix, des valeurs'.[351] As such, Barthes 'uses food and drink as examples of the way ideological discourses are constructed and circulated', once again proving that food surpasses its biological function of sustenance.[352] The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues in a similar vein that food and drink are powerful modes of distinction through which people express their inclusion or exclusion of groups. He writes that: 'le goût en matière alimentaire ne peut être complètement autonomisé par rapport aux autres dimensions de rapport au monde, aux autres, au corps propre, où s'accomplit la philosophie pratique caractéristique de chaque classe.'[353] As Stephen Mennell notes: 'Bourdieu looks for formulae underlying the cultural preferences of each class or sub-class'.[354] For Bourdieu food is only one of the signs showing one's belonging to a group as he states:

> les espaces des préférences alimentaires, vestimentaires, cosmétiques, s'organisent selon la même structure fondamentale, celle de l'espace social déterminé par le volume et la structure du capital. Pour construire complètement l'espace des styles de vie à l'intérieur desquels se définissent les consommations culturelles, il faudrait établir, pour chaque classe et fraction de classe, c'est-à-dire pour chacune des configurations du capital, la *formule génératrice* de l'habitus qui retraduit dans un *style de vie* particulier les nécessités et les facilités caractéristiques de cette classe de condition d'existence (relativement) homogènes.[355]

Following Lévi-Strauss, both Barthes and Bourdieu thus shed light on some additional functions that food can perform, such as its capacity to disseminate ideological discourses and its reflection of the preferences specific to each social class. Food is therefore shown as central to our understanding of the world, which explains why it has been imbued with emotional signification. As the anthropologist Margaret Mead argues: 'in most societies, food is the focus of emotional associations, a channel for inter-personal relations, for the communication of love or discrimination or disapproval; it usually has a symbolic reference.'[356] This vision is not confined to anthropology, but is shared by researchers in other fields, including in psychology and psychoanalysis. For instance, the Jungian psychologist Eve Jackson states that 'when the psyche talks about food, about feeding, nourishing, starving, taste, assimilation, it is generally not to be taken literally' as we 'project meanings unto food that have nothing to do with assuaging our alimentary needs, seeking through eating to satisfy our longing for affection or sexual fulfilment, or to muffle our grief or rage'.[357] Across fields, it is thus agreed that food transcends its initial function as physical nourishment; it is a system of communication which encompasses the ideological, the economical,

351 Ibid, p. 978
352 Cruickshank, p. 303
353 Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979), p. 215
354 Mennell, p. 12
355 Bourdieu, p. 230
356 Margaret Mead, *Cultural Patterns and Technical Change: A manual* (New York: New American Library, 1955), p. 197
357 Eve Jackson, *Food and Transformation: Imagery and symbolism of eating* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1996), pp. 8-9

the social, as well as the psychological. Because of this, food can function as a symbol, making it a particularly rich tool for both literature and cinema.

In fiction, food and the customs surrounding its consumption provide information about the characters. Food can act as a marker of class, as well as of other groups such as nationality and religion. Indeed, as Bourdieu demonstrates, taste 'transforme des pratiques objectivement classées dans lesquelles une condition se signifie elle-même […] en pratiques classantes, c'est-à-dire en expression symbolique de la position de classe'.[358] The food they consume therefore places people within a specific society, group or social class, which is useful in fictional works to situate characters. In *Un Conte de Noël*, for instance, the red wine and pâté enjoyed at the dinner table clearly marks the characters as culturally French. As Barthes notes, wine 'orne les cérémoniaux les plus menus de la vie quotidienne française, du casse-croûte […] au festin, de la conversation de bistrot au discours de banquet'.[359] Similarly, the tuna melt prepared by Wendy in *The Savages*, is a typical American snack, as are the sweet corns and hot dogs enjoyed by the Mulvaney family in *We Were the Mulvaneys*. As Massimo Montanari comments: 'the food system contains and conveys the culture of its practitioner […]. It is therefore an extraordinary vehicle of self-representation […] – a means of establishing identity'.[360] In fiction, food can thus be used as a quick and easy way to provide information about where the story is situated, and who the characters are. However, as food and recipes travel, the food consumed by characters can do more than inform about their inclusion in a specific group, but also shed light on their views of their world. This is the case in *Le Skylab*, where the family's consumption of couscous and mechoui highlight their hypocrisy. Indeed, several members of the family are right-wing, regret the French losses in the wars of decolonisation and have strong racist tendencies, and yet they prepare and enjoy a dish which is a direct import from the ex-French colonies in Maghreb. The archeologist Martin Jones notes that 'national cuisine tells a story, or interweaves a constellation of different stories, about mercantile enterprise, an empire over which the sun never sets, and many other things beside', and indeed Delpy uses food to comment on the place of immigrants 1970s France by highlighting the hypocrisy of a society which rejects people while appropriating parts of their culture.[361]

Customs surrounding food can also be markers of nationality, class or religion. This is the case in *Un Conte de Noël* where the family hold a semi-formal Christmas dinner which indicates their Christian heritage. Similarly, the *apéro* enjoyed by the adults in *Le Skylab* roots them firmly in

358 Bourdieu, p. 195
359 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957), p. 85
360 Massimo Montanari, *Food is Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 133
361 Martin Jones, *Feast: Why humans share food* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 293

the French tradition, and the Fourth of July cookout at the end of *We Were the Mulvaneys* is inscribed in American traditions. Alongside clothing, ways of speaking and settings, food and food customs are elements that helps situate the characters. André-Jeanne Baudrier notes that 'les aliments permettent aux auteurs d'enrichir l'aspect social, économique ou idéologique de l'oeuvre', which is true in both literature and cinema.[362] Furthermore, food does not have to be prominently displayed in order to achieve this goal, but instead belongs to a myriad other details that, together, create an identity for the characters. However, this is obviously not the case of every foodstuff consumed in a novel or a film, I have here chosen to focus on examples that are telling, but in the course of the works there are instances which are more significant than others. Generally speaking though, food in fiction can function as a symbol of national, social and religious identity and transcend its function of sustenance.

In this chapter however, I will not focus on food in general but specifically on meals. As the instances where food is shared by people, meals are, like food, a system of communication. Douglas has extensively studied the significance of meals, and especially of shared meals. She does not, like Lévi-Strauss, believe there is a universal message encoded in the language of food, but states that:

> If food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries. […] Food categories therefore encode social events.[363]

For Douglas meal patterns are thus clues to the social relations between the people sharing the meal, and to the significance of certain events over others. She argues that food discriminates between different types of meals, from the everyday to the feast, writing: 'the choice of goods continuously creates certain patterns of discrimination, overlaying or reinforcing others. Goods, then, are the visible part of culture.'[364] Douglas therefore places great importance on the patterning of meals during the day, week and year. Mead also emphasises the importance of meal patterns in order to understand what food means to specific societies.[365] This idea has been developed by others as well, such as Jones who writes that 'we now used the shared meal to punctuate the day, celebrate the great occasions of life, make transactions, and define who is inside and outside any particular cultural group'.[366] Meals are thus important as they bring people together, while also organising the day which is punctuated by several meals – breakfast, lunch, dinner – and creating a hierarchy between

362 André-Jeanne Baudrier, 'Avant-propos' in *Le Roman et la nourriture*, ed. by André-Jeanne Baudrier (Besançon: Presses Universitaires Franc-comtoises, 2003), pp. 3-8 (p. 5)
363 Mary Douglas, 'Deciphering a Meal' in *Daedalus*, Vol. 101, No. 1 (Winter, 1972), pp. 61-81 (p. 61)
364 Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an anthropology of consumption* (London: Allen Lane, 1979), p. 66
365 Mead, pp. 198-200
366 Jones, p. 2

different types of meals – weekday dinner, Sunday lunch, Christmas feast – and therefore different types of of events. I will examine in detail the patterning of meals in my works in the second part of this chapter. Meals also discriminate between who is allowed at, or excluded from, the table. According to Douglas, 'the grand operator of the system is the line between intimacy and distance'.[367]

As they reveal the structure of our lives, and discriminate between events, meals are rituals that closely resemble a play. Margaret Visser thus defined a meal as 'an artistic social construct, ordering the foodstuffs which comprise it into a complex dramatic whole […]. However humble it may be, a meal has a definite plot, the intention of which is to intrigue, stimulate, and satisfy'.[368] Every meal therefore has a purpose, and their significance are further developed by Karin Becker and Olivier Leplatre:

> La nourriture est un code, dépendant d'une énonciation et de règles de mise en signes. Le repas, où se réalise la réserve signifiante de l'aliment, le ramifie dans le foisonnement des pratiques humaines. De ce point de vue, en même temps qu'il dépend de la situation historique où il se produit, le repas donne à l'aliment une aura mythique: il l'intègre dans un rituel où se rejoue l'ensemble des traits de l'existence humaine. L'homme y est intégralement sollicité, de son corps à sa parole, de son espace à sa temporalité, de son intimité la plus intérieure à sa sociabilité, de sa vie à sa mort. La question que pose le repas est celle de la possibilité de faire jouer ensemble toutes les modalités des significations humaines, toute leur théâtralité, leur politique, leur économie, leur idéologie…[369]

The importance of meals therefore resides in the fact that its ramifications reach far beyond the satisfaction of the biological need of hunger, but extend to incorporate all the aspects of human life. Their ritualistic aspect also makes meals uniquely suited to fiction, as is the fact that they provide a good opportunity for bringing people together. Many authors and filmmakers therefore construct whole scenes, or indeed works, around meals. Their theatrical nature is further highlighted by Visser:

> The whole dinner party is an improvised drama, with roles of varying importance, elaborate stage business, props, and theatrical conventions. At the same time it is a deadly serious affair where tremendous decisions may be made, well camouflaged by the decorative façade, but understood by all. Everyone knows the rules, is made to participate, and indeed contributes to the script, and everyone is both actor and audience.[370]

Meals thus serve as organising principles in our lives, which allows for a discrimination between different types of occasion, bringing people together to perform a ritual.

---

367 Douglas, 'Deciphering a Meal', p. 66
368 Margaret Visser, *Much Depends on Dinner: The extraordinary history and mythology, allure and obsessions, perils and taboos of an ordinary meal* (London: Penguin, 1989), pp. 14-15
369 Karin Becker and Olivier Leplatre, 'Introduction: «Faire l'histoire de la gastronomie, c'est faire l'histoire d'une littérature»' in *Écritures du repas: Fragments d'un discours gastronomique*, ed. by Karin Becker and Olivier Leplatre (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 7
370 Visser, *Much Depends on Dinner*, p. 190

Family meals are imbued with special meaning as our societies are built around families. Families are thus the group that shares food together the most often, and, as Visser notes, because 'it is often part of society's manners code never to eat between meals' every family meal thus turns into 'a mini-feast or festival, so that it can, like a feast, celebrate both the interconnectedness and the self-control of the group's members'.[371] The status of the family as the central unit in Western societies was examined in Chapter I, and the significance of the family meal is thus linked to the importance of the family home. Indeed, as discussed in the first chapter, with the rise of the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century, there is an 'instauration d'une nette division entre les sphères privée et publique de l'existence, et la légitimation de la sphère privée comme lieu de réalisation de soi et d'authenticité', with home being 'le domaine de l'affectivité du sujet, de la famille et de la femme. La maison est son espace privilégié'.[372] Therefore

> le repas familial, en tant que rituel de cette communauté, prend une importance déterminante. Moment récurrent de la vie quotidienne où sont imposées et confortés les hiérarchies, les places et les rôles, il forge les comportements, régule les pulsions, mais aussi donne un plaisir contrôlé et permet de nouer des liens affectifs.[373]

The importance of the family meals is clearly linked to the importance of the home as the domain of the family, and the most valued space in society. The family meal is thus a means to strengthen the bond between family members, and as such is 'one of the key institutions through which a home is maintained'.[374] Visser exemplifies this point when she claims that 'one definition of a family – a definition with different degrees of significance in different cultures – is «those who eat together»'.[375] The second part of this chapter will closely examine what actually takes place during those family meals, but it is crucial to note that they are established as some of the most significant events in Western societies.

I will now show how the structures of the works in my corpus reflect the particular significance of family meals. Within works of fiction meals are useful as tools to allow the plot to develop by bringing the characters together. Furthermore, as meals are so essential to the life of families it is no surprise they often play a central role in works that feature families, and indeed Baudrier notes that 'les grandes sagas familiales telles que la Forsyte saga de John Galsworthy ou les Rougon-Macquart d'Emile Zola ne sauraient se passer de repas de famille ou autres pouvant

371 Margaret Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The origins, evolution, eccentricities and meanings of table manners* (UK: Penguin Books, 2017), p. 24
372 Sicotte, pp. 31-32
373 Ibid., p. 33
374 Morley, p. 26
375 Visser, *Rituals of Dinner*, p. 86

même rythmer l'action'.[376] I have already discussed how individual instances of meals are inherently theatrical, but their patterning also bears resemblance to a narrative, as Jones shows:

> The whole sequence of meals through lifetime was like a long conversation, or an extended narrative, broken down into episodes, chapters, paragraphs, and sentences. That narrative expressed and reaffirmed relationships within the family and between families, followed life stories from the cradle to the grave, and charted and celebrated major turning points in the community's history. Looking more closely at each particular meal, just as sentences broke down to words and syllables, meals broke down to courses and mouthfuls, each articulated with a certain amount of individual expression, but essentially following a shared corpus of grammatical rules.[377]

Meals are thus doubly suited to fiction, as their function as a narrative can be replicated in a work, whereby meals allow us to trace the evolution of a family. It is thus not surprising that in my corpus the works have used meals as a structuring device, albeit all in different ways.

In *August: Osage County*, the narrative is articulated around three meals, a structure that comes from the original play where each of the three acts revolves around a meal. The film borrows that structure, and thus the middle of the film is occupied by the meal following Beverly's funeral, while in the first part there is an afternoon snack shared by Violet, Barbara and Bill on the porch, and in the later half a lunch shared by Violet, Barbara and Ivy. These three meals punctuate the beginning, middle and end of the film, and act as gauges of the characters' states of mind, and especially those of Violet and Barbara who are the only ones present at each meal. They are also three points of entry which, when compared, show the parallel transformations of Barbara and Violet discussed in Chapter II. Barbara goes from being the dutiful daughter to violently taking control of her mother (in the process becoming similar to her) to choosing independence and freedom. In counterpoint, Violet starts off as the overwhelmingly strong matriarch but the last meal sees her being abandoned by her daughters. The first meal scene also works as an introduction to Violet and Barbara's relationship, and the development of that relationship can be traced all the way through the last lunch scene, via the funeral meal. It starts as fairly cordial, although tense, comes to a head towards the film's mid-point and ends in a separation. The funeral lunch, which constitutes the longest scene of the film and is placed in the middle, functions as the climax of the narrative. It is the only scene for which all the characters are present in the same room. Until that moment characters arrive at the house in small groups and tensions start building between all of them. All those tensions explode during the only scene which reunites them all, and afterwards they leave again one after the other, while the film slowly works towards its ending which sees the dismantling of the family. Meals in Wells's film should be examined together, looking at how they respond to

376 Baudrier, p. 5
377 Jones, p. 8

one another, rather than in isolation. For instance, Ivy's breaking of her plate in the third meal mirrors Barbara's instigation of physical violence at the funeral meal. The meal scenes in *August: Osage County* make apparent both the evolution of individual characters and of their relationships with one another.

There are also three main scenes of meals in *Un Conte de Noël*, to which should be added two key scenes that take place in the kitchen: the men's conversation while they prepare an apple pie and Sylvia's nighttime confrontation with Simon. As in *August: Osage County* these scenes punctuate the film, acting as anchors in a work that relishes, and in some ways celebrates, disorder. Furthermore, they all function as small climaxes within the structure of the narrative as the tensions between the family members always come to a head during these scenes. Tensions that have been building are released during the meals, and things settle down for a little while after each of these meals, before the process recommences. This mechanism is very apparent, for example, during the second meal in the kitchen. Up until that point, tension has been building up around the question of whether Paul would be allowed to donate his bone marrow to his grand-mother. The scene is one of the film's climaxes as, following Elizabeth's revelation that Paul has been given the authorisation, Claude and Henri start to fight physically. Following that explosion of tension, Elizabeth tends to Henri's wound, indicating a softening in their relationship. However, the same mechanism then starts again, leading to a further altercation between Henri and Elizabeth during the Christmas dinner. Although all the meals act as contained climaxes within the narrative, the Christmas dinner functions as the main one. Featuring all the characters, it is the point where the narrative truly shifts as afterwards there is a definite improvement in Henri's relationships with his mother and sister. The special status of that scene is clear as the dinner is the culmination of the Christmas ritual they have come together to celebrate, and is indicated by a camera that is less mobile than in the rest of the film.

Meals also play a critical role in the structure of *We Were the Mulvaneys*. As in *August: Osage County*, they exist in mirror relationships with one another: any meal is always compared with the previous or subsequent one(s). They therefore function as key points in the narrative, which is why there are instances of meals in each of the five parts of the novel, with the notable exception of the third part, 'The Pilgrim', which focuses on Marianne's life at the Green Isle Co-op. This absence is signifiant in itself and I discuss it later in this chapter when looking at Marianne's anorexia. Meals in Oates's novel allow us to see where the characters are at, just as in *August: Osage County* they are indicators of the state of mind of the characters, as well as of the state of the family-unit. The meal in the epilogue serves an additional function, that of denouement, as it brings the novel, and the family, full circle: from united to dismantled to reunited. By making the symbol

of the reunited family a shared meal, Oates reinforces the symbolic use of meals throughout the novel.

Most of *Le Skylab* revolves around meals: the bulk of the film is made up of the lunch which stretches into the afternoon, and the film additionally features a family dinner and a breakfast. These meals, which last several hours and even stretch out across the whole day, embed the film within French cultural tradition, but their main function is to bring the characters together, thus providing the opportunity for the discussions which make up a large part of the film. However, if meals do produce the kernel around which narrative crises can materialise for the adults – such as the unruly political discussion at dinner –, it is not the case for the children. For them, the narrative crises take place outside the table, marking a contrast between the group of adults and children in the film. Delpy thus uses meals as a strong structuring principle in her film, one that allows the adults to converse and argue with one another, while drawing comparisons between the world of the adults and the children.

Meals, however, do not always play a preponderant role in the structure of the works. Indeed, they do not have a structuring function in either *The Savages* or *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit*. In all the works in my corpus one of the virtues of meals is to bring characters together, but when they play a structuring role their function can also be that of climax, of bringing forth the narrative crises. In Vigan and Jenkins their role is more limited and they are only one piece of the puzzle providing information about the nature of the family dynamics.

In this part, I have discussed the importance of food and meals in Western societies, and the specific status of family meals. Food often signifies more than the fulfilment of a physical need, and is not only a tool for reading cultures but also a system of communication. As meals bring people together to share food, they appear as significant events which organise our days, weeks and years, while also being rituals, of special importance in family life. I have shown how the writings of Lévi-Strauss, Douglas, Barthes, Bourdieu, Visser and others have made visible the transcendental nature of food, and the similarities between meals and narratives. As families are the main unit around which our societies are organised, meals play an important role in family life. Indeed, as Wendy Hunnewell Leynse and Ramona Lee Pérez put it: 'Food can be used metaphorically to talk about and enact various elements of social interaction and organization, one of which is the family.'[378] Because meals are so central to families, and thanks to their theatrical nature, they are often used as structuring principles in works that feature families, as is the case in some of the

378 Wendy Hunnewell Leynse and Ramona Lee Pérez, 'Metaphor, Food As' in *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture*, ed. by Solomon H. Katz (New York, London: Scribner, 2003), pp. 489-491 (p. 490)

works in my corpus. The second part of this chapter will show how, even when meals do not play a structuring role, they exemplify family dynamics and relationships.

II. Mealtime

Having demonstrated the importance of food and family meals, this part looks in more detail at the different aspects of meals in the works of my corpus, and at their significance. Crucially, I demonstrate how the characters' relation to food mirrors their relationship with their family. Eating is more often than not a social act that we have learnt to do in the context of the family, as Sicotte notes:

> Manger n'est qu'une manière civilisée de téter. D'emblée, le nourrissage s'inscrit dans une dynamique relationnelle, il est fondé sur le rapport à un(e) autre qui dispense ou retire la nourriture. […] Ainsi, dès les débuts de la vie, l'acte alimentaire est non seulement une fonction biologique de nourrissage, mais un acte social, un repas.[379]

Eating is thus often linked to one's family, as the place where and the people with which one has learnt how, what, when and where to eat. For the characters, once they have become adults, the ways in which they share food with their family demonstrates an acceptance, or refusal, of the family itself, an acceptance or refusal to ingest its (past and present) history. Indeed, as we have seen, food is more than physical nourishment, but it is rather a 'currency of love and desire, a medium of expression and communication'.[380] In order to analyse how the relationship with food and behaviour at meals of the characters, reveal the truth about their relationship with the family, I look at different aspects of meals. I examine in turn the different statuses of everyday and celebratory meals, the preparation of meals, what happens once at the table, instances where food is absent, and the significance of drinks and drunkenness.

Everyday and Celebratory Meals

The rituals surrounding food and eating are exceptionally ripe with meaning, which heightens the narrative tension around meals depicted in films and novels. However, as I have mentioned previously, meals have different ritualistic practices and signification according to whether it is an everyday meal or a celebratory one. As Douglas, whose work has focused extensively on the patterning of meals, explains:

> We will discover the social boundaries which the food meanings encode by an approach which values the binary pairs according to their position in a series. Between breakfast and the last nightcap, the food of the day comes in an ordered pattern. Between Monday and Sunday the food of the week is patterned again. Then

379 Sicotte, p. 19
380 Sceats, p. 11

there is the sequence of holidays and fast days throughout the year, to say nothing of life cycle feasts, birthdays, and weddings. In other words, the binary or other contrasts must be seen in their syntagmatic relations. The chain which links them together gives each element some of its meaning.[381]

Meals are thus given their significance according to where they fit in a given pattern, and people bring different expectations and emotions according to the nature of the meal in question. Indeed, an everyday meal is usually more informal than a celebratory one, in terms of the room it is eaten in, the tableware used, the amount or quality of the food and the clothes that participants wear. On the other hand, celebratory meals have more in common with the family ritual of celebration identified by Bennett and Wolin – which was explored in some depth in the previous chapter – and thus are usually linked with religious celebrations (Christmas, Easter ...), national holidays (Thanksgiving, Independence Day …) or weddings and funerals. Most of the works in my corpus have instances of both everyday and celebratory meals, and I show how the authors and filmmakers use these different occasions for specific purposes. I first look at how in *We Were the Mulvaneys* the pattern works in the way identified by Douglas, before showing how in *August: Osage County* and *Un Conte de Noël* formal meals generate more tension than ordinary ones.

In *We Were the Mulvaneys*, before the dissolution of the family the meals are important precisely because of their regularity, as they play their role of cementing the family. These daily meals bring the busy family together, thus contributing to building up intimacy between all its members. Their repetition makes them especially significant, as Douglas argues that 'the meaning of a meal is found in a system of repeated analogies. Each meal carries something of the meaning of the other meals; each meal is a structured social event which structures others in its own image'.[382] By sharing food the Mulvaneys also share love, and emotional nourishment in general. Judd reflects on the importance of these meals: 'How many suppers, how many meals, here in the big cozy country kitchen at High Point Farm: you might bear the memory into eternity, yet each occasion was unique, mysterious.'[383] These everyday meals are essential to the family and act as an indicator of its well-being: when the family falls apart, the meals stop almost immediately. The passages of the novel describing the family's life before Marianne's rape thus insist heavily on the importance of such family rituals, showing how the family depends on everyday tasks to create a sense of unity. Within those daily meals, however, a special emphasis is placed on Sunday dinners, and it is one of those which is used to shows how things change in the wake of Marianne's rape, even when the secret is not yet out. Instead of feeling comforted by the ritual and the presence of her family,

381 Douglas, 'Deciphering a Meal', p. 62
382 Ibid., pp. 69-70
383 *Mulvaneys*, p. 81

Marianne is described as follows: 'In a haze of smiling, nodding, chewing, swallowing Marianne navigated the hour-long meal. Not quite so talkative, smiling, happy as usual but maybe no one noticed?'.[384] The passage superimposes the usual topics of discussion such as 'talk of the icy roads, Monday morning's predicted weather. Talk of upcoming dental appointments' with Marianne's attitude: 'Talk swirled around Marianne's head like confetti. She was listening, yet seemed not to hear. […] There was a buzzing in her ears remote as wasps, in summer, under the eaves. That ache like weeping in her loins.'[385] This superimposition highlights Marianne's discomfort, and foreshadows the fact that, even though the family may not know it yet, their lives have changed irrevocably. By first introducing the importance of the Sunday dinner ritual before depicting its break down, Oates shows that the family's reaction to Marianne's rape will have devastating consequences for the family's unity and togetherness. This instance of a disturbed family ritual reinforces the importance of food within the narrative, while also foreshadowing the collapse of the entire family system. Indeed, shared meals are so important to the family that when they break down there is no going back, at least for several years. This helps to understand why in the house Corinne, Michael and Judd move into following the bankruptcy, the three of them are never shown eating together: the family unity is gone. As Sceats points out, eating is an 'act of trust' and a 'medium of expression and communication', so when trust and communication break down in the Mulvaney family, the daily meals stop taking place.[386]

Because for the Mulvaneys food is so strongly associated with family togetherness and love, the meals are expected to take place within the home, which is the physical embodiment of their family unity. When Mike moves out and says he will eat mostly in restaurants, Corinne replies 'chiding, Restaurant meals! – they aren't very nourishing, and they're expensive'.[387] Like the apartments into which the Mulvaney brothers move, and which are not proper 'homes' (as discussed in the first chapter) meals that are not a shared family meal in the family home thereby lose their status, and even their basic function of sustenance. If the food does not provide love, it cannot provide nourishment. The association between family love and the quality of food is reinforced later in the novel, when the only meal Michael shares with a family member (Mike) following the family's dissolution takes place in a Chinese restaurant with 'sticky plastic booths' and 'a smell of something brown-scorched in the stale-circulating air' where the food is 'salty-gummy food, tasting of something brown-scorched'.[388] The setting and poor quality of the meal illustrates the irrevocable separation between the father and son, this meal is 'their first in years, and it would be their last',

384 Ibid., p. 81
385 Ibid., p. 82
386 Sceats, p. 2 and p. 11
387 *Mulvaneys*, p. 179
388 Ibid., pp. 389-390

and are a counterpoint to the descriptions of the meals shared previously by the family.[389]

Due to the symbolic nature of food in Oates's novel, the fracture in the family system can only be repaired by sharing a meal, as the family does in the epilogue. The special quality of that meal is marked by the fact that it takes place on the fourth of July, the United States's Independence Day. Furthermore, Judd buys a lot of food to bring to the cookout noting that he feels 'generous, elated, giddy and anxious', thereby clearly establishing a connection between food and family love.[390] As a celebratory meal, the cookout possesses a supplementary symbolic weight which allows it to fulfil its reconciliatory function. The fact that this celebration takes place at Corinne's new house, which is strongly reminiscent of High Point Farm, marks the definite reconciliation of the family.

In this novel, the daily meals are given their importance by their repetitive nature, exemplifying Douglas's argument that:

> Meals are ordered in scale of importance and grandeur through the week and the year. The smallest, meanest meal metonymically figures the structure of the grandest, and each unit of the grand meal figures again the whole meal – or the meanest meal. The perspective created by these repetitive analogies invests the individual meal with additional meaning.[391]

In Oates the everyday meals act as daily moments of bonding for the family, and a special focus is shown on the Sunday dinners which allow members to come together during a more relaxed time of the week. The Fourth of July cookout is also given a special status, as only a celebratory meal can properly achieve the family reunion in a family where meals function as symbols for family unity.

Un Conte de Noël and *August: Osage County* feature instances of both everyday and celebratory meals, but with a special focus on celebratory ones as carriers of greater tensions. In Desplechin's film the difference of status is achieved partly through the settings: everyday meals are eaten in the kitchen, while the Christmas dinner takes place in the dining room around the formal dining room table which Robert Wuthnow calls the 'totemic object of the dinner ritual'.[392] This setting gives more weight to the Christmas dinner, as do the use of the use of formal dishes and silverware, the candles lit on the table, and the formal clothes worn by the characters. These are some of the ways in which to structure food patterning, as Douglas states that 'structure appears as the result of strict rules governing the presentation of food, the varieties permitted at a given

389 Ibid., p. 389
390 Ibid., p. 434
391 Douglas, 'Deciphering a Meal', p. 67
392 Robert Wuthnow and others, *Cultural Analysis: The work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas* (Boston and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 113

occasion, and rules of precedence and combination. Such an elaborate structure clearly facilitates the expressive function of food'.[393] In Desplechin's film the choice of lighting and colours also further differentiates the Christmas dinner from meals taken in the kitchen. The Christmas dinner is shot with tones of red and orange, while in the other meals the light is colder, and tones of white and blue dominate. The difference can be observed in the following screenshots:

As the fulfilment of the family Christmas ritual, there is more at stake during the Christmas dinner, which is the reason it is set apart from the others: this dinner is the reason the characters have come together, and as such it carries more weight. Henri's behaviour, however, is similar in all meal scenes: his resentment and aggression towards his mother and sister come out both during the formal dinner and the other meals. Whether during everyday meals or special occasions, the

393 Mary Douglas, 'Standard Social Uses of Food: Introduction' in *Food in the Social Order: Studies of food and festivities in three American communities* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984), pp. 1-39 (p. 15)

undercurrent of hurt, incomprehension and hostility come out when the family gathers around the dinner table.

Similarly in *August: Osage County* the meal following the funeral has a special status, reflected by the formal black clothes worn by all the characters, and by the fact that it is the only scene in the film to include all the characters. This special occasion, however, only serves to bring forth tensions between the family members. A funeral meal, like all rituals, is intended 'to make difficult passages easier' by providing a framework for the grief to express itself, and by giving the family concrete tasks to focus on.[394] However this aim fails in Wells's film as the meal is fraught with arguments and Violet's aggressiveness appears to only be strengthened by the presence of the whole family around her. The tensions escalate until a physical altercation between Violet and Barbara breaks out: the moments of sharing of nourishment are thus subverted to become moments where the characters share violence instead. In both Desplechin and Wells's films, the formal celebratory meals carry more tension than everyday occurrences. This is due to their more heavily accentuated ritualistic nature which restricts behaviour and imposes politeness and self-control, leading to the expression of true feelings to subsequently burst out. Furthermore, these rituals are intended to symbolise family togetherness and harmony and characters who are at odds with other family members experience the ritual as a painful and degrading parody of family unity.

Meals perform different functions, irrespective of whether they are everyday ones or celebratory occasions. In the works of my corpus, each has been selected carefully by the creator to fit a specific purpose. Oates uses these different types of meals to reinforce the symbolic nature of food in her novel, the daily meals taken in the home serve to create a sense of the united family, and then display the dissolution of the family once they disappear from the narrative, while the Fourth of July cookout cements the reunification of the family, something only a celebratory meal can achieve. Desplechin and Wells use formal meals to heighten the tension in their films, as the added pressure of a celebratory occasion make the characters loose control. Delpy uses a celebratory occasion – the matriarch's birthday – as a means to bring the characters together, and she executes her film within that structure, as previously discussed.

Meal Preparation

The actions surrounding the organisation of meals, such as preparing the food and laying and clearing the table, can be as significant as the meals themselves in indicating the type of

394 Visser, *Rituals of Dinner*, p. 23

relationship the family members have with one another, and the nature of the system within which they operate. Here I show how *We Were the Mulvaneys* and *Le Skylab* use the preparation of meals to articulate issues relating to gender, while in Delpy's film, along with *August: Osage County*, it also serves to broach issues of racial inequality. Finally, I look at how Vigan uses the preparation of meals as means to create tension, while in Desplechin they are moments of comparative calm, compared to the meals.

Food is often associated with women, and especially with mothers, as Eve Jackson explains:

> The mother archetype has a particularly intimate connection with food imagery. Mother (Latin *mater*, Greek *meter*) is cognate with matter (Latin *materia*), and as Earth Mother (Gaia) she provides the literal substance of food […] and with it a very basic metaphor which recurs in our speech and in our dreams in association with all areas of life.[395]

The link between mothers and food also comes from the act of breast-feeding; as the mother is the first purveyor of food, she thus becomes associated with it. This is what Sceats points out, when she argues that 'for many people the connection of food with love centres on the mother, as a rule the most important figure in an infant's world, able to give or withhold everything that sustains, nourishes, fulfils and completes'.[396] Furthermore, the realm of the domestic in general is often associated with women. In the first chapter I discussed how the home is constructed in relation with several concepts, but I have not yet addressed the relationship between home and gender, which is especially relevant here.

Home is not a genderless concept, and it is necessary to look at the implications of this. In his history of the home Rybczynski explains how it became associated with women, stating that in the seventeenth century 'not only was the house becoming more intimate, it was also, in the process, acquiring a special atmosphere. It was becoming a feminine place, or at least under feminine control'.[397] This argument has been made by others as well, such as Saggini and Soccio, who argue that 'with the development of a proto-capitalist society […] society underwent a process of transformation which lastingly associated the domestic and the female, with all too predictable stifling consequences for women'.[398] Feminist criticism has denounced this historical association of women and the home as particularly stifling for women. Mallett offers a good summary of the intellectual situation:

---

395 Eve Jackson, pp. 13-14
396 Sceats, p. 11
397 Rybczynski, p. 74
398 Saggini and Soccio, p. 3

> Almost without exception, second-wave feminist writers (of the 1970's and 1980's), particularly but not exclusively socialist feminists, identify home as a site of oppression, tyranny and patriarchal domination of women. […] Related, second-wave feminist research on the interaction between gender, space and home noted how these social and historical ideas about gender roles and relationships in the home environment are inflected in housing designs, domestic interiors and technologies.[399]

This is the context Rachel Bowlby refers to when writing that 'the rejection of domesticity has seemed a principal, if not *the* principal, tenet of feminism demands for freedom. The home figures as the place where the woman is confined, and from which she must be emancipated'.[400] This conflation first happened because women did not work outside the home and the care of the home, including the preparation of meals, thus fell to them. However, this situation has continued past the point where women have started to occupy the public space. As Bowlby, Gregory and McKie note (in 1997): 'For most women, including many of those on higher incomes, the home and the «family» it encloses remains ideologically and materially the expected focus of their everyday lives.'[401] Although things have evolved in the past twenty years it is not an exception to see the home being associated with women, and yet not as a place of freedom but of restriction. As Tucker notes in his philosophical exploration of the home: 'The chauvinist «A woman's place is in the home» […] means […] that the place of the woman is at the home of the man, *not her own home*', as it is a home she can inhabit but not only has she been assigned to it, the care of the home also falls to her.[402] There is thus a direct link between home, meals and women as part of the traditional care of the home includes the organisation of meals.

This connection is apparent in *We Were the Mulvaneys*, in which the kitchen is Corinne's domain. As discussed in Chapter I, the family home in Oates's novel is a symbol of the happy, united family, and the kitchen is a room with special significance: 'the kitchen was the heart of our household; where we naturally gravitated to seek one another out.'[403] In a home that symbolises their unity, the kitchen is the room that especially embodies it, and this room is dominated by Corinne. Furthermore, it is the Mulvaney women who prepare the food for the family. Indeed, the ritual is for Marianne and her mother to prepare meals together, especially the Sunday night dinners for which they concoct 'delicious refrigerator-leftovers unique and not repeatable' meals.[404] As discussed previously, the ritual of meal preparation creates a special bond between Corinne and her daughter. Corinne's hurt at Marianne's breaking that ritual (following her rape) demonstrates its importance: 'that startled plea in Corinne's voice: Don't we prepare Sunday supper together, super-casserole?'.[405]

399 Mallett, p. 75
400 Rachel Bowlby, p. 78
401 Bowlby, Gregory and McKie, p. 344
402 Tucker, p. 185
403 *Mulvaneys*, p. 45
404 Ibid., p. 64
405 Ibid., p. 73

Even though Marianne does ultimately prepare that meal with her mother, things have changed irrevocably, as the following passage makes clear: 'Marianne had helped Mom prepare supper as usual as if nothing were wrong, so perhaps nothing was wrong.'[406] The discussion of the preparation of meals not only contributes to the sense of unity of the family, but it also establishes Corinne and Marianne as the care-givers within the family sphere: they are the ones who provide nourishment to others. And indeed, Marianne not only prepares the meal but also serves her family members throughout: 'Marianne leapt up to save Mom a trip, carrying the heated casserole back to the table, passed the newly replenished bread basket back to Dad'.[407]

Marianne's status as a care-giver is further demonstrated in the rest of the novel through her preparation of food for others: be it at the Green Isle Co-op or during a visit to her brother Patrick. This nourishment should be understood in terms of physical needs, but also emotional ones. Because the description of food prepared by Corinne and Marianne, which appear every time food is mentioned, is always appetising, it reinforces the link between food and emotional nourishment: 'Parmesan-dill bread, baked butternut squash sprinkled with brown sugar, a giant tossed salad with Mom's special oil-and-vinegar dressing, homemade apple-cinnamon cobbler with vanilla ice-cream.'[408] Since food is associated with love and the fulfilling of emotional needs in the novel, providing food is linked to providing love and care. Neither Corinne nor Marianne appear to resent their roles as care-givers, on the contrary they seem to value this role, and be nourished by it. It does, however, exemplify a gender divide within the family and an adherence to traditional models of families which were still prevalent in the 1970s in the United States. Although Corinne and Marianne seem to view their role as positive, it begs the question of whether had they not been trained to take care of others, they would be able to take better care of themselves. And indeed, the following passage seems to hint that being a care-giver is somewhat of a burden:

> Marianne and I discussed Mom on the phone. I remarked, how long ago and far away it seemed now – lanky carroty-haired Whistle making such commotion in the kitchen. «The way she'd call us down for breakfast – remember? 'WAKE UP! RISE N' SHINE, KIDDOS!'» But Marianne […] said gently, «You know, Judd, maybe Mom doesn't want to be Mom right now. Maybe she's taking time out.»[409]

Similarly, Marianne may have been better equipped to deal with her banishment had she not been used to looking after her family so much. It exemplifies Sceats's comment that:

> the maternal role in western society is ambiguous, if not ambivalent; mothers are overwhelmingly powerful

406 Ibid., p. 81
407 Ibid., p. 82
408 Ibid., p. 81
409 Ibid., p. 437

but at the same time are socially and domestically disempowered by their nurturing, serving role. This ambiguity is reflected in representations of mothers and mother figures both as enslaved and as powerful providers of food.[410]

The Mulvaneys operate within a system in which food is a currency for love, and therefore those who prepare it come to be seen as the purveyors of physical and emotional nourishment. Although it is presented as positive in many ways in the novel, the gender divide in the preparation of meals is still questioned by Oates, thereby pointing towards a dysfunction in the family, as the chores are not shared equally

This is also the case in *Le Skylab*, also set in the 1970s, in which the relegation of the domestic sphere to women is of greater concern, and Delpy addresses it more openly. There is a clear gender divide in the preparation of the meal, when the men prepare the lamb for the méchoui – a task identified as masculine because of the physical force needed to handle the lamb –, the women prepare the rest of the food and also set up and clear the table. This dynamic is first highlighted when Joseph asks Jean's help with the lamb and Anna tells him 'Allez sois un homme'. Although meant as a joke, the comment does stress the fact that Joseph would not have asked any of the women present for help with this task. And in a private conversation with Jean, Anna later denounces what she sees as the subservience of women in his family. The scene opens on an extreme long shot of the lunch table at which the men are sitting while Monique and Suzanne clear it, which is the view Jean and Anna, sitting further away, have.

The film then cuts to a medium shot of both of them, sitting against a tree, reading and smoking, offering in their similarity a stark contrast to the gender divide of the previous shot.

410 Sceats, p. 11

The following exchange then takes place between Anna and Jean:

Anna: Quand je pense qu'on s'est battu pour l'égalité des sexes, et toutes tes sœurs sont à la maison à s'occuper de leurs mômes. Bon à part Clémentine, mais bon.
Jean: Suzette elle est infirmière c'est pas rien.
Anna: Oui, mais elle se tape tout. Elle s'occupe des mômes, elle fait la bouffe, elle bosse, c'est ça l'égalité, tout faire ?
Jean: Mais qu'est ce que ça peut te foutre, c'est pas toi.
Anna: Ça me révolte. On l'a fait pourquoi mai 68 ? Pour que nos filles ne se retrouvent pas au fourneaux comme nos mères.
Jean: Ta mère aux fourneaux ? Ta mère elle a mené ton père toute sa vie. Elle l'a tellement fait chier qu'il en est mort. Comme la mienne, elle en a tué trois.
Anna: Oui et après elle s'est retrouvée toute seule à élever six mômes. Ben moi ma fille elle sera pas bobonne. Je peux te le dire ça.
Jean: Ah non ça c'est sûr, si elle est aussi chiante que toi. Il n'y a pas un mec qui va la supporter. Remarque toi t'en as trouvé un. T'as réussi à en coincer un. Un bon con, hein.
Anna: Ah mais c'était ça. En fait c'est ça les colonies. Votre famille de toute façon vous avez toujours eu des grouillots. Vous avez exploité les Viets, les Arabes, les Noirs. Au moins chez vous vous les avez tous fait, comme ça il n'y a pas de jaloux. Maintenant c'est les bonnes femmes.
Jean: Mais enfin moi je suis féministe Anna.
Anna: Féministe mon cul ouais.

(She stands up and departs, and is now out of the shot.)

Anna: Vous êtes juste une bande d'esclavagistes ouais.
Jean (laughing): Oh c'est vrai que c'est quand même con une bonne femme.

This discussion allows Delpy to challenge traditional models through Anna's perspective, using the preparation of food as an example of the domestic burden shouldered by women. In an interview Delpy states that 'depuis que j'ai perdu ma mère, qui était une grande féministe, je reprends le flambeau'.[411] Here she takes up the torch as she plays the feminist Anna, who is a version of her real mother. Anna protests against the widely accepted view that 'a mother's presence is always implicit

411 Gallot

in food. It is almost as if food, in its many and varied forms, becomes a representation of the mother'.[412] The film also sheds light on the fact that within a single family one can find many different family models: Jean and Anna offer a feminist and progressive vision of family life, Suzette and her husband Joseph rely on a more traditional and catholic model, and Fredo offers the image of a strict and restrictive father. These differences in opinions are also apparent regarding the topic of the French colonies.

As evident in the exchange between Anna and Jean, the film also questions racial inequalities in French society, with Anna equating the exploitation of women to that of colonial populations. The topic of French colonies is recurrent in the film, through Amandine's discussion of her life in Vietnam, Roger's depression following his dismissal from his Parachute Regiment and the dinner time argument over the Algerian war. As previously discussed, the topic is also present through the choice of food consumed: couscous and méchoui. Delpy decries not only the treatment of women, but also French colonisation. While the film validates Anna and Jean's political and societal choices more than those of the others, the positive side of other characters is also explored, ensuring that, although their choices are shown to be problematic, they are still portrayed as sympathetic characters. Indeed, the film refrains from being judgemental, in part as it takes pleasure in displaying the flaws of all the characters. For example, although Jean and Anna's equal relationship is presented as more enviable than that of Micheline and Roger, they are nonetheless shown to go too far at times. Anna enjoys provoking her brothers-in-law when discussing politics, and does not refrain from striking a low blow in reminding Roger his daughter is sleeping with one of his friends. Similarly, Suzette, who is an exploited woman in Anna's mind, is portrayed as a caring person who opens her house to her rowdy family while always remaining calm and generous. Ultimately, instead of pitting the family's members against one another, the film celebrates their common ground and their genuine love for one another. Most of the family operates in a very traditional system, and Anna and Jean are used to question this system – be it in the realm of domestic chores or others – but they are not exempt from being questioned themselves. *Le Skylab* uses the organisation and preparation of meals in order to challenge gender and racial discrimination, while always treating all its characters with humanity.

In *August: Osage County*, the preparation of food also addresses issues of race through the character of Johnna, as mentioned in Chapter I. She is the sole provider of food in the Weston household and the other characters often comment on the high quality of her meals. Johnna is, however, an outsider to the family, and her sphere is solely that of the kitchen and dining room.

412 Susie Orbach, *Hunger Strike: The anorectic's struggle as a metaphor of our age* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 35

Furthermore, she is very silent compared to all the other characters, who spend most of their time talking or yelling. Her status as an outsider is reinforced by the fact that she is a paid help, as well as Native American, and not considered as a member of the family. Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, in the Weston family only the blood relatives are considered family. As an employee in a white household, her presence thus questions the place of Native Americans in the American society as a whole. This is exemplified by a conversation between Barbara and Violet during which Barbara tells her mother that Johnna should be referred to as Native American instead of Indian. To Violet's outcry that: 'they aren't any more native than me', Barbara replies that 'in fact they are'. This highlights Johnna's paradoxical position as a subordinate in a country to which she is more native than the people she works for. The fact that she overhears the exchange, as she is cleaning dishes in the kitchen, only stresses the point further. Her cooking for the Westons, the catfish for example, also calls back to the United States's history, as 'the origins of American styles of cooking' are found in 'the fusion of English and Native American food habits, demonstrating that European settlers adopted foods that they identified as «savage» only reluctantly when their survival was at stake'.[413] And indeed, Johnna is hired by Beverly as the survival of the Westons is in question: Beverly has decided to commit suicide and Violet is unable to take care of herself. But, although she feeds the family, Johnna refuses to share their meals: she prepares and serves them, but chooses to eat on her own. Through Johnna's cooking, the Westons thus ingest the violent history of the United States, as her feeding them calls back upon the settlers' relationship with Native Americans, as Visser explains: 'The European settlers in North America survived their first winters because they listened to the Indians and learned fast.'[414]

Johnna being the provider of food also serves another purpose, which is to emphasise the parents' lack of purveyance of either food or emotional support to their children, and therefore the dysfunction of the family. As in *We Were the Mulvaneys*, Johnna's role as the provider of good food symbolises her provision of other types of care as well. Indeed, when Steve is taking advantage of Jean, it is Johnna who stops him, hitting him with a shovel. While all the other characters are caught up in their emotions, she is the one keeping watch and preventing harm from happening. In that respect, Johnna acts as a moral compass in the film, offering a counterpoint to the egotism of the Westons. She is the outsider who observes, as is exemplified during the confrontation between Bill, Barbara and Jean, directly following Jean's molestation. After explaining her actions simply – 'He was messing with Jean' – Johnna then stands as an observer during Jean's argument with her parents. She is visually separated from the others: she is shot standing alone, while Barbara, Bill

413 Jennifer Jensen Wallach, *How America Eats: A social history of U.S. food and culture* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), p. xiv
414 Visser, *Much Depends on Dinner*, p. 38

and Jean appear in the same frame. Johnna is the non-judgemental outsider who observes the family tearing itself apart, while offering care and empathy. It is therefore not surprising that she is the only character who remains with Violet at the end of the film. Having Johnna be the sole provider of food thus serves a double purpose. It denounces the unfair place occupied by Native Americans in contemporary society, and brings forth the United States's violent history in the form of food, which is what the settlers' relationship with Native Americans was based upon, while also proposing the idea that family members cannot take care of one another properly, that the family brings hurt, while an outsider is in a better position to offer care and support.

In *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* the preparation of meals in the family's country house involves the whole family, and at first appears to be moments of sharing: 'on passait la journée dans la cuisine […] on pétrissait, touillait, on laissait mijoter à feux doux, on évoquait les uns et les autres, les études, les maladies, les mariages, les naissances, les divorces, les pertes d'emploi'.[415] The food and the topics of discussion appear in a continuous list and are therefore put on the same level, which has the effect of assimilating food and conversation, and thus physical and mental nourishment. However, the appearance of unity is deceptive, as the next sentence states that 'les voix finissaient toujours par monter dans les aigus, les portes claquaient et […] l'on en venait presque aux mains'.[416] The underlying cracks in the family structure are once more made apparent, as in the rest of the work, the facade of the happy family which they try to maintain quickly shatters. Furthermore, as in *We Were the Mulvaneys* and *Le Skylab*, Vigan displays the imbalance there is between Georges and Liane in the organisation of meals, and domestic life in general. This is apparent in the following passage: 'Liane préparait les repas, faisait et défaisait les lits, lavait le linge, assumait les élans solidaires de son mari.'[417] Along with other remarks about Georges this makes clear the fact that behind his friendly and enthusiastic façade a darker personality lies. The rituals of domestic life in Vigan thus serve to display the gap between the front the family presents and the reality.

In *Un Conte de Noël*, on the contrary, the single instance of preparation of food is a moment of greater intimacy than the meals themselves. Indeed, in a scene set in the kitchen and shot in the subdued lighting of a December afternoon in northern France, Abel, Simon, Ivan and Henri share an open and intimate discussion. Their bond is illustrated by a unifying colour scheme in tones of blue, which along with the lack of light, seems to blend objects and characters together in a cushioned

415 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 310
416 Ibid., pp. 310-311
417 Ibid., p. 65

atmosphere.

Abel and Simon's roles as care-givers is manifested by their preparation of an apple pie, which neither Ivan nor Henri are helping with. Henri's drinking signals his anxiety, as it does throughout the whole film, and he laments and reprimands the others for standing by as Elizabeth banished him.

Although Henri is agitated he does not attack the other men as violently as he attacks his mother and sister. Instead, there is a shared lamentation at the state of affairs, as Abel states: 'C'est horriblement triste d'assister à ces haines.' Each character sticks to their ascribed roles however, Henri as the trouble-maker, Ivan as the youngest, somewhat spoiled, child who has no power to intervene in his siblings' feud, and Simon as the peace-maker. This scene, however, displays the fact that Henri places more trust in the male than in the female members of his family. As images of the

preparation of the Christmas meal are interspersed with scenes showing the children's play, it also underlines the theatrical aspect of a Christmas feast. Indeed, these two moments resonate with one another – the play being about a prince who, following an unspeakable action, is banished – and affect the understanding of each. The play offers the children's understanding of the adults' fights and show that, like the play, the family drama can end well.

This has shown that the preparation of meals is used in the films and novels in order to indicate the system the family operates within. In Oates, Delpy and Wells these systems carry political and societal questions about the role and place of women and minorities, which the works challenges to different degrees. The preparation of meals is also used as a means to exemplify the relationship between the different family members. In *We Were the Mulvaneys* it epitomises the bond between Corinne and Marianna, whereas in *August: Osage County* it points to the absence of parental emotional support. In Vigan's work the description of preparation of meals is part of a larger network of moments which showcase the futility and shallowness of their façade as a happy family, while in *Un Conte de Noël* it demonstrates the bond that unites Henri to the other men in his family.

At the Table

Having examined different types of meals, as well as their preparation, I now turn to analysing what happens once the characters are seated around the table. Even ordinary meals can be seen as rituals, following Visser's definition that:

> Ritual is action frequently repeated, in a form largely laid down in advance; it aims to get those actions right. Everyone knows what should happen, and notices when it does not. […] Repetitiveness serves the meaning being expressed, for if the pattern is at least generally constant we can concentrate on the message embodied in the performance.[418]

As rituals, meals are meant to bring forth cohesion, and indeed Visser argues that 'we use eating as a medium for social relationships: satisfaction of the most individual of needs becomes a means of creating community'.[419] However, because meals force together characters who would sometimes rather avoid one another this goal of creating cohesion is not always achieved, and the meal can turn violent instead. In this sense, meals work like self-contained family reunions. Much of what I have said about reunions in the previous chapter can therefore also be applied to meals. For instance,

418 Visser, *Rituals of Dinner*, pp. 19-20
419 Ibid., p. xix

both reunions and family meals force together the different members of the family, and can therefore act as a trigger for the expression of tensions. In this part I show how, in the works of my corpus, rituals surrounding meals do not always fulfil their function. In Oates and Delpy the meals succeed in creating cohesion, whereas in Wells and Desplechin all the meals turn into fights. I then examine how the diner scene in *The Savages* exemplifies the strained family dynamic, and finally how in Vigan meals reveal that the apparent cohesion is illusionary.

As previously discussed, in *We Were the Mulvaneys* meals are a ritual crucial to family life, and as such are representative of their family in their unity as well as their intensity: 'supper – in our family, *intense*. Just to hold my own around our table, for a kid like me, the youngest of the Mulvaneys, used up energy and staying power'.[420] Meals for the Mulvaneys illustrates Douglas's comment that

> The time devoted to the common meal is a conclave, used for coordinating other arrangements, negotiating exemptions, canvassing for privileges, diffusing information about the outside world, agreeing on strategies for dealing with it and making shared evaluations. The conclave invents exceptions to its rules: permission to be late, skip a meal.[421]

When the Mulvaneys are an united family the meals fulfil their function as creators of cohesion, and link the family to their past as Visser notes that it should: 'Ritual is about *lasting* […]. Because it is pre-ordained, it always expresses order, and it predicts endurance; it links the present with the past, and it hopes also to link the present with the future.'[422] However, when the family falls apart the ritual meals can no longer accomplish their role and thus become non-existent. When the meals disappear, the family's togetherness does too, as shown by the following quotation, which takes place after Mike has left High Point Farm: 'it had distressed her [Corinne] how infrequently Mike came to the farm to visit, even for his favorite meals. Unless they weren't «favorite meals» any longer and Mom hadn't been informed.'[423] The 'favorite meals' here work as a general signifier of understanding one's relative, for Corinne not knowing Mike's favourite food is equated with not knowing her son anymore. The meal as a vector of cohesion, and a symbol for family togetherness is further reinforced by Patrick dreaming of his childhood when he lives alone:

> Sometimes in this strange place in Ithaca hundreds of miles from home he heard in his sleep […] *Wake up kiddos! Wake-up time kiddos!* And Mom's friendly whistle. Smelled frying bacon, for always Mom insisted upon good, solid, hot breakfast, no going with just cereal dumped in a bowl, breakfast was the most

420 *Mulvaneys*, p. 15
421 Douglas, 'The Idea of a Home', p. 302
422 Visser, *Rituals of Dinner*, p. 26
423 *Mulvaneys*, p. 190

important meal of the day Mom and Dad both insisted.[424]

What comes first to Patrick's mind when longing for home is the food the family used to share together, exemplifying the symbolic nature of food and meals in the novel. His dream is contrasted with his regular meals in Ithaca: 'Usually he prepared for himself quick meals out of cans, dumped in a pan or stir-fried in a skillet. Sat at his desk and worked as he ate, hardly tasting his food, washing it down with numerous glasses of fruit juice.'[425] The nourishing and delicious food of the dream is opposed to the bland food Patrick makes for himself, as his aloneness is with the previous family community. Jones writes that for Douglas 'meals constitute a kind of narrative. Like all narratives, they allude to earlier narratives, retelling and reshaping earlier stories', which is proven true here as Patrick's lonely meals allude to but fail short of his childhood family meals.[426] Following the dismantling of their clan, when the family wants to reunite they do it by reuniting with the ritual that has helped them maintain their cohesion in the past: dining. The symbolic importance of the Fourth of July cookout is emphasised by the fact that the event marks the third appearance of a doe in the novel, an animal which functions as a symbol for Marianne. Indeed, the first doe is mauled by dogs, mirroring Marianne's rape, while the second is a carcass seen by Michael on his last day at High Point Farm, and the last one is accompanied by two fawns and signals the rebirth not only of Marianne, but of the whole Mulvaney family. Oates's novel adheres to the ritual of meals as described by Douglas and Visser, where meals are vectors of cohesion.

This is also the case in *Le Skylab* where, despite many arguments, meals do fulfil their task of creating cohesion between its members. They exemplify Eve Jackson's comment that 'sharing food is a fundamental bonding ritual in which we affirm our common identity as members of a family or group'.[427] Indeed, even though Anna clearly takes pleasure in her role of agitator by challenging her more traditionalist sisters and brothers-in-law, the fights created are intense but short lived. As Regnier notes, Delpy likes to play 'avec les fractures de la société française de l'époque et les tabous qui leur sont généralement associés'.[428] Furthermore, the consumption of alcohol throughout the film also appears to help the characters bond. It might make them slightly less inhibited, but it does not drive a wedge between them. Alcohol actually functions as a connector between Roger and Fredo, as the former seeks solace in alcohol and from his brother-in-law. Delpy's film differs from the other works in that her characters drink as part of the celebration of their family reunion rather than to escape the family. In *Le Skylab* meals alternate between

424 Ibid., p. 213
425 Ibid., p. 221
426 Jones, p. 19
427 Eve Jackson, p. 82
428 Regnier

tension and calm as members argue and reconcile alternatively, as Jean and his brother Fredo do during dinner. After bitterly fighting about politics, and while Frédo has said: 'De toute façon Jean, si je t'avais eu en face de moi sur les barricades à Alger, j'aurais pas hésité à tirer', the brothers reconcile thanks to Jean's speech:

> Frédo, fréro. Fréro, Frédo. Je veux te dire quelque chose. T'es mon fréro. Et malgré nos divergences politiques, je n'oublierai jamais qu'il y a deux ans quand j'étais complètement bourré tu m'as sauvé la vie au moment même où je mettais un doigt dans le cul d'un rugbyman. Voilà, pour ça merci fréro. Oh écoute, c'est la famille hein.

During the meals many different topics are broached, including the education of children, sexuality, politics, and while some of those lead to fights, they never last long, and the characters make peace with one another. Like *We Were the Mulvaneys*, *Le Skylab* thus adheres to the idea that meals are rituals which express solidarity. Indeed, in Delpy's film, by virtue of belonging to the same family the characters never remain angry with one another for long. This view is illustrated by Fredo's statement, following Roger's attack on Frédo's wife: 'La famille il y a des choses qui ne fonctionnent pas, il faut l'accepter telle qu'elle est.'

Both *August: Osage County* and *Un Conte de Noël* offer a different view, as the meals in those films fail to create any cohesion between the family members. In Wells and Desplechin's films, meals turn into fights which are not as easily overcome as they are in *Le Skylab*. In *August: Osage County* all meals end in violence: the first one stays purely psychological while the latter two descend into physical fighting. The funeral meal is the climax of the film and the only scene in which all the characters are present. It thus acts as a precipitator for the fights that had been brewing: Mattie Fae is furious with her son, Barbara and Bill have a fraught relationship, Violet berates her daughters and their partners, which leads Barbara to retaliate. These latent conflicts all come to a head simultaneously, and the ritual nature of the meal is unable to prevent the outbreak of conflict. Visser argues that table manners are meant to 'pressure people to behave in a predictable fashion' and that 'this is why rules of politeness tend to cluster round moments of transition, of meeting others, making decisions, conferring, parting, commemorating. Rituals are there to make difficult passages easier'.[429] In Wells's film rituals fail as they do not prevent an outburst of violence. Indeed, Charlie's attempt to say grace is disrupted by Violet's sneering and meals end tragically. The brutality of Barbara and Violet's fight, for example, is emphasised by the mobility of the camera and the sudden abrupt cuts from shot to shot. Even though rituals and manners are meant to make things easier, Violet is only interested in chaos and in asserting her power over the family: she is

429 Visser, *Rituals of Dinner*, p. 23

frequently shot towering over other characters. In the following screenshot, for example, not only is she is the only one standing up, but she is a black outline in the foreground contrasting with the rest of the cast who are lit up in the background.

Sicotte notes that:

> À table, les places, les rôles et les comportements attendues de chacun pour que fonctionne la cellule familiale se créent, se transmettent et se redisent sans trêve. La hiérarchisation des convives selon l'âge et le sexe est aussi resoulignée – et relégitimée – à chaque repas. Celui-ci constitue de la sorte une matrice d'attentes axiologiques, comportementales et sociales. A la répartition des rôles correspond également une circulation codée et hiérarchisée de la parole.[430]

This is the case in the funeral meal in *August: Osage County*, with Violet being the powerful head of the family, and her daughters remaining within their ascribed roles: Barbara the leader, Ivy the shy and dutiful daughter, and Karen the ditzy one. But by the last meal this hierarchy has been overturned as Violet is no longer in power, and Ivy is no longer quiet. Meals have thus failed not only to produce cohesion, but also to maintain the role repartition I have discussed in the previous chapter. The violent end to meals in the film is representative of the dissolution of the family, as Jane F. Ferry notes in her work on food in film, the disruption of meals 'often suggests the dissolution of the group consciousness or unity'.[431] As opposed to the dining rituals in Oates and Delpy, in Wells's film meals fail their function of creating a community.

This is also the case in *Un Conte de Noël* where meals always turn into fights. Although Eve Jackson writes that

430 Sicotte, p. 52
431 Jane F. Ferry, *Food in Film: A culinary performance of communication* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 163

Sitting down to eat together means putting aside differences, hence taboos on raising controversial issues at dinner parties. The dinner table can be a healing place where opponents discover each others' common humanity. It is a place where relationship is fed and warm personal exchanges take place.[432]

this is completely disproven in Desplechin's film, as meals feature exchanges that are far from warm. Indeed, during the first dinner Henri decides to reveal he is compatible for the graft that could save Junon. The staging and editing mirror Henri's sense of spectacle: for instance the sound of the silverware hitting the glass opens the shot but does not allow the audience to identify who is calling for a toast. The image then cuts to a shot which reveals Henri is the one standing up to talk. While the dinner does not turn as violent as the others, the news upsets both Elizabeth and her son, who immediately leaves the table. This scene reinforces the disconnect between Henri and his sister as they are never contained in the same shot for the majority of the meal: this happens only in the final shot of the sequence, which focuses on Elizabeth in the foreground, turned away from the table, while Henri is seen in the background lighting a cigarette.

This shot illustrates the siblings' estrangement, and their violence towards one another continues in the next meal scene, during which Elizabeth takes revenge on Henri by announcing that Paul has received the authorisation to be Junon's donor. These two scenes echo each other: both take place in the kitchen, and in the second one Elizabeth sits in the seat Henri occupied in the first scene, while Henri sits at the opposite end of the table. The second scene ends more violently than the first one when Claude punches Henri, but the violence is counteracted by the Irish folk music which lends a comical atmosphere to the event. This music, titled *Henri's March*, is first heard during Henri's first appearance in the film when he collapses in the street. In the kitchen scene the comical effect is

432 Eve Jackson, p. 85

reinforced by the following scene in which Simon slaps Henri while Elizabeth is treating his face.

As in *August: Osage County* the table manners which are meant as 'a system of taboos designed to ensure that violence remains out of the question' fail to contain the violence present in the Vuillard family.[433] Indeed, they also fail to prevent the Christmas dinner turning sour as Henri toasts: 'Comme le duc d'Orleans à son état major en Espagne évoquant, sans les nommer, Mme de Maintenon et Mme des Ursins qui étaient ses ennemies implacables et folles, Messieurs je vous porte la santé au *con*-capitaine et au *con*-lieutenant' with the voice-over making it clear that 'le capitaine fut pour Junon et le lieutenant pour Elizabeth'. However, as in the previous meal in the kitchen, the verbal attack is lent a comical note as the voice-over continues: 'Henri se rassit et ne parla plus' while the image shows Henri missing his chair and falling down, before being carried upstairs, asleep, by Abel and Simon. Furthermore, both Elizabeth and Junon react fairly well to Henri's jeering: Elizabeth laughs loudly, joined by Ivan, and Junon quips: 'Bon débarras, Henri m'épuisait ce soir.' In this scene, as in the previous ones, the seating arrangement makes clear the alliances that exist within the family, as Wuthnow notes: 'Meals are times when the family gathers, and seating arrangements reflect the status hierarchy of the family'.[434] At the Christmas dinner table, just as in the two kitchen meal scenes, Elizabeth and Henri are seated at opposite ends of the table, while Elizabeth is always sat close to her mother. As Bennett and Wolin observe, the symbolic communication in rituals can be seen through seating charts which can 'symbolize power relationships (...) or unsettled conflicts', as is the case in *Un Conte de Noël*.[435] As in *August: Osage County*, the rituals of dinner fail to produce cohesion for the Vuillard family, as all meals turn to fights. However, as in the rest of the film, the drama is always treated with a slight distance and a dose of comedy which lighten the impact of the horrifying things these characters say to one another. The end of the film does not present an estranged family, showing that even if dinner rituals seem to fail, the disruption of meals does not signal the dissolution of the family as it does in Wells's film. It also indicates that the initial distinction between meals fostering cohesion and failing to do so is in effect more nuanced: meals can fail to create cohesion but it doing so act as catharses which then allow for renewed family cohesion.

The excessive consumption of alcohol in *Un Conte de Noël* also merits discussion. Several members of the Vuillard family turn to drinking in order to deal with a family reunion fraught with fights and tensions. For instance, Simon and Abel hide in the kitchen to drink wine during the first night of the reunion, and to Abel's admonishment 'Va doucement!', Simon replies: 'Je peux pas. Tout un Noël sobre !'.

433 Visser, *Rituals of Dinner*, p. xii
434 Wuthnow, p. 112
435 Bennett and Wolin, p. 7

In that sequence, the camera is close to them, creating a claustrophobic effect, mirroring their impression of being boxed in by their family. This is not an isolated occurrence as Simon later gets drunk at a bar following his altercation with Sylvia, and Henri is shown constantly drinking throughout family meals. Indeed, one of the first sentences uttered by Henri upon his arrival in the family home, and after greeting his mother, is: 'J'ai soif, j'ai énormément soif. Il me faut boire.' This leads to the following exchange:

Junon (talking to Ivan's sons): Soyez gentil les enfants, allez chercher du vin pour votre oncle alcoolique.
Henri: Oui il me faut du vin, je suis de retour, j'ai besoin de boire.

There thus appears to be a direct correlation between Henri's return to his family's home and his need for liquid courage. His excessive drinking continues throughout the film, for example after his fight with Claude he tells Faunia: 'Oui je merde, oui j'ai bu. […] Je suis complètement bourré.' Alcohol functions both as an escape, and as a disinhibitor which allows Henri to express his feelings to his family, albeit in an aggressive and insulting way. In fact, most of the characters are seen drinking more than eating, which I read as a reflection of the family's trouble in nourishing its members emotionally. The most common drink in *Un Conte de Noël* is wine, which Barthes defines as being 'senti par la nation française comme un bien qui lui est propre. […] C'est une boisson-totem'.[436] This French preference for wine is also illustrated in *Le Skylab*, where the main drink consumed during meals is wine. Barthes states that 'en France, l'ivresse est conséquence, jamais finalité; la boisson est sentie comme l'étalement d'un plaisir non comme la cause nécessaire d'un effet recherché', but although that is mostly true in Delpy, it is not the case in Desplechin.[437] On the

436 Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 83
437 Ibid., p. 84

contrary, drunkenness seems to be what both Henri and Simon are after in Desplechin's film, and they also make excessive use of pills taken from Paul. Pills are also a preferred way of self-numbing for the characters in both *The Savages* and *August: Osage County*. Violet's abuse of pills is a cause of tension with her daughters, especially Barbara, and thus one of the main subplots of the film: Violet calls pills 'my best fucking friends' and states 'they never let me down'. All these characters feel the need to abuse these substances in order to avoid their feelings of anger, resentment and alienation, thereby demonstrating how difficult it can be to endure family meals or reunions.

Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit offers instances of meals where the ritual appears to be working but underneath the surface the fragilities of the family are apparent, which also nuances the initial distinction between meals successfully or unsuccessfully fostering cohesion. Meals in Vigan's novels work in the same way as her description of the preparation of meals does: they both reveal what is going on underneath the surface. There are two especially significant passages in that regard, the first one being the narration of a Christmas dinner gone awry:

> Lors d'un Noël à Pierremont où nous étions tous réunis devant une orgie de victuailles […] se produisit une scène qui marquerait l'histoire familiale. Le repas du réveillon était tendu, ce n'était pas inhabituel: dès lors que la famille était rassemblée, l'air se chargeait d'abord d'une électricité joyeuse qui ne tardait pas à se transformer en courant haute tension. Année après année, il me semblait de plus en plus difficile pour ma famille de cohabiter au-delà de quelques heures. Cette fois, le débat s'était cristallisé autour de la première femme de Barthélémy, que Georges avait toujours détestée, qui avait insisté pour venir passer Noël à Pierremont avec notre cousin, alors que Barthélémy y séjournait avec sa nouvelle compagne. […] Peu à peu la tension était montée et Georges avait fini par quitter la table, après avoir fustigé la collectivité d'une phrase assassine dont il avait le secret. Alors Liane, qu'au cours de ma vie je n'avais jamais vue pleurer, éclata en sanglots. Elle mit ses mains devant ses yeux et par un effet de contagion […] tous les convives présents à table, ou presque, se mirent à pleurer.[438]

This passage is a key one in the novel for several reasons. It provides an example of Georges's violence, thereby hinting at the dark secrets the family keeps hidden, and showcasing some of its dysfunctions. This is further reinforced by the comment that as years go by it becomes more and more difficult for the family to cohabit: the reader understands that the increase in tension can be ascribed in part to the claims of incest the family members are all trying to ignore. This passage also establishes Liane as the emotional centre of the family, and thus parallels the other most significant instance of a meal in the novel, in a dream the author has:

> Il y a quelques jours, j'ai fait un rêve qui n'a pas fini de me hanter. Nous sommes tous réunis dans la salle à manger de Pierremont, autour de l'immense table en bois […]. Tout le monde est là, rien n'a bougé […]. Liane est en face de moi. C'est un repas de famille comme nous en avons connu jusqu'à la fin des années

438 *Rien ne s'oppose*, pp. 359-360

quatre-vingt-dix, quand Georges était encore vivant. L'ambiance est un peu tendue, Georges fait son show […], tandis que Liane invite les uns et les autres à se servir pendant que c'est chaud. A la réflexion, je ne vois pas Lucile, je ne suis pas sûre qu'elle soit dans le rêve, elle n'est pas là, non, sans que toutefois son absence soit signalée. A un moment […] le silence se fait. Le sourire de Liane disparaît elle se tourne vers moi et me dit, avec ce voile désolé ou accablé qui altérait parfois son regard, dénué de toute hostilité:
- Ce n'est pas gentil ce que vous faites, ma reine chérie, ce n'est pas gentil.
Je me réveille en sursaut et trempée de sueur.[439]

The two passages echo one another, and the second one makes apparent the guilt the author experiences when writing about her family. The fact that her dream takes place in Pierremont is not surprising given the importance of the house for the family, as I have discussed in the first chapter. The dream sequence parallels the actual event, but whereas Liane appears as benevolent during the real meal, in the dream she is the one who makes the narrator feels guilty. The dream is narrated before the actual meal, and this foreshadowing necessarily informs the reader's vision of Liane in the second passage. She might not be guilty of incest, but she did protect her husband, and forced the family to pretend nothing is wrong. Meals in Vigan are thus one of the ways in which the characters use family rituals as a way of avoiding family's secrets, but as Visser notes a 'ritual becomes meaningless to us, and finally destructive, if it is used for deception'.[440] Such is the case in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit*, as the meals are rituals perverted to give an impression of cohesion and community even though they do not exist.

Overall, Visser's statements that 'eating together helps people get over fights' and that 'the action of eating together can ritually express what is held, shared, and enjoyed, after all, in common; […] therefore signif[ying] the dropping of the hostilities' is not proven true in all works.[441] Although both Oates and Delpy's works adhere to this idea, it is not the case in *Un Conte de Noël* or *August: Osage County* where meals fail at creating solidarity and community, nor in Vigan where the ritual is perverted in order to maintain a façade of solidarity. In her exploration of the family dinner in three American films Ferry notes that in contemporary American cinema 'shared family meals are proscribed as occasions for conflict and tension (danger)', a thesis which Wells's film tends to prove.[442] Along with Desplechin's work, Wells's film paints a relatively pessimistic picture of family meals, one which echoes Annie Ernaux's comment in *Les Années* that 'dans le brouhaha des voix, brusquement perçues comme détachées des corps, on savait que le repas de famille était un endroit où la folie pouvait survenir et on renverserait la table en hurlant'.[443] On the contrary,

439 Ibid. pp. 181-182
440 Visser, *Rituals of Dinner*, p. 26
441 Ibid., pp. 92-93
442 Ferry, p. 60
443 Annie Ernaux, *Les Années* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), p. 137

family meals in *We Were the Mulvaneys* do create cohesion within the family, and although fights erupt at the table in *Le Skylab* the characters overcome them fairly quickly. In *The Savages*, meals are almost entirely absent, as I will now discuss.

Not Eating

Alongside the food actually consumed in the works, a discussion of family meals needs to analyse instances of the absence or refusal of food. Here I show how a difficult relation with food can be indicative of complex and tense feelings towards the family. Although there is not much to be said about instances of not eating in *August: Osage County*, it is worth noting that Jean's vegetarianism is a stark refusal of tradition, especially in rural America, and an example of her fraught relationship with her family. Jean illustrates Eve Jackson's claim that meals 'provide an opportunity for resistance to the parental culture as part of the child's process of seeking self-definition'.[444] In this part I start by briefly looking at how the absence of food in *The Savages* is emblematic of the Savage family dynamic, before examining how in Oates and Vigan the anorexic characters' relationship to food can be read as reflecting their relationship with their family.

In *The Savages* very little food appears onscreen. Wendy and Jon share a tuna melt, but it is more of a snack than a real meal. And even this minimal meal reveals the tension in their relationship, as Wendy prepares the sandwiches to avoid Jon's questions about her married lover, and it is while they eat together that she lies about receiving funding for her writing. Apart from this episode, there is an absence of food in the film which I read as reflecting the lack of family cohesion: the Savages are not emotionally nourished by one another, and thus no food is shared. This absence of food also signals the absence of a mother, if we accept that food is habitually linked with mother-figures. The absence of food is mirrored by the absence of a family home discussed in the first chapter, displaying a family which does not function properly as its functioning is almost inexistent.

Their only visit to an establishment that serves food is the diner scene, in which the absence of food is glaring. However, although the only items consumed by the Savages are glasses of water, this scene does unite the family around a dining table. The diner is the place chosen by Jon and Wendy to have a discussion with their father about his end-of-life care and funeral arrangements. The fact that they choose this bland and generic diner to have a very private conversation highlights their distance from Lenny. The camera separates Jon and Wendy from Lenny, as he sits alone on

444 Eve Jackson, p. 115

one side of the table and shots alternate between focusing on the siblings and on their father. Their body language clearly marks their discomfort, as does the fact all three have kept their coats and scarves on inside.

Most of the scene is shot in medium shot, but when the camera cuts to a long shot of the inside of the diner it becomes apparent that many other tables are occupied, emphasising the feeling of inadequacy of the setting. This cut takes place after Lenny yells 'Pull the plug' in response to one of Jon's questions, both showcasing the uncomfortable reactions of the other diners and Jon's embarrassment at these reactions.

The lack of intimacy that exists between Lenny and his children is further reinforced by the harsh white light used during the scene. Although this scene displays the distance between Jon, Wendy and Lenny, it is also one of the only instances where Jon and Wendy talk *to* their father, rather than

about or at him. In that respect the conversation is not a total failure, and shows that a modicum of intimacy can be created around this diner table, even if no meal is shared. The absence of food, and thus meals, in Jenkins's film is as significant and telling of the Savage's family dynamics than the instances of meals in the other works.

Both *We Were the Mulvaneys* and *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* present young women suffering from anorexia: Marianne in Oates and the author herself in Vigan. Hilde Bruch, one of the most significant authors working on eating disorders, describes anorexia as

> a literal and symbolic embodiment of the profound resistance to women's embodying power. If a girl has no needs, paradoxically enough, she has a kind of immense power; she has attained an almost superhuman control over herself. Because she is then unlike everyone else, she is special indeed. At the same time, however, she has lowered her ambitions, aspirations, and expectations *of others*, and has lost her belief in her right to take up space in the world.[445]

This makes it clear that anorexia is about control over one's (emotional) needs, as well as about a difficulty in taking up one's place in the world. Bruch explains that 'food lends itself readily to such an usage because eating, from birth on, is always closely intermingled with interpersonal and emotional experiences, and its physiological and psychological aspects cannot be strictly differentiated'.[446] Indeed, as previously discussed, food in the works never offers only physical nourishment but is bound up with emotional nourishment as well.

Marianne's anorexia in *We Were the Mulvaneys* quite clearly stems from two great traumas, her rape and banishment from High Point Farm. While the novel never states outright that Marianne is anorexic, it does repeatedly reference her extreme loss of weight. Upon her return to school, for example, 'it was noted that Marianne's face was oddly triangular, sallow-skinned and witchy; her downcast eyes were overlarge in their sockets' and during her visit to Patrick she is described as having 'upper arms no larger than his [Patrick's] wrists. Collarbone jutting and breasts tiny as a twelve-year-old's'.[447] It is also mentioned that she stops eating, in the two following passages for example:

> the previous evening, instead of sitting down at dinner with her family, Marianne had stammered some excuse, a headache, cramps, she'd taken a bowl of cottage cheese with mashed banana up to her room, but how could Corinne know she'd actually eaten it? And that morning, rushing at the last minute, a hurried breakfast or perhaps none at all, in the commotion of the morning kitchen, who could tell? And what about

445 Hilde Bruch, *The Golden Cage: The enigma of anorexia nervosa* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. xiv
446 Hilde Bruch, *Eating Disorders: Obesity, anorexia nervosa and the person within* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 3
447 *Mulvaneys*, p. 162 and p. 220

the previous morning?

She wasn't taking […] the sleek green-and-black capsules Dr. Oakley had prescribed to *help restore appetite* (like Mom «restoring» one of her «antiques»?) but that was Marianne's secret, one of her secrets.[448]

Thus, while the word itself is never used, it is very clear that Marianne is indeed anorexic. Food in general is often a difficult area for Oates's characters, and their relationship with it tend to be unhealthy, as David Rutledge notes in his article on instances of over-eating in Oates.[449] Her works also feature several other anorexic young female characters, as Oates's biographer Greg Johnson observes:

Negative images of food recur with a peculiar frequency and intensity throughout her work. Her female protagonists in every decade of her career – Karen Herz in *With Shuddering Fall* (1964), Elena Howe in *Do With Me What You Will* (1971), Marya Knauer in *Marya: A Life* (1986), and Marianne Mulvaney in *We Were the Mulvaneys* (1996) – disdain the process of eating and nurture.[450]

As a majority of the works in my corpus could be described as autofictional in a broad sense, I think it worth considering that the characters' troubled relationship with food can be linked with Oates's own anorexia. Johnson touches on this: 'although Joyce herself sometimes dismissed her personal issues with food, […] it seems clear that the frequent and occasionally intense anorexic impulses that mark her life' are often 'dramatized in her fiction'.[451] Although she does not draw a link between her own experience and her fiction, Oates herself writes about her anorexia in her published journal. The March 4, 1977 entry, for example, reads:

if one refuses to eat it isn't always because there isn't adequate or tempting food … it may simply be that one wishes to display one's <u>will</u>; one wishes to dramatize one's own victory over the instincts of the flesh. […] Having felt such temptations … having been visited by them … I understand what they are from the inside. And they are terrible. Terrible.

And the entry from April 5, 1979 is even clearer: 'Recalling 1970, 1971, … the early stages of what was probably anorexia … when I weighed 95-98 pounds for a while, and had no appetite'.[452]

In *We Were the Mulvaneys* Marianne's physical transformation begins in the aftermath of her rape, while she is still living at High Point Farm. Indeed, during the first meal following the event

448 Ibid., p. 118 and p. 152
449 David Rutledge, 'Distate: Joyce Carol Oates and Food' in *Bearing Witness: Joyce Carol Oates Studies*, Vol. 1, Article 5 (2014)
450 Greg Johnson, *Invisible Writer: A biography of Joyce Carol Oates* (New York and London: Dutton, 1998), p. 173
451 Ibid., pp. 173-174
452 Joyce Carol Oates, *The Journal of Joyce Carol Oates: 1973-1982*, ed. by Greg Johnson (New York: Ecco, 2007), p. 177 and pp. 297-298. See also September 18, 1976, p. 145

Marianne had had a mild surge of nausea but no one had noticed. She'd conquered it, sitting very calmly and waiting for it to subside. As Dad said, *An act of will*. […] But the nausea remained, and a taste of hot yellow bile at the back of her mouth.[453]

Marianne's 'act of will' in this passage prefigures her descent into anorexia in that such control over one's self is a feature of this eating disorder, as previously mentioned. Anorexia is considered to be a relatively common response to a traumatic sexual experience, as noted in the novel itself:

Patrick had read about rape victims, he'd done research in his methodical Pinch-style, in the Cornell psych library. *It is common for a rape victim, female or male, to avoid mirrors and direct confrontation with all images of the "self". As if, where there had been a person, there is now no one*.[454]

Furthermore, most of Oates's anorexic characters have suffered a traumatic sexual experience, as Johnson points out, in Oates the 'drive toward anorexia is often coupled with a portrayal of female sexual experience in wholly negative and destructive terms'.[455]

But although Marianne's anorexia must therefore be seen as directly linked to her rape, I would argue that, in fact, it is mostly a signal of her lack of emotional nourishment following her exile from her family. Indeed, Marianne's relationship with food mirrors and illustrates her relationship with her family: the absence of a relationship with her family translates into a lack of appetite, or at least a refusal to be nourished. In a similar way she avoids forming close emotional ties to people, abruptly leaving both the Co-Op and Miss Hagström's house, her anorexia is a 'refusal, not only of food but of social connection'.[456] In her essay on food Oates writes that 'our relationship with food makes us human, and our repudiation of a relationship to food is a repudiation of our humanity as well' which seems to perfectly embody Marianne's experience.[457] Her refusal of food is a refusal of a proper life, as she does not wish to live without her family. Marianne tests and submits her body in more than one way, as she also executes intense physical work at the Co-Op and in another instance considers that 'if she walked barefoot in the snow, it might be a test. In her numbed, exalted state she'd become invulnerable!'.[458] As Christianity is a way for Marianne to read the world, she strives to transcend her emotional pain and believes that 'you could make of your pain an offering. You could make of your humiliation a gift'.[459] Marianne is not equipped to deal with life without her family, translating their absence in a lack of food and any

453 *Mulvaneys*, pp. 85-86
454 Ibid., p. 221
455 Johnson, p. 173
456 Sceats, p. 93
457 Joyce Carol Oates, 'Food Mysteries' in *Not For Bread Alone: Writers on food, wine, and the art of eating*, ed. by Daniel Halpern (New York: HarperCollins e-books, 2009), pp. 16-22 (p. 18)
458 *Mulvaneys*, p. 153
459 Ibid., p. 90

other kind of emotional sustenance. The fact that following Marianne's exile Corinne insists on keeping up appearances as if there was no problem is also an aggravating factor in her daughter's illness. This can be read as the family myth in action, as I have discussed in the previous chapter. In fact families keeping up a façade of unity is a common occurrence in anorexic's families, as Bruch explains. She states that 'parents tend to present their family life as more harmonious than it actually is, or they deny difficulties altogether' and that 'only intensive therapeutic work revealed the distortions and tensions underlying the facade of normality'.[460] Marianne's deep trauma at being exiled is thus made worse by Corinne as, by refusing to acknowledge there is even a problem, she forbids her daughter discussing it.

Anorexia is also for Marianne a way to exercise control faced with events – the rape and the exile – which have taken away her agency. This exercise of will is a response by anorexics to experiencing 'themselves as not being in control of their behavior, needs, and impulses, as not owning their own bodies, as not having a center of gravity within themselves'.[461] Orbach further develops this argument by stating that the anorexic 'experiences her emotional life as an attack on herself, and she attempts to control it so that she will not be devoured by her emotions', a claim that appears to apply entirely to Marianne's situation.[462] Furthermore, control is a recurring theme in Oates, and within *We Were the Mulvaneys* Marianne is not the only character to exhaust her body: Patrick runs for miles and miles. Writing about Oates, Aida Edemariam notes that 'there is often the sense, in her fiction, that sanity is only just maintained, that superhuman effort is required to hold things together', and one of Marianne's ways of holding things together is starving herself.[463]

Without her family Marianne has no real sense of identity, and thus she does not know how to live when her family is denied to her. In his essay, Rutledge argues similarly that

> One reason for this unhealthy sense [of food and nutrition] is the disconnect each character has between flesh and self. None of these characters identify with their bodies. None of them think of themselves as physical beings. […] this lack of awareness of themselves as physical beings connects to Oates's most prominent theme, the instability of identity.[464]

Marianne's hunger for the love and emotional nourishment of her family, is underlined by the absence of food in the third part of the novel, the part devoted to Marianne, save for the sandwiches she shares with Hewie following her grand-mother's funeral. Patrick's hunger for the same things, and for communication in general, is illustrated by his voracious eating of the meal prepared by

460 Bruch, *The Golden Cage*, p. 106 and *Eating Disorders*, p. 81
461 Bruch, *Eating Disorders*, p. 55
462 Orbach, p. xii
463 Aida Edemariam, 'The New Monroe Doctrine' in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006*, ed. by Greg Johnson (Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 2006), pp. 213-223 (p. 222)
464 Rutledge, p. 10

Marianne when she comes to visit him in Ithaca: 'No one had cooked for Patrick here, in his own kitchen. They sat down to eat. Marianne's minestrone was the most delicious soup Patrick had ever tasted […] Patrick was surprised at his appetite, his hunger.'[465] Indeed, while Marianne does not eat she often prepares food for others, be it for Patrick or at the Co-Op. This may seem paradoxical, but is in fact recognised as typical of anorexics, as Orbach explains:

> while the anorectic comes to fear taking in food for herself, she feels the need to be near it. She thinks about it constantly, is involved in preparing food for others, especially desserts, and shows concern for the food needs of those close to her. In this way her own desire and need for food is partly met through the process of projective identification.[466]

The food Marianne prepares is reminiscent of the meals she prepares with her mother, it is familiar food which expresses her longing for home. And indeed, while preparing the meal for Patrick 'she'd chattered to him, glowing with pleasure and purpose. Almost she was Button Mulvaney. If Patrick didn't stare at her', clearly showing that her preparation of food take her back to her childhood, to the place she wants to be.[467] Rutledge argues that Marianne and Patrick's meal in Ithaca is a instance of a positive depiction of food in Oates, claiming that 'this delicious soup may represent Marianne's attempts to make her own life, at this point in the novel. This soup represents the self and the soul she has created at the Green Isle Co-Op'.[468] On the contrary I would argue that this meal perfectly exemplifies Marianne's inability to build a life for herself away from her family, and that it represents her longing for home. Indeed, while she may be the one preparing the food, she eats very little, and she only overcomes her anorexia after her father calls her on his death bed, once the family is – by this action – reconciled. Her recovery is apparent in the epilogue, where she is described thusly: 'Marianne was in the prime of her young womanhood, the color restored to her skin, a fullness to her face, the stress lines eased, the liquidy yearning in the eyes eased'.[469]

Oates features characters with complex relationships with food in many of her novels, be it that they over-eat or starve themselves. Bruch herself notes that Oates is particularly apt at depicting eating disorders, writing: 'that individual emotional experiences, not social conditions, are involved in the development of obesity, is described with brilliant psychological awareness in two novels by Joyce Carol Oates.'[470] In 'Food Mysteries' Oates establishes a link between cooking, eating and one's family, as she writes that cooking is 'an intimate, methodical, deeply engrossing and rewarding

465 *Mulvaneys*, p. 221
466 Orbach, p. xii
467 *Mulvaneys*, p. 220
468 Rutledge, p. 19
469 *Mulvaneys*, p. 440
470 Bruch, *Eating Disorders*, p. 22

activity', which she states she has only ever done with her mother.[471] The end of this piece strongly links food to the family, showing how forceful the bond is in Oates's mind. The bond between anorexia and family relationship is also established by Bruch who claims that 'the development of anorexia nervosa is so closely related to abnormal patterns of family interaction that successful treatment must always involve resolution of the underlying family problems'.[472] Therefore, it is not surprising that Marianne's difficult relationship with food mirrors her relationship with her family. When the family is united Marianne eats, whereas when she is banished she turns to anorexia. In Oates the father's alcoholism parallels the demise of the family as well as Marianne's anorexia. I therefore read the alcoholism and anorexia as two different ways of coping with a situation which both characters find difficult to endure. While Marianne takes refuge in the form of extreme control over her body, Michael opts for the opposite route of the loss of control provided by an excess of alcohol. Both can lead to death, but in *We Were the Mulvaneys* only Michael dies, paving the way for a family reconciliation following his death.

In Vigan the link between anorexia and problems within the family is quite similar to the one explored by Oates. Vigan writes about her experience with anorexia in her first book *Jours sans faim*, in which she quite firmly links her eating disorder to troubles in her relationship to her family, and a traumatic childhood.[473] In *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* Vigan directly references this book:

> après mon retour à Paris et le séjour de Lucile à Sainte-Anne, le temps d'une année scolaire, j'avais cessé de m'alimenter, jusqu'à sentir la mort dans mon corps. C'est d'ailleurs précisément ce que je voulais: sentir la mort dans mon corps. […] En 2001, j'ai publié un roman qui raconte l'hospitalisation d'une jeune femme anorexique. *Jours sans faim* est un roman en partie autobiographique.[474]

As in Oates, anorexia for Vigan is partly about control, but a control which she believes is only an illusion, as she states that

> Le jeûne est une drogue puissante et peu onéreuse, on oublie souvent de le dire. L'état de dénutrition anesthésie la douleur, les émotions, les sentiments, et fonctionne, dans un premier temps, comme une protection. L'anorexie restrictive est une addiction qui fait croire au contrôle alors qu'elle conduit le corps à sa destruction.[475]

As previously discussed the link between anorexia and control is established. Lilian R. Furst

471 Oates, 'Food Mysteries', p. 21
472 Bruch, *The Golden Cage*, p. 106
473 *Jours sans faim* was written under the pseudonym Lou Delvig
474 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 331
475 Ibid., p. 332

describes it as follow:

> eating, like noneating, is a tool for power both over oneself and over one's surroundings. The individual, especially when forced into a coercive situation of any sort, can exercise control and a measure of choice by the mode and amount of food ingested. The order of eating thus becomes a very fundamental vehicle for self-expression, and simultaneously for manipulation.[476]

In Vigan the need to exercise power comes as the response to the mother's mental illness and the father's verbal abuse, which both contributed to making Vigan's childhood fairly traumatic. In *Jours sans faim* she makes it clear that her anorexia is linked to her parents' behaviour, writing that 'elle voulait leur faire mal, les blesser dans leur chair, les détruire peut-être. Son père et sa mère. Qu'ils ne s'en tirent pas comme ça. Toxiques tous les deux.'[477] She further develops her inability to move past her childhood in a later passage:

> Jusqu'au jour où cette enfance blessée lui est remontée d'un seul coup. Acide. Elle avait beau mâcher, ruminer, déglutir, ça ne passait plus. […] elle n'en finissait plus de faire rouler dans sa bouche ces petit morceaux d'enfance comme des cailloux terreux qu'elle refusait de cracher. Elle ne voulait pas grandir, comment peut-on grandir avec ces blessures à l'intérieur de soi ? Elle voulait combler par le vide ce manque qu'ils avaient creusé en elle, leur faire payer ce dégoût qu'elle avait d'elle-même, cette culpabilité qui la reliait encore à eux.[478]

Here the development of anorexia as a response to trauma within the family is clearly stated by the author, who equates an inability to digest her childhood with a refusal to ingest food. The fact that Vigan has devoted an entire novel to her year living (or surviving) with anorexia demonstrates the importance of this experience for her, and the fact that she comes back to it when writing about her family in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* makes clear the link between anorexia and family traumas.

As we have seen, in these works both the absence of food and troubled relationships with food are unquestionably representative of the characters' relationships with their family. In *The Savages* food is barely present, echoing the mother's absence and showing how he rest of the family fails to provide emotional nourishment to each another. In Oates and Vigan, anorexia reveals a difficulty in dealing with sexual abuse and / or childhood traumas. As discussed above, the link between anorexia and the family has long been established by psychologists: Furst, for instance, notes that the 'struggle for autonomous power over the self and, by extension, over others is nowadays recognized in anorexics as closely connected to the dynamics of family interaction'.[479]

476 Lilian R. Furst, 'Introduction' in *Disorderly Eaters: Texts in self-empowerment*, ed. by Lilian R. Furst and Peter W. Graham (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), pp. 1-9 (p. 4)
477 Lou Delvig, *Jours sans faim* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2012), p. 29
478 Ibid., pp. 124-125
479 Furst, p. 6

Anorexia can therefore be read by the literary critic as an attempt for the characters to make sense of the world and regain control of a situation which has robbed them of agency. In both works it is also a way for them to deal with a lack of emotional support and of love, illustrating Orbach's point that 'anorexia is an attempted solution to being in a world from which at the most profound level one feels excluded, and into which one feels deeply unentitled to enter'.[480] As has been shown throughout this chapter, food in fiction therefore often represents more than physical sustenance, as Eve Jackson states: 'In assimilating experiences with all their emotional content, factual information and ideas, we may meet difficulties which can be expressed imaginally in digestive terms, or even through physical alimentary problems.'[481] In both Oates and Vigan the characters project upon food their problematic relationships with their family, once again illustrating the power of food as a symbol for the family.

480 Orbach, p. 84
481 Eve Jackson, p. 95

Conclusion

Overall, this chapter has shown how central food and meals are in all of the works, even when they do not feature extensively – as in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* – or when the significance lies in their absence, as in *The Savages*. This examination has made apparent the fact that food is never either social or biological but instead that 'the sharing of food brings people once again to the intimate interconnection between social person and biological organism'; they are interdependent.[482] As we have seen, this is partly what gives food its essential status for humans, as food is 'a phenomenon that exists at the border of the symbolic and the material'.[483] Meals thus possess a special status as the instances where the sharing of food takes place, and are especially important in the life of families as they bring its members together. In works of fiction they thus create occasions to generate conflict between the characters and move the plot forward, which is why they are used as structuring devices in *August: Osage County*, *We Were the Mulvaneys*, *Un Conte de Noël* and *Le Skylab*. This chapter further develops the question of family disfunction, and shows the different ways in which dysfunctions can occur. Some, like the imbalance of responsibility for chores between genders do not point to an overall dysfunctional family if they appear on their own. Others are more critical, such as the lack of emotional support in the Weston and Savage families and Georges's violence in Vigan. The excessive recourse to alcohol and tranquillising pills in a majority of the works also points to the dysfunctional characters of these families, as the protagonists are shown to resort to drugs and drunkenness to escape difficulties in family dynamics. One exception is the portrayal of alcoholism in *Le Skylab*, where Roger drinks excessively to drown sorrows about his professional life, rather than his familial one. Lastly, the anorexic characters in Oates and Vigan can be read to show how family dysfunctions can lead to mental and physical disorders for its members.

The patterns of meals and of the actions which surround them (preparing the food, laying and clearing the table) have proven to be as significant and symbolically rich as the meals themselves. Indeed, the discrimination between everyday and formal meals allows the authors and filmmakers to use them to different effect. In *We Were the Mulvaneys*, for example, given the importance given to meals by the Mulvaneys, only a celebratory meal can properly function as the symbol for the reunion. The actions necessary for the preparation of meals are as important as the meals themselves in indicating the type of system the families operate within, and the relationships the members have with one another. Furthermore, they allow for an exploration of societal issues

482 Jones, p. 12

483 Robert Appelbaum, *Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup, and Other Gastronomic Interjections: Literature, culture, and food among the early moderns* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 9

such as gender divides in *Le Skylab*, and race inequality in *August: Osage County*. As rituals, meals are imagined as moments which create cohesion and community within a group, however this aim is not fulfilled in all of the works – in *August: Osage County* and *Un Conte de Noël* all the meals end in fights – and is even perverted in *Rien ne s'opppose à la nuit* to construct a façade of united family, when the reality is that dark secrets lie beneath the surface. By forcing the family members together, meals can generate great tensions and anxieties and lead to outbursts of violence. As Sicotte notes: 'le repas littéraire présente souvent un caractère paroxystique, il est un moment de cristallisation du récit où les événements, heureux ou malheureux, culminent.'[484]

This chapter has also sought to bring more elements to bear on the question of what makes someone part of a family. Although my discussion of meals in *August: Osage County* complements my earlier comments on Johnna's status as an outsider, this chapter has sought to emphasise the fact that she looks after the Westons in a way they do not for each other. In Oates, family meals are restricted to the parents and siblings until the epilogue, showing how the family opens up to new members as they evolve. This chapter reinforces the inclusivity of the family in *Le Skylab*, as meals once again unite both the mothers, the siblings and their spouses as well as the children. The fact that Claude and Sylvia are present for the Christmas dinner in *Un Conte de Noël* indicates that while they are not fully integrated, they are still considered part of the family is some way. The lack of meals in *The Savages* begs the same question as the absence of a family home did in the first chapter: can you be a family when there is little contact between members? Similarly, this chapter furthers the question of whether the family is a refuge or a trap. The family once more appears to be a trap for the Westons, as meals trap them in a cycle of verbal abuse and physical violence. Similarly to the way the house functioned as a refuge for the Mulvaneys in the first chapter, meals provide them comfort and stability. However, it also establishes an imbalance as the preparation of meals falls entirely on Corinne and Marianne. Similarly, in previous chapters the family did not appear to be a trap in Delpy but it is revealed here that it does trap women in a domestic role. These questions are further developed in the following chapter, which examines secrets and traumas.

484 Sicotte, p. 98

Chapter IV. Secrets and Traumas

The characters in my corpus are preoccupied with the weight of their family of origin, and the existence of secrets and traumas in these families therefore plays a central role in the existing family dynamics. As Laurent Demanze notes:

> l'écriture contemporaine est […] travaillée par un retour au récit, mais un récit strié d'ellipses et de lacunes, un récit porteur de mémoire et taraudé par un passé absent. Le récit contemporain renoue alors avec les histoires de famille, qui sous-tendaient la littérature, du conte aux fresques généalogiques.[485]

Secrets and traumas are necessarily linked, since secrets are often connected to traumatic events, and, furthermore, secrets are hidden and thus unavailable like a trauma is 'always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or a truth that is not otherwise available', as Cathy Caruth states.[486] In the preface to their collection of studies on the family secret in francophone contemporary novels, Patricia Bissa Enama and Nathalie Fontane Wacker write:

> le secret est une matière littéraire riche et dynamique: il est indissociable du récit de sa révélation ou du récit mensonger dont on l'entoure. Le secret de famille est ainsi intrinsèquement lié à la fiction: il l'est d'abord au sens où le silence qui le constitue s'accompagne nécessairement d'un discours qui se substitue à la réalité des faits. […] il est un moteur romanesque capital; le romancier place au coeur de son récit un mystère dont le dévoilement est incontestablement un vecteur d'émotions, de rebondissements, de conflits ou de tensions entre le désir de connaître la vérité et le désir de l'occulter.[487]

In this chapter, I examine the pivotal importance of secrets and traumas in the fictions of my corpus. I will argue that secrets and traumas play a crucial role in fictions concerned with families because of their effects on family dynamics and their revelation of the unconscious transmissions taking place within families.

In this chapter I draw on psychological and psychoanalytical theories, since those fields have long shown a special interest in family secrets. There is of course a long and on-going debate about the recourse to psychoanalysis by literary criticism, but I subscribe to Shoshana Felman's position, which is contained in the following:

> The notion of *application* would be replaced by the radically different notion of *implication*: bringing

485 Laurent Demanze, *Encres orphelines* (Paris: J. Corti, 2008), p. 11
486 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, narrative, and history* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 4
487 Patricia Bissa Enama and Nathalie Fontane Wacker, 'Avant-propos' in *Le Secret de famille dans le roman contemporain*, ed. by Patricia Bissa Enama and Nathalie Fontane Wacker (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2016), pp. 9-12 (p. 10)

analytical questions to bear upon literary questions, *involving* psychoanalysis in the scene of literary analysis, the interpreter's role would here be, not to *apply* to the text an acquired science, a preconceived knowledge, but to act as a go-between, to *generate implications* between literature and psychoanalysis – to explore, bring to light and articulate the various (indirect) ways in which the two domains do indeed *implicate each other*, each one finding itself enlightened, informed, but also affected, displaced, by the other.[488]

Following Felman what I hope to achieve in this chapter is a dialogue between the films and novels analysed and the different psychoanalytic theories of traumas and secrets I call upon. What I am specifically interested in is the hidden mechanism for the transmission of secrets, as well as the impact of keeping a secret on the keeper's descendants. Drawing on the work of Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török, the psychologist Anne Ancelin Schützenberger has elaborated a theory of the transgenerational transmission of secrets, which will, I hope, prove especially useful in this chapter. I also make use of the work of Serge Tisseron, a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who has worked extensively on family secrets. As concepts originating in psychoanalysis have entered general knowledge, the creators of the works of my corpus themselves operate in relation to such concepts – whether they adhere to or reject them. Some, as we will see, even address them explicitly. The family therapy theorists that have been discussed in the second chapter also appear in this one, as I continue my discussion of family rules, history and myth.

The first part of this chapter examines the secrets present in my corpus and argues that family dynamics are radically altered by the revelation or the keeping of secrets. I then proceed to explore the unconscious transmission of secrets and traumas within the families depicted in the works of my corpus, and the effects such transmissions have on these fictional families. Finally, I examine how art can be used to work through questions of family secrets and transmission: I will argue that several authors of the works in my corpus quite explicitly show themselves to be doing this, and that my corpus contains an artist character whose practice can also be read in this way. As there are no secrets in *Le Skylab* and *The Savages*, these two films are absent from the first two parts of the chapter, but they come back in the discussion of the use of art as a way of managing family traumas or of re-creating the past.

488 Shoshana Felman, 'To Open the Question' in *Yale French Studies*, Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise, No. 55/56 (1977), pp. 5-10 (pp. 8-9)

I. Secrets and the Family Dynamic

In this first part I focus on the specific secrets and traumas represented in my corpus, and explore how these fictions represent the effects of keeping or revealing them. *August: Osage County* is a film in which secrets between family members are legion; for example Barbara keeps her separation from her husband a secret and Ivy does not tell her family about her cancer. Nevertheless, the audience is guided by the camera and editing to pay attention to those secrets, for instance in the veranda scene featuring Violet, Barbara and Bill. Talking about her parents Barbara says: 'Marriage is hard', and Bill mutters: 'Under the best of circumstances'. In a rapid succession the camera moves from a shot of Violet looking at them both, to one of Barbara looking at Bill before going back to Violet noticing Barbara's look.

In this way the camera leads us to pay attention not only to Barbara and Bill's exchange, which hints at their separation, but also to Violet who, in that moment, understands what is going on. This comes up later when, at the funeral lunch, Violet suddenly asks Bill: 'where are you living now?': in doing so she reveals their separation to the whole family. In Wells's film every character presents a false front which conceals many different secrets: the most important of these are the secret of Little Charles's filiation, Ivy and Little Charles's relationship, and the fact that Violet knew about Beverly's plan to commit suicide.

In *August: Osage County* there is a collusion between the members of the parents' generation that leads to a family riddled with secrets. By pretending to ignore Beverly and Mattie Fae's affair, Violet and Charlie encourage a culture of secrecy within the family, and by their silence the four of them strengthen the effects the secret of Little Charles's filiation has on the family. As Lily Pincus and Christopher Dare note: 'like everything else that happens in families, they [secrets] do not remain the property of the individual, as the responses of other family

members set in motion processes of interaction, which strengthen or weaken the effects of secrets.'[489] The Westons are a family in which each member plays a fixed role, as discussed in previous chapters, and these roles come into play when secrets are concerned. For instance, Mattie Fae discloses her secret to Barbara, who is defined as the responsible daughter: she is thus put in charge of preventing Ivy and Little Charles's relationship from progressing. Once the secrets are exposed, however, the dynamic of the family changes and the daughters leave, seemingly permanently. The secrets therefore appear to have been keeping the family together, even though much tension exists among its members. Prior to the secrets being revealed the daughters are unable to sever ties with the family, but when the truth emerges they are finally set free. As François Vigouroux notes: 'on ne se débarrasse pas de ce qu'on ne connaît pas' and thus the family secrets need to be exposed in order for the characters to be able to cut off ties with their ascendants.[490] The family is the main problem faced by the Weston daughters in this film, but the only solution to that problem is the family itself. The reunion here serves the purpose of exposing all the secrets so that the members can move away from one another.

Un Conte de Noël is not a film greatly concerned with mystery: for example while the reason for Henri's banishment remains a mystery, it remains relatively unimportant over the course of the film. The reason for his banishment is discussed several times, by Elizabeth and her psychoanalyst and later by Henri and Ivan, but the audience is never given a definite explanation. Desplechin allows several potential reasons to coexist: that Henri slept with Paul's babysitter, that he would have sent his sister a letter – to this suggestion by Ivan, Henri asks 'Avec quoi dedans ?' and Ivan replies 'Ben je sais pas, des choses impardonnables'. The only real secret in the film pertains to a romantic relationship, the secret surrounding Sylvia's love life, rather than a familial one, which explains the difference of its treatment: Desplechin does not elaborate his story about family around an enigma, but it does come into play in the romantic plot.

The secret surrounding Sylvia and the three cousins serves to both create and reinforce their respective roles in the family. Indeed, the fact that Henri, Ivan and Simon decided amongst themselves which one of them should date Sylvia exemplifies their roles as: Henri the seducer who was only superficially interested, Ivan the fragile one who needs the help and support of his family, and Simon, the cousin who, feeling indebted to his aunt's family for effectively adopting him, gives up his chance of being with Sylvia. The scene in which Sylvia confronts Simon also makes apparent their roles, as Simon is sitting at the kitchen table while Sylvia is dominating him in the frame.

489 Lily Pincus and Christopher Dare, *Secrets in the Family* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p. 16
490 François Vigouroux, *Le Secret de famille* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), p. 51

Her words also reinforce her dominant status:

Tu fais comme si t'étais pas dans le jeu mais tu es dans le jeu ! La preuve c'est que tu as choisi à ma place. […] Tu as joué à ma place et tu as triché. Maintenant je ne saurais jamais rien de ma vie. C'est pas ma vie. Tu m'as enlevé le droit de te préférer Ivan. […] Depuis dix ans t'as aucune vie. T'es minable dans ton atelier. Tu parles pas, tu es triste. Chez nous ou ici tu passes les dimanches à faire la vaisselle, à me regarder en cachette et à fuir mes enfants. T'es un échec monumental accroché aux Vuillards pour ne pas couler. Tu t'es jamais remis qu'on soit pas ensemble.

As usual in Desplechin's wider oeuvre, the harshest truths are told frontally, in a version of reality so heightened as to appear both commonplace and profoundly theatrical. Furthermore, the scenes are usually played in a manner opposite to what would be expected: in the outdoor scene between Junon and Henri harsh words are said in a matter-of-fact way as mother and son affirm they do not love one another. In her analysis of this scene Saturnino notes that 'baignés d'une lumière bleutée, les plans serrés accentuent la proximité qui s'instaure entre les personnages' whereas the dialogue is violent, and that therefore 'la scène dit tout et son contraire, mettant à jour toutes les hypocrisies et les faux-semblants qui régissent la famille'.[491]

491 Saturnino, p. 23

This is also true of the confrontation between Sylvia and Simon, as in that scene Simon smiles gently throughout Sylvia's monologue, his reaction contrasting with the violence of her words.

The revelation of this secret in *Un Conte de Noël* does not have the same destructive value for the family as it does in *August: Osage County*. On the contrary, when Sylvia and Junon say goodbye they seem more tender toward one another than in previous scenes, and Sylvia's relationship with Ivan does not seem to have been affected by her spending a night with Simon. Here, the revelation of a secret brings the characters closer together and reinforces their sense of family.

We Were the Mulvaneys plays with the revelation of secrets throughout. Indeed, in the opening passage Judd states: 'For a long time you envied us, then you pitied us. For a long time you admired us, then you thought *Good! – that's what they deserve*', creating an enigma for the reader,

that of what has happened to the family.[492] Two pages later, Oates is again teasing the reader: 'Which is why many of you envied us, I think. Before the events of 1976 when everything came apart for us and was never again put together in quite the same way', without making clear what these events are.[493] A few pages on, Judd mentions that he was involved in a criminal act alongside his brother Patrick. From the very beginning Oates therefore creates a sense of expectation in the reader, and will continue to frustrate this desire to know the full story, as the details of Marianne's rape are only given in the seventeenth chapter and Patrick's revenge is described only at the end of the second part. There are in fact allusions to Marianne's rape scattered throughout the first sixteen chapters, and the reader understands what has happened before getting the details. I have discussed in the previous chapter how in the novel the doe is representative of Marianne, and Oates's use of this symbol begins in the second chapter, where the description of the doe's death could equally well apply to Marianne: '*Don't think about it:* back in the woods, what's happening. Or not happening. Or has happened already. Or a thousand thousand times before even you were born.'[494] The reader is further encouraged to link the girl and the doe, and thus to infer what happens to the one according to what happens to the other, as the opening of the chapter following 'The Doe' is: 'No one would be able to name what had happened, not even Marianne Mulvaney to whom it had happened.'[495] Oates also establishes a parallel between a female teenager and a doe in *Carthage*, a novel in which a father is searching for his lost daughter in the woods: 'he saw that the thing on the farther bank wasn't his daughter but the carcass of a partly decomposed deer, a young doe, the still-beautiful head lacking antlers and a jagged bloody section of her chest torn away by scavengers.'[496] The doe thus appears in Oates both as a symbol of innocence and of the loss of innocence. There are other clues for the reader to infer Marianne's fate, such as the story of another girl's rape – Della Rae – the narration of which is interwoven with that of Marianne's return home the morning after hers. By alternating between different stories and time-periods, Oates creates parallels between the different tales.

In this novel, contrarily to *August: Osage County*, it is not the revelation but the keeping of secrets which brings the family members closer, as when Patrick and Judd take revenge on Marianne's rapist, an action they never disclose to anyone. The secret allows them to grow closer together, as exemplified by Judd's comment: 'I thought, *I have a brother! I am a brother! This is what it is – to be brothers!*'.[497] Oates uses the italics here, as she often does, to indicate not only the

492 *Mulvaneys*, p. 3
493 Ibid., p. 5
494 Ibid., p. 24
495 Ibid., p. 26
496 Joyce Carol Oates, *Carthage* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), p. 15
497 *Mulvaneys*, p. 274

private thoughts of her characters, but also to give them more weight and resonance. Here the keeping of the secret has a positive value, as it not only allows the brothers to grow closer, but also helps them move on with their life. Indeed, Patrick tells his younger brother: 'I couldn't go on with my life. My 'normal' life. Until justice is executed. Until our enemy is punished.'[498] And it is only once this revenge is accomplished that Patrick seems to be liberated from his guilt, reemerging as a new man in the epilogue, and telling Judd:

> After I left that day, Easter Sunday, remember? – it all just drained out of me. Like poison draining out of my blood. Like I'd been sick, infected, and hadn't known until the poison was gone. I don't regret any of it though. I think revenge must be good.[499]

Contrarily to the other works in which secrets need to come out in order for them to have a positive impact, the value of the revenge in Oates's novel is that it stays secret. The family balance was disrupted by acts that are never discussed openly by the family - the rape and banishment of Marianne – and Oates shows that this balance can only be restored by a similarly hidden act: only Judd and Patrick know about Patrick's kidnapping and assault of Zachary. Judd points this out at the end of the novel: 'I would tell him [Patrick] how Marianne had never known, had never guessed. What had been done for her sake. For the family's sake.'[500] However, not all secrets are positive in the novel, as the fact that the family members keep quiet about Marianne's rape with one another leads them to avoid Marianne herself. The narrator comments on the penchant of families to keep secrets when beginning a chapter titled 'Secrets' by the following: 'In a family, what isn't spoken is what you listen for. But the noise of a family is to drown it out.'[501] The novel thus seems to indicate that keeping secrets in a family is a normal thing to do, and that it can even be healthy in some cases, while in others trauma needs to be spoken and acknowledged.

The revelation of Lucile's rape in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* occurs halfway through the book, appearing at the chronological time the author learned about it as a teenager. This revelation is however foreshadowed by several passages that comment on the relationship between Lucile and Georges. These are usually short and somewhat mysterious remarks, starting with: 'Et Georges ne pouvait détacher son regard d'elle, fasciné' and 'Quoi qu'il advînt, elle restait la préférée de son père, celle sur qui le regard de Georges se posait en premier'.[502] These already indicate a somewhat unclear relationship, something that is worth commenting on. It becomes clearer as the revelation

498 Ibid., p. 272
499 Ibid., p. 453
500 Ibid., p. 452-453
501 Ibid., p. 91
502 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 30 and p. 70

approaches, as Vigan states: '[elle] l'a haï pour d'autres raisons' which obviously points to a larger issue, and which taken together with the two previous quotes leads the reader to think of incest.[503] Two further quotes strengthen that impression:

> Lucile n'échappait pas à la règle, mais son père n'allait jamais jusqu'à l'humilier. […] Georges se rattrapait sur les amis de Barthélémy qui s'intéressait à sa fille […]. Il détestait Forrest plus que tout autre […] un garçon […] qui n'avait d'yeux que pour Lucile.

and 'Ai-je le droit de dire […] qu'il entretenait avec certaines de ses filles des relations au minimum ambiguës ?'.[504] Almost all of these quotes appear as stand-alone paragraphs, thus calling attention to them and giving them added weight. As can be seen, the allusions become clearer and more obvious as the book progresses, especially as they start to accumulate. Furthermore, there are other allusions to sexual abuse, which do not directly concern Georges and Lucile, but which also serve to alert the reader to the possibility of an incestuous relationship between father and daughter before it is revealed: Lucile says the newsagent fondles his young assistant, the narrator speaks about how her step-brother '[lui] demandait de caresser son sexe jusqu'à l'éjaculation' and Lucile worries that 'il *se passait des choses entre Robert*' and her daughter.[505] There is thus throughout the work the constant presence of sexual abuse which hints towards Georges's behaviour before it is clearly enunciated in the text.

It is, in fact, quite striking that Vigan does not disclose the incest sooner, as the book's opening chapters make clear that *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* is intended as an attempt to understand her mother. By contrast, Vigan does not operate in the same way regarding the many deaths of her mother's siblings. Indeed, towards the beginning of the book she presents a list with the names of her mother's parents and siblings alongside their date of birth and for several of the siblings the date of their death.[506] The reader thus possesses the knowledge of the early deaths of the siblings long before their deaths are narrated with further details in the work. With *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* Vigan constructs a book in which the reader is both given many of the family traumas up-front, but the main secret is less immediately accessible. The reader has to read between the lines in order to decipher this secret before its revelation. In her other works de Vigan also often deliberately plays with the reader's expectations, as in *D'après une histoire vraie*, where she makes the frontier between autobiography and fiction so thin that, at times, it seems to disappear.

The revelation of Lucile's rape through a letter she sends to her parents and siblings appears

503 Ibid., p. 114
504 Ibid., p. 160 and p. 180
505 Ibid., p. 102, p. 194 and p. 231
506 Ibid., p. 52

to have no impact on the family. Indeed, although the letter is perfectly clear – 'Je vais pisser, mon père me guettait, il me donne un somnifère et m'entraîne dans son lit. Il m'a violé pendant mon sommeil, j'avais seize ans, je l'ai dit.' – the family does not react.[507] The revelation is met only by silence, as described by Vigan: 'Je suis dans l'attente du drame. Pourtant, il ne se passe rien. […] Le texte est resté lettre morte et Lucile n'a reçu en retour qu'un silence pétrifié.'[508] Here, the revelation collides with the family myth of itself as a happy family, discussed in Chapter II, and is therefore denied by the rest of the family. Contrarily to the revelations in Wells and Desplechin's films, here the revelation of a secret does not create a shift in family roles, as it is rejected and thus not assimilated. This rejection can be better understood through Pincus and Dare's comment that 'incest is rarely only an individual's offence but is an expression of collusive interaction processes in the family'.[509] Indeed, Vigan has to publish her work for the incest to become public and truly enter the family history. However, this successful revelation can only take place once the protagonists of the secrets – Lucile, Georges, and even Liane – are deceased.

These four works have different approaches to secrets. The Westons in *August: Osage County* are a family in which secrets are abundant, whereas there is only one secret in *Un Conte de Noël*, and it does not concern a family trauma but rather a romantic relationship; while Oates and Vigan's novels belong in between these two extremes. The impact of the revelation or keeping of secrets also varies from work to work, but the family dynamic is always affected. In Wells, Desplechin and Vigan the revelation of secret is necessary and positive, even when it leads to the dismantling of the family, as is the case in *August: Osage County*. Indeed, Vigan's work brings to light her mother's incest which had been denied by the family when first revealed. It appears that Vigan has no choice but to expose it publicly, perhaps out of fear that this trauma would continue to be denied by her family. Only Oates seems to argue that not all secrets are meant to be revealed. Indeed, while she makes clear the fact that the trauma of Marianne's rape should have been discussed by the family, keeping their revenge secret sets Patrick and Judd free, and brings them closer together.

507 Ibid., p. 237
508 Ibid., p. 240-241
509 Pincus and Dare, p. 88

II. Unconscious Transmission

Having examined the impact of the revelation and keeping of secrets in the works, I now explore how secrets are part of a network of unconscious transmissions that take place within families. The French psychologist Anne Ancelin Schützenberger has devised a theory named psychogenealogy, which, as its name indicates, combines psychotherapy and genealogy. In its therapeutic form, Schützenberger defines it as follows: 'elle permet, une fois dessiné son arbre généalogique complété des principaux éléments de vie et de leur commentaire, d'avoir soudainement et d'un seul coup d'oeil la vision globale, sur deux siècles, de son histoire familiale et d'en ressentir l'impact.'[510] This therapy thus focuses on the transmission which takes place within a family, but Schützenberger establishes a distinction between intergenerational transmission and transgenerational transmission. The intergenerational transmission is defined as 'ce qui se passe entre les générations, de leur vivant, de façon clairement dite ou évidente', whereas transgenerational transmission is what is transmitted unconsciously, and thus never assimilated: it is 'never verbalized and remains hidden among unspoken family secrets'.[511] Intergenerational transmission typically concerns habits, skills and ways of being, whereas transgenerational transmission is responsible for the transmission of trauma, illnesses and somatic or psychosomatic manifestations.[512] Of course this distinction is somewhat porous, as ways of being can be unconscious and trauma can be talked about. Psychogenealogy focuses on how traumas and secrets can be the objects of transgenerational transmission. Schützenberger draws on Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török's works to devise her own theory, as in their works they explored the ideas of a transmission from unconscious to unconscious from one generation to the next within a family. According to Schützenberger, when a traumatic experience is kept secret 'à la première génération c'est un non-dit', the *unsaid*, which is then transmitted to the following generation. 'A la deuxième génération c'est un secret de famille', where it thus becomes the *unspeakable*, and when it is transmitted to the third generation it becomes 'un impensé généalogique', *unthinkable* because this generation is not even consciously aware of the presence of a secret.[513] The transgenerational theory therefore shows how traumatic events and secrets can, within a family, be unconsciously transmitted from one generation to the next.

In order to analyse the works in my corpus, I also draw on the works of the French psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Serge Tisseron, who has worked extensively on family secrets. He

510 Anne Ancelin Schützenberger, *Exercises pratiques de psychogénéalogie* (Paris: Payot, 2011), p. 12
511 Ibid. and Anne Ancelin Schützenberger, *The Ancestor Syndrome: Transgenerational psychotherapy and the hidden links in the family tree* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 4
512 Schützenberger, *Ancestor Syndrome*, p. 92
513 Ibid., p. 88

identifies three conditions for the creation of a secret: that it stems from a event lived as traumatic by the subject, that it is kept quiet and that the other members of the family are forbidden to know what the secret is, or even to think that something is hidden.[514] Tisseron believes that keeping a secret leads to the creation of a subject who is psychologically split, where the memory of the secret remains unchanged for ever as it is never assimilated.[515] According to him, a subject keeping a secret will display *suintements*, by which he means that 'les blessures psychiques mal cicatrisées se traduisent par des manifestations visibles, tout comme les blessures physiques.'[516] These *suintements* can be things such as gestures, facial expressions or reactions to certain images or sounds. However, although these *suintements* are visible, they can not be understood by other people as their source is secret. Furthermore, Tisseron thinks that when a secret is put in place it progressively rigidifies the entire family: rules are put into place in order to force all the members to respect the forbidden topic, and with time these rules start to encompass more and more areas, rigidifying the family even more. As we can see this rejoins the notion of a rigidifying system used by the family therapists, and indeed Tisseron states that when the family becomes rigid a family myth is put in place.[517]

Schützenberger and Tisseron's theories revolve around the idea that secrets can lead to a dysfunctional family as they impact negatively the lives of its members, potentially leading to mental and physical symptoms. These theories were originally designed as therapies in order to be clinically applied, however this is not how I use them in this chapter, but rather as concepts which can enter in a dialogue with the narratives I analyse. Indeed, these notions help shed light on the characters' actions and interactions, to see them in a broader context, and to be able to decipher them when they may appear difficult to understand. I will explore how these theories can help read the works, and also look at instances where the works depart from them, or choose a different emphasis.

Of the many secrets in *August: Osage County*, Little Charles's filiation is particularly relevant to a discussion of a secret's manifestations in later generations. Until the end of the film neither Little Charles nor his cousins/half-sisters know that his real father is Beverly. And even though the four adults of the previous generation all seem to be aware of this secret, it is never discussed. For the audience many clues appear before Mattie Fae reveals it to Barbara. In the first apparition of Mattie Fae and her husband they talk about Beverly's books and Mattie Fae tells

514 Serge Tisseron, *Les Secrets de famille* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011), p. 8
515 Ibid., p. 20
516 Ibid.
517 Ibid., pp. 64-65

Charlie that she has never seen him read, to which he replies: 'Well Beverly was a teacher and teachers read books. I'm in the upholstery business.' From the very beginning a comparison between Charlie and Beverly is thus established by Mattie Fae, and seemingly not to the advantage of her husband. The following exchange then takes place:

Mattie Fae: Beverly is a very complicated man.
Charlie: Yeah, like Little Charles.
Mattie Fae: Little Charles isn't complicated, he's just unemployed.
Charlie: You don't think Little Charles and Beverly share some kind of … complication?

This foreshadows the later disclosure that Little Charles is Beverly's son.

In the light of the revelation of this secret, Mattie Fae's harshness towards her son can be interpreted as a manifestation of her guilt at having betrayed both her husband and her sister. Both Schützenberger and Boszormenyi-Nagy argue that there a constant bookkeeping takes place within a family. Boszormenyi-Nagy defines it as 'an invisible ledger which keeps an account of past and present obligations among family members', and specifies that 'the individual family member's «slate» […] is already loaded before he begins to act. Depending on whether his parents were overly devoted or neglectful, he is born into a field of greater or lesser obligations'.[518] Similarly, Schützenberger talks about 'un grand livre des comptes où sont consignés les dettes et les mérites' which is unique to each family.[519] For Schützenberger this ledger takes into account not only the living family members, but the deceased ones as well: one can be paying a debt that was incurred by an ancestor. In the case of Wells's film, this idea of a ledger would indicate that Mattie Fae has a debt to repay to her sister: a son was born from her relationship with her sister's husband. And, indeed, in the scene where she reveals the truth to Barbara she states: 'I made a mistake a long ago okay? I've paid for it.' But the way she paid for it is never clarified or mentioned again. It could of course refer to the emotional suffering she has gone through because of her guilt, but it can also be understood that her payment has been in the form of her devotion to her sister, to whom she leaves the role of matriarch in the family. Her emotional suffering is apparent in the scene in which the secret is revealed, as the camera frames her in a way that makes evident the trembling of her lower face.

518 Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and Geraldine M. Spark, *Invisible Loyalties: Reciprocity in Intergenerational Family Therapy* (New York: Brunner and Mazel, 1984), p. 53
519 Schützenberger, *Exercises pratiques*, p. 31

The payment for her sin could also be understood as her public harsh treatment of her son. A comment she makes in the same scene can be understood as hinting towards this: 'I don't know why Little Charles is such a disappointment to me. Maybe he … well I don't know why. I'm disappointed for him more than anything.' Other explanations can also be found for the secret surrounding Beverly and Mattie Fae's affair and the original play on which the film is based is more informative on this topic. Indeed, that play explains that Violet met Beverly because her sister Mattie Fae had a date with him but stood him up and sent her sister instead.[520] One can thus imagine that Violet feels she has a debt to repay her sister for setting her up with her future husband, and that keeping the secret was her way of repaying that debt. In a similar fashion Violet reveals in one of the last scenes that she believes Beverly might have killed himself out of guilt over his extramarital affair. This shows that Schützenberger's theory of an 'implicit family book-keeping' of merits and debts can provide a new angle for understanding the relationships in the Weston family.[521] As can be seen in *August: Osage County* the keeping of secrets has great repercussions on the members of the family, repercussions which appear to exist through the unconscious transmission of said secret and which lead the family to become dysfunctional.

The romantic relationship between Little Charles and Ivy can also be seen as a *ricochet* of the secret, a concept developed by Tisseron. Indeed, Tisseron believes that there are consequences – which he names *ricochets* – for the children whose parent keeps a secret, as

> ils apprennent […] à fonctionner avec un psychisme divisé: d'un côté ils doivent repérer l'existence du secret de manière à ne pas courir le risque de confronter leur parent à ce qu'il semble vouloir cacher; mais d'un autre côté, ils sont obligés de faire comme s'ils n'avaient rien vu et rien entendu.[522]

520 Letts, p. 16
521 Schützenberger, *Ancestor Syndrome*, p. 22
522 Tisseron, pp. 21-22

He explains that children reproduce their parent's behaviour, and will do so in situations where *suintements* appear. However, the child does not know where these emotions come from, and is simply adopting the same emotions as the parent. This leads the child to exhibit *ricochets* of the original secret such as feelings of guilt or shame, strange behaviours or physical illness.[523] Tisseron, like Schützenberger, says that at the first generation the events surrounding the secret are 'indicibles', at the second generation they become 'innommables' and ultimately 'impensables' for the third generation.[524] In the case of Little Charles and Ivy, they are of the generation for whom the secret is 'innommable', meaning that they feel the existence of a secret but do not know what it is. Like Schützenberger, Tisseron places emphasis on the fact that in certain families it is of great importance to the members that secrets stay hidden, but that they are also a vital part of the family, who will therefore find ways to commemorate them. Indeed, Little Charles and Ivy's relationship enables them to commemorate the close bond they share as half-siblings, when knowledge of this connection is denied to them. Incest thus becomes the product of a filiation kept secret. Furthermore, in the light of Schützenberger and Tisseron's works the relationship can be analysed as a way to push for the revelation of the secret. Indeed, it is only because it becomes more dangerous for the first generation to keep rather than to reveal the secret that it comes to light. As Tisseron notes, the existence of a secret can usually be felt but the children must act as if they have no knowledge whatsoever of its existence.

Going back to Little Charles and Ivy's relationship, the concept of invisible family loyalties developed by Schützenberger can help make sense of the romantic love that comes to exist between the cousins/half-siblings. This concept originates with the family therapist Boszormenyi-Nagy who explored the 'invisible loyalty commitment's to one's family' and explains that 'the concept of a multipersonal loyalty fabric […] implies the existence of structured group expectations to which all members are committed'.[525] For Boszormenyi-Nagy the frame of reference of such a loyalty fabric is 'trust, merit, commitment, and action', and he explains further that 'in order to be a loyal member of a group, one has to internalize the spirit of its expectations and to have a set of specifiable attitudes to comply with the internalized injunctions'.[526] These loyalties commitments are 'like invisible but strong filers which hold together complex pieces of relationship “behavior” in families' whose main goal is the 'maintenance of the group itself'.[527] These loyalties can explain behaviours which may appear to outsiders as going against the maintenance of the family, as Boszormenyi-Nagy notes:

523 Ibid., pp. 22-24
524 Ibid., p. 59
525 Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, p. xiii and p. 37
526 Ibid., p. 37
527 Ibid., p. 39 and p. 40

We have to go beyond conscious behavioral manifestations and specific issues if we want to understand the meaning of basic loyalty commitments. What seems to be shockingly destructive and irritating behavior on the part of one member towards another, may not be experienced as such by the participants, if the behavior conforms to a basic family loyalty.[528]

He gives the example of siblings whose intense rivalry actually masks the failure of their parents' marriage. Other family therapists have in turn used Boszormenyi-Nagy's concept, such as Mona Dekoven Fishbane who argues that 'unfinished business in the family of origin affects individuals and their relationships for generations'.[529] In *August: Osage County* Ivy and Little Charles's relationship can be seen as a way of commemorating Mattie Fae and Beverly's relationship: both are illicit – one because it is an extramarital affair and the other because of incest – and both occur between members of the same family. By reproducing a relationship similar to that of their parents, Ivy and Little Charles signal their loyalty to the family, as well as revealing that the original relationship and its consequences have not been digested by the previous generation. It is thus doomed to repeat itself until the secret is revealed. This repetition continues with Jean and Steve's flirtation: once again an illicit relationship between members of the same family. All these motivations evidently occur in the realm of the unconscious and do not work to the exclusion of one another, but instead coexist.

We Were the Mulvaneys also offers the commemoration of a secret in the form of a repetition. In the fourth chapter, the reader learns that, at the age of eighteen, Michael quarrelled with his father and left home and

so his father retaliated by cutting Michael out of his life permanently: he never spoke to him again, not even on the phone; nor did he allow anyone else in the family to see Michael, speak with him, answer any of his letters.[530]

When telling his wife the story Michael states: 'My mother, my sisters – even my sister Marian I was always so close with – acted as if I'd died.'[531] Although it is never specifically stated that Michael's story is a secret from children, it is nevertheless implied they do not know about it, which is why I treat it here as a secret. Following his daughter Marianne's rape and refusal to press charges against her attacker, Michael in turn banishes her and acts as if she has died. As Christine Hobbie

528 Ibid., p. 40
529 Mona Devoken Fishbane, 'Differentiation and Dialogue in Intergenerational Relationships' in *Handbook of Clinical Family Therapy*, ed. by Jay Lebow (Hoboken: John Wiley, 2005), pp. 543-568 (p. 543)
530 *Mulvaneys*, p. 31
531 Ibid.

notes Michael 'is utterly unconscious of the striking reenactment of history present in his treatment of his daughter Marianne', and yet the banishment of his daughter can be seen as Michael's attempt to commemorate his own dismissal.[532] This repetition of a child being removed from the family following a refusal to conform to the father's wishes can be understood as a manifestation of Michael's secret and pain. He learned that the price to pay for opposing the father is to be completely cut out of the family, and so he unconsciously applies the same rule to his daughter. The mirroring of Michael and Marianne's stories is apparent in the chapters' titles. Indeed, the one in which Marianne is banished and the one in which Michael dies are both titled 'Gone', and they mark the end of the first and the fourth parts of the novel. As I have discussed in previous chapters, the link between Marianne's exile and Michael's death is clear and as Daly notes: 'Again and again, Oates dramatizes this problem in short stories and novels, demonstrating that the departure of the youngest daughter signals, for the father, his impending death.'[533] The sudden departure of a young female character is indeed a recurring theme in Oates's works, as shown for example by her novel *Carthage* in which a teenager goes missing for years after her overtures are rejected by her sister's fiancé. By calling his daughter on his deathbed, Michael repairs what has been broken at the previous generation – his father never called him back.

In *We Were the Mulvaneys* this repetition between father and daughter can also be read with reference to the concept of the anniversary syndrome discussed by Schützenberger. According to her, the anniversary syndrome is one of the key ways in which family secrets manifest their existence in subsequent generations. Building on previous definitions, Schützenberger broadens the concept of the anniversary syndrome to the repetition of important dates within a family.[534] She sees this syndrome as a means to remember and commemorate a traumatic or secret event which 'one could not forget and was forbidden to remember'.[535] George H. Pollock, an American psychiatrist, also worked on the notion of anniversary syndrome and defines it as 'the reaction to a temporal trigger that permits the emergence of repressed conflict, which may or may not have defined qualities that can be manifested in symptoms', where the 'onset situation relates to the anniversary trigger'.[536] Consequently, a reader or critic with a background in psychogenealogy might remark that in Oates's novel, as his daughter is approaching the age of eighteen, Michael feels the need to unconsciously commemorate the traumatic event that took place when he was the same age. When discussing transference Peter Brooks notes that 'repetition is a way of remembering brought into

532 Christine Hobbie, 'Review: We Were the Mulvaneys' in *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (February 2004), pp. 45-53 (p. 48)
533 Daly, p. xvii
534 Schützenberger, *Ancestor Syndrome*, p. 50
535 Ibid., p. 101
536 George H. Pollock, 'Anniversary Reactions, Trauma and Mourning' in *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (1970), pp. 347-371 (p. 348 and p. 362)

play when recollection in the intellectual sense is blocked by repression and resistance'.[537] Marianne also bears the same name, although disguised by a different spelling, as the sister Michael's was closest to, and Michael is thus unconsciously taking revenge on the sister that acted as if he were dead. Using the notions of repetition and anniversary syndrome thus provides a new way of reading the events of *We Were the Mulvaneys*, which reveals the power of unconscious transmissions in this fictional family, and how they are symptoms of the dysfunction of the family.

As mentioned previously, talking about secrets in relation to Desplechin's *Un Conte de Noël* can seem antithetical, as the Vuillard family members speak their minds with a great frankness. Wajeman discusses this absence of secrets, and goes on to state that the film's characters do not have an unconscious and therefore say everything they think.[538] There is, however, a curious repetition that, if not linked to a secret, is linked to the traumatic event that appears as the founding act of the family: the death of the eldest son Joseph at six years old. Towards the beginning of the film Elizabeth's son is admitted to a psychiatric hospital, and Ivan, visiting his nephew in hospital, remarks: 'J'imagine que Paul a dû apprendre que son oncle a été déclaré dingue au même age', calling attention to the presence of an anniversary syndrome. History thus repeats itself, and just as Junon is dying of a cancer similar to that of her son Joseph, Paul suffers from psychiatric trouble at the same age his uncle did. As Youri Deschamps notes:

> Dès le prologue, donc, la filiation est envisagée sous un angle exclusif et pour le moins singulier : celui de la mort et la maladie. Derrière la polyphonie ostensible du récit, les premiers développements de l'intrigue ne cessent d'ailleurs de tresser et de décliner ce même thème. Devenus adultes, les enfants Vuillard s'avèrent tous en effet frappés par la maladie d'une manière ou d'une autre.[539]

A later conversation between Simon and Henri sheds light on the possible reasons for such a repetition. Henri asks Simon: 'T'as des nouvelles de Paul ?' to which his cousin answers: 'Jamais de nouvelles de Paul. Depuis qu'il a six ans, on n'a pas de nouvelles de Paul.' It is interesting to note that Simon dates the 'disappearance' of Paul at the age of six, the same age at which Joseph died. Furthermore, Henri's banishment lasts around the same length of time. In the light of Schützenberger's theories, it is not a stretch to imagine that Elizabeth's great anguish for her son's well-being started when he was the same age at which her brother died. The link thus established between Paul and the deceased Joseph provides a thread throughout the film, and is reinforced both

537 Peter Brooks, 'The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism' in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 13, No. 2, The Trial(s) of Psychoanalysis (Winter, 1987), pp. 334-348 (p. 342)
538 Finkielkraut
539 Youri Deschamps, 'D'entre les morts' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No. 52 (2013), pp. 104-113 (p. 104)

by the characters and the editing. The film introduces Elizabeth first under the title card 'L'aînée' but the second character to be introduced in that way is her son, with the title card 'Paul Dédalus', subsequently followed by Henri and Ivan. The editing therefore places Paul at the same level as the generation of his mother: he is replacing her deceased brother. Papion argues that other characters in the film are also replacing Joseph, namely Elizabeth as she becomes the eldest, and Ivan as he fills in for the gap left by the dead brother.[540] Rattez develops a similar interpretation when looking at the use of Gershwin's *Lullaby* in the film. He remarks that this melody is used when characters – Henri, Spatafora, Claude and Paul – act towards Junon as a son would, and thus that these characters punctually become 'autant de réincarnations du fils disparu'.[541] Elizabeth further establishes a link between Joseph and Paul when talking to her analyst: 'Je ne comprends pas à quel deuil je survis. […] Ce n'est pas mon frère Joseph… De lui, on ne cesse de parler. Et personne ne se soucie de mon fils, qui est bien vivant lui'. Paul's mental illness can therefore be read, by a psychogenealogically informed critic following on Desplechin's lead, to be the manifestation of his mother's intense sadness and possible feeling of guilt over the death of Joseph.

Although the original trauma is not secret, the link established between uncle and nephew is, as Elizabeth does not consciously recognise it. Paul is thus being loyal to his mother by embodying her emotions. That he does so in a way that links him to his uncle Ivan is no surprise either. Although the reasons for Ivan's mental breakdown are not known, one could easily imagine they are linked to Joseph's death as well. But regardless of whether that is the case or not, Paul respects his mother's unconscious injunction to be like his uncle Joseph. But as he is not dead, his behaviour instead repeats that of his other uncle, Ivan. The French psychoanalyst Alain de Mijolla dedicated a work to the study of what he calls 'les visiteurs du moi': when a person is taken over by someone else – a parent, a sibling, a grandparent. This idea is somewhat similar to Abraham and Török's, and in turn Schützenberger's, concept of the phantom but with the difference that, for Mijolla, it can be constituted by fantasies rather than actual facts.[542] This can be seen as happening to Paul, who is overtaken by his mother's grief, as well as by his long-deceased uncle Joseph. Part of this is explained to Paul by Henri towards the end of the film; in a scene that sees them jogging together, Henri tells Paul:

> Mais j'ai compris Paul pourquoi tu ne vas pas bien ! Tu crois que tu es triste et dingue à cause de la myélodysplasie. Pas du tout. C'est ta mère, ma soeur, qui t'a conçu dans le chagrin. C'est Elizabeth qui est mélancolique. C'est elle qui s'ennuie, pas toi. T'es guéri Paul ! Sois heureux !

540 Papion, p. 77
541 Rattez, pp. 117-118
542 Alain de Mijolla, *Les Visiteurs du moi* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1996), p. 199

The light in this scene is strikingly white and the streets in which they run are covered in snow, offering a stark contrast to the darkness, both physical and metaphorical, that surrounds Paul in the rest of the film.

The feeling of freedom and air is reinforced by the the fact that part of it is filmed in a long shot whereas in the rest of the film the camera frames Paul from much closer, giving an impression of imprisonment and suffocation. In this film the repetition of psychiatric troubles is linked to Elizabeth's inability to accept Joseph's death, and her projection of that grief onto her son, exemplifying Demanze's comment: 'on dit que la mélancolie est l'ombre portée des secrets généalogiques et des pertes familiales, inscrivant à même le corps la fidélité envers ceux qui furent.'[543] Mental breakdowns are a recurring motif in Desplechin's films, as shown by a similar episode mentioned by the Paul Dédalus of *Trois souvenirs de ma jeunesse* and by Ismaël Vuillard (played again by Amalric) in *Rois et Reine*. Interestingly, in *Trois souvenirs de ma jeunesse* it can also be linked to transmission as Paul's mother is shown as suffering from mental issues. However, in Desplechin mental breakdown is never portrayed as being very much out of the ordinary, but rather as one manifestation amongst others of the characters' suffering.

In *Un Conte de Noël* Henri's banishment allows for the reenactment of the loss of a child or sibling. The viewer may find this to be necessary once it becomes clear that none of the family members are at peace with Joseph's death, with the possible exception of Abel. Indeed, Abel, echoing the fate of the Biblical Abel, who is killed while his brother Caïn is banished, is 'empêché par sa femme et sa fille d'occuper sa place de père' and thus 'met son fils mort à cette place et

543 Laurent Demanze, 'Sang d'encre. Filiation et mélancolie dans la littérature contemporaine' in *Le Roman contemporain de la famille*, ed. by Sylviane Coyault, Christine Jérusalem and Gaspard Turin (Paris: Lettres modernes Minard, 2015), pp. 37-49 (p. 38)

accepte le bannissement de son fils vivant'.[544] The fact that Abel is not fully occupying his position as a father is hinted at by Elizabeth over the theatre of shadows as she narrates: 'Junon conçut alors un troisième enfant', thereby negating Abel's role in Henri's conception. This inversion of roles between Abel and Joseph, made evident by Abel's declaration that 'Joseph est désormais mon fondateur', is linked to the multiplication of substitutes for Joseph which I discussed previously. These displacements of roles and people create a world were the characters 'violent la nécessité de l'ordre naturel' as 'les enfants, et parfois leur mort, octroient ou rendent la vie à leurs ascendants'.[545] This is the case for Abel and Joseph, but equally for Junon and Henri, as it is a transplant from Henri which saves his mother; a transplant which shocks the doctor who states 'Ça ne se fait pas'. In *La Greffe*, which inspired *Un Conte de Noël*, Jacques Ascher and Jean-Pierre Jouet state that the atmosphere surrounding the transplant is 'un peu comparable à ce qui peut se passer en maternité auprès des parturientes', thus reinforcing Henri's position as the creator of his mother.[546] Henri is thus placed in the position of parent twice: the first time to save Joseph, which ends in failure, and the second time to save Junon. Because it symbolises the inversion of roles, but also Henri's regaining his legitimacy in the family, the transplant plays a central role in the film. It serves both to save Junon and as a way to 'traduire concrètement les circulations d'affects'.[547] Indeed, as Papion notes 'la greffe de moelle permet[…] d'explorer la question des liens du sang et de la compatibilité sous toutes ses formes'.[548] These inversion of roles and replacements of one character by another reveal a film which is fully preoccupied with mourning, where mourning is both a gift and a debt.[549]

The central place of mourning is made visible through the onscreen multiplication of photographs and paintings of deceased family members, already mentioned in Chapter I.[550] Joseph is present throughout the film via photographs, and the film's title appears over his grave, reinforcing the centrality of his death in the narrative.[551] Furthermore, when Faunia arrives with Henri he almost immediately shows her the pictures of the deceased members of the family: his first wife Madeleine, Abel's mother, Joseph and Simon's father. During that sequence, the shots alternate between Faunia and Henri and the pictures through dissolves which 'provoquent visuellement la

544 Élisabeth Darchis and others, 'Corps familial souffrant et deuils pathologiques. À partir du film d'Arnaud Desplechin, Un Conte de Noël' in *Le Divan familial* 2010/2 (N° 25), pp. 143-154 (p. 146)
545 Sébastien David, 'Les figurations de l'ambivalence' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No. 52 (2013), pp. 10-19 (p. 16)
546 Jacques Ascher and Jean-Pierre Jouet, *La Greffe, entre biologie et psychanalyse* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004), p. 113
547 Burdeau, 'Donnez-nous du deuil', p. 38
548 Papion, p. 76
549 For more on mourning as a gift and a debt see Burdeau, p. 36 and Domenach, p. 193
550 Some of the pictures are of Desplechin's own family and are seen in *L'Aimée*. For more on this topic see Hélène Vally, 'Ce que les morts ont à dire' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No. 52 (2013), pp. 86-93 (p. 92)
551 For an analysis of one of the apparition of Joseph's photograph see Deschamps, p. 110

dissolution d'Henri et de Faunia dans les photos des disparus'.[552]

The link between the living and the dead is thus visually established, and as HélèneVally notes: 'Ce jeu d'images instaure un *échange virtuel* entre générations, comme si la famille ne pouvait se défaire de ses défunts, de ses souvenirs.'[553] There is no clear separation between the living and the dead, which can also explain the confusion between Joseph and other family members, such as Paul and Henri. This obsession with death is present throughout Desplechin's filmography, in *La Sentinelle* for example Mathias is congratulated twice – by Bleicher and by William – for looking after the dead. Desplechin himself states:

> c'est une fable que j'ai explorée moi-même, jeune homme, cette obsession de donner une sépulture pour redonner la vie à quelqu'un, pour le re-tuer, de ne pas laisser un cadavre sur le côté, de ne pas laisser un être humain sans nom, de ne pas le laisser sans sépulture.[554]

Death and mourning are indeed always present in his cinema, as Victor Serpieri remarks: 'Dans la famille version Desplechin, le travail du deuil est donc permanent, essentiel, structurant.'[555] Thus, although there are no secrets in *Un Conte de Noël*, there is a troubling relationship between the dead and the living, whereby the former invade the lives of the latter. This transmission of the family history is apparent through the repetition of illnesses, as well as through the confusion between between the different members of the family, which are some of the manifestations of the dysfunctional nature of the family. Those bring to light the invisible loyalty to the family, which all

552 Deschamps, p. 105
553 Vally, p. 91
554 Anne-Lorraine Bujon, Carole Desbarats and Arthur Guichoux, 'Voir sans avoir vu. Entretien avec Arnaud Desplechin' in *Esprit* 2016/6, pp. 76-85 (p. 83)
555 Victor Serpieri, 'En famille …' in *L'Avant-scène. Un conte de Noël. Arnaud Desplechin*, No. 572 (May 2008), pp. 15-17 (p. 17)

the members of the Vuillard family demonstrate.

In *August: Osage County*, *We Were the Mulvaneys* and *Un Conte de Noël* the concepts surrounding psychogenealogy and family secrets are therefore very apparent, even if they are not addressed directly in each work. Vigan, on the contrary, addresses them in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* as she writes: 'Je ne me suis jamais vraiment intéressée à la psychogénéalogie ni aux phénomènes de répétition transmis d'une génération à une autre […]. J'ignore comment ces choses (l'inceste, les enfants morts, le suicide, la folie) se transmettent.'[556] And yet her whole text is a study on these precise topics, an exploration of her maternal family in which children repeatedly die, either by accident or through suicide. As Conil notes: 'Delphine de Vigan a cherché comme on cherche à propos de ceux que l'on aime, des pourquoi, des raisons récurrentes, de l'héritage génétique au trauma, ou les deux.'[557] The death of Lucile's brothers is a repetition of the deaths of Liane's own brothers, as is Lucile's mental illness which is reminiscent of her aunt Barbara's mental troubles. The main revelation of the work is that of the sexual abuse Lucile claims to have suffered at the hands of her father, a revelation supported by Vigan's discovery that one of her aunts, as well as a family friend, have had similar experiences. There is a repetition at work here as Vigan notes that 'j'ai appris que certaines soeurs de ma grand-mère avaient selon toute vraisemblance été victimes d'abus sexuels de la part de leur père'.[558] Lucile never overcomes the trauma of her rape as Vigan writes that her mother was worried for her grandchildren: 'Lucile voyait des pédophiles partout, et considérait tout homme âgé de plus de quinze ans, appartenant à notre entourage proche ou lointain, comme suspect.'[559] The death of her mother allows Vigan to revisit that history, and in a way to rehabilitate her mother by bringing the truth to light. As Elizabeth Snyder Hook remarks in her work on family secrets in German novels: 'Frequently it is the death of a mother or father (or both) that serves as the catalyst for the narrator's journey into the past.'[560] That appears to be true for Vigan whose mother's death both prompts and gives her the authorisation to write a book about her family.

The secrets in my corpus are mostly linked to traumas of a sexual nature: Beverly and Mattie Fae's affair in *August: Osage County*, Marianne's rape in *We Were the Mulvaneys* and the incest in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit*. This exploration has shown that new understandings of the

556 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 283
557 Conil
558 *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit*, p. 282
559 Ibid., p. 400
560 Elizabeth Snyder Hook, *Family Secrets and the Contemporary German Novel: Literary explorations in the aftermath of the Third Reich* (Rochester and Woodbridge: Camden House, 2001), p. 5

family dynamics in my corpus are brought by using Schützenberger and Tisseron's theories. Indeed, they reveal a network of repetitions, anniversary syndromes and *ricochets* which display the invisible loyalties that link the characters to their family. *The Savages* and *Le Skylab* are different in that respect as they do not feature family secrets, nor any of the notions discussed by Schützenberger or Tisseron. In the case of *The Savages* not enough is known about Lenny's life to know whether his children are repeating his actions, and the film focuses on different matters, such as the reality of old age and the burden of care, as I have discussed previously. Similarly, *Le Skylab* focuses on happier elements of family life, and chooses to display the family not as the locus of secrets and trauma, but as that of quick arguments and laughter.

III. The Role of Creation

In *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* Vigan attempts to make sense of her family history by writing a book about it, and, beyond the exploration of her family, she reflects on what her writing means, and what its consequences will be. The work sees Vigan trying to understand the enigma that her mother poses, but without ever enunciating clearly what is, according to her, the main reason for her mother's difficulties. The mystery of Lucile's sufferings is never fully clarified by the author, although her framing of the narrative says a lot. Indeed, in order to understand her mother she goes back to her childhood, thereby implicitly indicating a link between the two. Vigan alternates between chapters narrating her mother's life, and an exposition of her doubts about the writing project itself. She explains this choice in the following way:

> Moi, je suis partie avec l'idée que je pouvais écrire ce livre à la troisième personne. Ce que je suis parvenue à faire dans la première partie. J'étais dans un fantasme de toute-puissance, mais celui-ci a vite été mis à l'épreuve lorsque j'ai abordé ce qui est certainement la blessure originelle de ma famille : la mort d'un enfant. Je me suis heurtée à différentes versions. Il me fallait en choisir une et m'en expliquer. J'ai beaucoup de mal à dire que je suis écrivain, alors me mettre en scène en tant que tel me paraissait d'une grande vanité, mais là, je n'avais pas le choix. Et puis en avançant, j'ai pris goût à cette seconde voix qui me permettait de faire part de mes doutes et de mes interrogations.[561]

She returns to her interrogations time and again, interrogations that can be summed up by this repeated question: 'Ai-je le droit d'écrire que ...'[562] And, although the existence of the book itself proves she has decided to take that right, we ignore how much she has kept hidden. Furthermore, Vigan comments: 'Écrire sur sa famille est sans aucun doute le moyen le plus sûr de se fâcher avec elle.'[563] In her subsequent work *D'après une histoire vraie* she presents a writer that, having just published a book about her family, deals with the impact of that work, and writes: 'J'avais écris un livre dont l'effet au sein de ma famille et autour de moi se diffuserait en plusieurs vagues, dont je n'avais pas anticipé les dommages collatéraux.'[564] Although *D'après une histoire vraie* is more fictional than *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* it still shows that Vigan is very aware of the potential for harm that writing about her family carries. In the first pages of *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* she writes

> Je ne sais plus quand est venue l'idée d'écrire sur ma mère […], je sais combien j'ai refusé cette idée […] dressant la liste des innombrables auteurs qui avaient écrit sur la leur, des plus anciens aux plus récents, histoire de me prouver combien le terrain était miné et le sujet galvaudé.

561 Rousseau
562 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 180
563 Ibid., p. 238
564 Delphine de Vigan, *D'après une histoire vraie* (Paris: Jean-Claude Lattès, 2015), p. 16

before capitulating: 'Et puis, comme des dizaines d'auteurs avant moi, j'ai essayé d'écrire sur ma mère.'[565] This illustrates Demanze's comment:

> Le récit de filiation s'élabore alors au confluent de deux héritages, et articule l'un à l'autre le désir de témoigner d'un passé familial, dont le deuil pèse sur la conscience, et la saisie d'un héritage littéraire, à travers lequel l'écriture approfondit son propre questionnement.[566]

For Vigan the main purpose of her work seems to be to exorcise, to rid herself of something and to make sense of the incomprehensible. In that sense there is a parallel between Lucile sending the letter denouncing her rape to her entire family and Vigan publishing *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit*. Indeed, there is a similar gesture of exposure and a similar risk of harm or blame with both endeavours. Writing, for Vigan, becomes a way to make sense of her history, and of the way in which it impacts her, as the ending makes clear. Indeed, in the last chapter Vigan narrates an anecdote about her son's answer to a question in his homework, he states: '«Non. Personne ne peut empêcher un suicide.»', which leads her to reflect 'Me fallait-il écrire un livre, empreint d'amour et de culpabilité pour parvenir à la même conclusion ?'.[567] She writes to make sense of traumatic events which did not happen directly to her but to her mother and other relatives, and as Gerd Bayer notes 'just as art may help to reassemble the past's broken pieces, so it may simultaneously prevent traumatic memories from travelling the trans-generational and spectral pathways'.[568] Vigan herself does not appear to have been molested by her grandfather, but she tries to explore her mother's experience with sexual abuse and psychiatric troubles, making her purpose clear in the following sentence: 'je sais aussi qu'à travers l'écriture je cherche l'origine de sa souffrance'.[569] She feels inhabited by her mother's experiences and trauma, which rejoins Schützenberger's theory on the transmission of traumas and secrets. Vigouroux notes that 'c'est par [le secret] que l'homme se crée. C'est en cherchant à l'élucider, consciemment et inconsciemment, que nous créons notre vie et prenons sens', which rings particularly true in the case of *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit*.[570] The psychoanalyst Claude Hamos goes further by stating that in writing this book Vigan 'protège ses enfants et les générations suivantes. Car, dans une famille, chacun sait tout inconsciemment. Dès lors, si les choses ne peuvent pas être dites avec des mots, elles se disent avec des actes : l'horreur se répète'.[571] The act of creation is thus a way to exorcise and make sense of trauma, but can also

565 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 17 and p. 19
566 Demanze, *Encres orphelines*, p. 10
567 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 436
568 Gerd Bayer, 'History, Dreams, and Shards. On Starting over in Jenny Diski's *Then Again*' in *Trauma in Contemporary Literature: Narrative and representation*, ed. by Marita Nadal and Mónica Calvo (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 88-99 (p. 97)
569 *Rien ne s'oppose*, p. 85
570 Vigouroux, p. 8
571 Mohammed Aissaoui and others, 'Chroniques familiales' in *Le Figaro*, 8 September 2011

provide protection from the repercussions of secrets and traumas by exposing them.

This is also the case for the character of Wendy in Jenkins's *The Savages*. Indeed, Wendy's play, which is being produced at the end of the film, shows the physical abuse she and Jon suffered at the hands of their father. This point is brought home as the camera cuts from the young actor to Jon, sitting in the audience and visibly emotional, underlining the link between the two.

In *The Savages* Wendy only manages to get her play produced after the death of her father, and once she has been able to make peace with him to some extent, showing that, as in Vigan, Wendy uses creation as a means to exorcise a difficult experience and to liberate herself from her past, thus displaying the 'power of writing as a path towards working through and healing'.[572] The importance

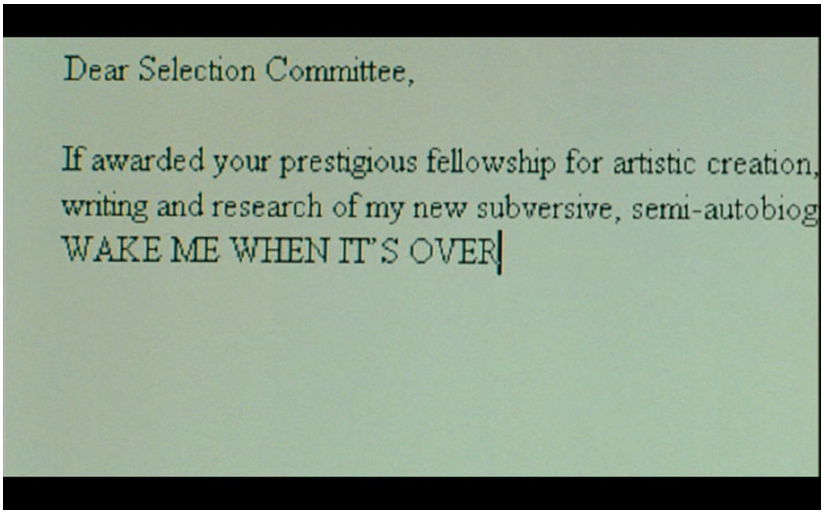
<http://lefigaro.fr/livres/2011/09/06/03005-20110906ARTFIG00707-chroniques-familiales.php> [Accessed 2 February 2017]

572 Marita Nadal and Mónica Calvo, 'Introduction' in *Trauma in Contemporary Literature: Narrative and representation*, ed. by Marita Nadal and Mónica Calvo (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1-13 (p. 9)

of writing is present in Wendy's very first scene; when she writes an application for a fellowship which would allow her to write her play. This letter gives the audience the key to Wendy and Jon's relationship with their father before the film sees them reunited, as it states the play is:

[a] semi-autobiographical play about my childhood, entitled *Wake Me When It's Over*. (…) Inspired by the work of Jean Genet, the cartoons of Linda Barry and the family dramas of Eugene O'Neill, *Wake Me When It's Over* tells the story of a brother and sister who, after being abandoned by their abusive father, are forced to fend for themselves when their depressive mother goes out on a date from which she never returns.

The film insists on the importance of this letter by both having it read as a voice-over and by showing Wendy's computer screen as she is writing it.



With her play, Wendy faces the same question of legitimacy as Vigan does, as shown when she asks her brother: 'Do you hate me for using stuff from your life in the play?', but just like Vigan it does not prevent her from creating.

Writing in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* is a way for Vigan to try to understand her mother's story, but also to fix her mother in time, and to offer her a life beyond her mortal one. It is significant that Vigan does so through the medium of writing, as she explains in her book that her mother herself wrote but never succeeded in being published. Vigan includes passages from her mother's writings in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit*, which is a way to delve into her mother's psyche while also publishing Lucile's works. Writing can thus be about fixing memories, to conjure their disappearance and to offer the protagonists a life beyond life. It can also be about trying to re-experience the past in order to both conjure loss and feel, once again, those emotions of the past. That would be akin to Delpy's approach in *Le Skylab*, which is inspired by Delpy's own childhood

and parents. Delpy explains that following her mother's death: 'J'ai été dans la mort pendant plusieurs années, j'avais envie d'un truc solaire, d'un hommage superheureux à ma mère', which became *Le Skylab*.[573] In that sense, the film is the answer to Delpy's need to fix some of her childhood memories in eternity, reserving for herself the role of her mother in the film. The importance of her mother is also apparent in a scene in *Two Days in New York* in which Delpy's character Marion disentangles a pigeon from a building in a parallel to letting the deceased mother go. This shows that in these works creating is intrinsically linked to recapturing the past and to fixing people and memories in stone.

573 Denis

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how some of the works in my corpus use secrets as ways to explore family dynamics, while *Le Skylab* eschews secrets altogether. Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, in Delpy's film trauma is not linked to the family, but instead to society, to wars. Similarly, there is no family secret in *The Savages*, which instead focuses on the trauma of caring for a parent from whom one is estranged. The first part of this chapter examined instances of secrets in the works, and how the revelation or keeping of secrets impacts the family in the long term, and changes the nature of relationships. Some works, such as *August: Osage County*, adhere to Schützenberger and Tisseron's theories by showing that the revelation of family secrets is necessary for its members to be free, presenting a world in which 'la construction de soi est donc aussi acceptation de ses secrets'.[574] But *We Were the Mulvaneys* takes the opposite view and departs from Schützenberger and Tisseron, as it is the keeping of secrets that brings brothers close and redeems the entire family. In *August: Osage County*, *Un Conte de Noël, We Were the Mulvaneys* and *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* both the keeping and revelation of secrets have been proven to have wide and lasting repercussions on the family members, and family unit, showing how the 'fidelity to ancestors, which has become unconscious and invisible […] governs us'.[575] Indeed, Vigan's need to reveal her mother's incest leads her to write a book which publicly denounces it, as it had been denied by her family's silence. This chapter demonstrates how secrets and traumas which are not assimilated lead to dysfunctional families. That dysfunction is apparent in the symptoms exhibited by the families. One of these symptoms is the repetition of traumas such as incest in Vigan and Wells, mental and physical illness in Desplechin and a banishment in Oates. Other symptoms are Tisseron's *ricochet* as illustrated by Ivy and Little Charles's relationship, and the reversal of roles which takes place in *Un Conte de Noël*. These families stop functioning properly as they become physically and mentally harmful to their members.

By calling upon Schützenberger and Tisseron's theories I have been able to show how the commemoration of secrets is at play in families represented in some of these works, through the unconscious manifestations of secrets, as well as through the repetition of specific events. The secrets the characters grapple with in these works demonstrate that, for them, the family is both the source of their problem, but also that the solving of these problems can only happen through the medium of family. Analysing these works through the lens of psychoanalytically inspired theories allows for different meanings to come forward, deepening our understanding of the family ties in

574 Bissa Enama and Fontane Wacker, p. 71
575 Schützenberger, *Ancestor Syndrome*, p. 43

these novels and films. Furthermore, turning to psychoanalysis is not necessarily a great departure from the practise of reading, as Brooks notes when comparing the analytic process to the reading of texts, stating:

> we interpret, construct, building hypotheses of meaning that are themselves productive of meaning, seeking to understand narrative as both a story and the discourse that conveys it, seeking both to work on the text and to have the text work on us.[576]

The films and novels have different ways of focusing the attention of the audience or reader unto secrets. *August: Osage County* uses setting and camera movements to build an atmosphere filled with secrets, whereas in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* clues are dropped in the form of short and ambiguous sentences. I have also shown how creation is a way both for the actual creators, as well as for the characters to transcend the weight of secrets and trauma. Indeed, it is through her book that Vigan rehabilitates and honours her mother, while for Wendy it is theatre which allows her to surmount her past. Jenkins and Delpy's films rejoin the other works in the idea that creation can help exorcise and make sense of trauma as well as allowing to fix moments in time for ever. In her work Vigan does both, and the autobiographical undertones in *August: Osage County* and *Un Conte de Noël* leads me to argue that this is also the case for Letts and Desplechin.

This chapter continues the discussion around the family as a refuge or a trap. Indeed, secrets prove to be traps in all works, except in Oates, as do traumas which are not digested. In Vigan the family has become a trap, since sexual abuse takes place and goes unacknowledged even when revealed. Similarly, Mattie Fae's guilt is a trap, as it leads her to be cruel to her son. On the contrary, *Le Skylab* once again displays the family as a refuge, as Delpy – working after her mother's death and, presumably, the dissolution of the family in the form depicted in *Le Skylab* - attempts to recreate it in her film. Concerning the question of who is part of the family, this chapter cements the interpretation of Simon's place in the Vuillard family, as the secret regarding Sylvia binds him to Henri and Ivan, as if all three were brothers. Furthermore, this chapter has made clear the fact that the Vuillard family is made up not only of its living members, but also of its deceased ones, as they are overwhelmingly present.

576 Peter Brooks, *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 72

Conclusion. Identity

Throughout this thesis I have explored different aspects of the relationship between the protagonists in my corpus and their family of origin, showing how this relationship is at the heart of the six works discussed in this thesis. The contrast between cinema and literature has provided counterpoints for the works, while also displaying the many similarities between the two mediums. For instance, as I have discussed, films are more suited to the depiction of groups, and therefore mainly approach the family from the point of the view of the group rather than the individual. Indeed, in all four films group scenes exemplify the family dynamics through the placement of characters, their clothes as well as the lighting, amongst other techniques. Novels, on the contrary, find it is easier to enter directly into the mind of characters, and thus Oates and Vigan's works present the intimate points of view of individuals, using both omniscient and first-person narrators. There is no absolute contrast between films and novels, however, as many similarities also emerged. For instance, both *We Were the Mulvaneys* and *Un Conte de Noël* attach themselves to individual characters one after another, although Oates uses this technique throughout her novel when it is only occasional in Desplechin's film. Similarly, the use of works from both the United States and France has proven fruitful. Indeed, most of the analysis has shown that despite some cultural differences, such as the different emphasis on the materiality of home discussed in Chapter I for example, the fictions from both countries share many themes and preoccupations. The variety of methodological approaches taken by this thesis has allowed for a wide-ranging examination of what it means for a family to be dysfunctional. By drawing on psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology, and anthropology I was able to approach the families represented in my corpus from different angles, and have sought to reveal family mechanisms which might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

One of the questions which emerged throughout the thesis is: what makes someone part of a family? Is it blood or marriage, is an ostracised family member still part of the family, and does a family remain a family when members have little or no contact? The works present two contrasting views of family membership: one is largely binary – people are either in or out of the family – whereas the other one consists primarily of a continuum of different degrees of belonging. The work which subscribes to the first view is *August: Osage County*. In this film, only people who are blood relations are considered family, and all others are regarded as outsiders; this is the case of Johnna but also of all the men who have entered the Weston family through marriage. The rest of

the works display the view that family is primarily a continuum of degrees, and this is most strongly the case in *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* and *Le Skylab*. Indeed, in Vigan the family always invites distant relatives, friends and acquaintances to join the family reunions, while in Delpy no difference is made between the relations by blood and by marriage. *We Were the Mulvaneys* and *Un Conte de Noël* offer less inclusive views whereby members who are not related by blood are not considered on the same plane as those who are, although they are still considered family in some sense. Moreover, in both works the ostracised members, Marianne and Henri, remain members of the family even when they are not around. Finally, *The Savages* demonstrates that even when members have little contact with one another, they are still family, as Jon and Wendy feel a sense of duty towards their father, and the film shows that relationships can recover from a period of estrangement. The answer to the question of who is part of a family thus varies in each work, displaying the fact that there is no general answer to that question, but only individual ones.

The other recurring question was whether the family constitutes a trap or a refuge. Once more, the works offer a variety of answers to that question. Only in *August: Osage County* is the family entirely seen as a trap, which the members attempt to escape from. In the film, characters are trapped by their duty to their parents, their roles within the group and family traumas which have not been assimilated, and the house provides an embodiment of the family as a trap. On the contrary, *Le Skylab* is the only work which paints the family as a refuge, so much so that both within and outside the story-world does Julie Delpy travels back in time to recreate her childhood family memories. All the other works demonstrate that the family is both a trap and a refuge, and that the two terms are not incompatible opposites but partly synonymous. Indeed, in Vigan the family is mostly a trap, as members are abused by their relatives which drives them to commit suicide and develop mental illnesses. And yet, the book also narrates joyful memories, and Vigan's tenderness towards her mother, aunts, uncles and grandmother are perceptible. Oates proposes the opposite view: in her novel the family is mostly seen as a refuge, but it can only remain so if characters step out of it to develop their own personality, otherwise they run the risk of being trapped by their family myth and roles, as well as by past traumas which have not been digested. But Oates ultimately chooses to emphasise the positive aspects of family, and she even has a character state: 'It's the way families are, sometimes. A thing goes wrong and no one knows how to fix it and years pass and – no one knows how to fix it.'[577] Once again, Desplechin and Jenkins's works offer a middle-ground, by which the family is almost simultaneously a trap and a refuge. Indeed, in *Un Conte de Noël* the characters' dilemmas are created by the family, but their only chance to move past them lies within the family. Similarly, in *The Savages* the siblings are at first

577 *Mulvaneys*, p. 428

trapped by their duty to their father, but it ultimately allows them to improve their individual lives and grow closer to one another. These differing views display the variety of degrees in the perception of families, and demonstrate that family is rarely ever only one thing.

Throughout the thesis, I explored the ways in which these families are dysfunctional, and showed how in not operating properly they become harmful to their members. Indeed, as we have seen, a majority of the families represented in my corpus fails to protect their members in different ways. In Wells and Jenkins the family fails to provide emotional support, in Vigan the father sexually abuses his daughters, in Oates the parents banish their daughter while in Desplechin they accept the banishment of their son and force their children to occupy genealogical roles other than their own. Furthermore, as I have demonstrated, when the family systems are too rigid they become harmful as well, as they prevent growth and evolution, both for the families and the individuals. In Oates and Vigan the family myth prevents the characters facing the truth about the family, while in Wells and Desplechin the roles constrict them from changing, and in Jenkins the system is almost inexistent. These family dysfunctions lead individuals to become dysfunctional. Indeed, in Wells, Jenkins, Oates and Desplechin the characters abuse drugs and alcohol, while in Oates and Vigan two female members become anorexic. In Desplechin and Vigan several members also exhibit signs of mental illness, while in the former physical illness also ensues. The only work in which the family does not appear to be dysfunctional is Delpy's *Le Skylab*. Indeed, in that film the family is a force for good: despite superficial disagreements between members the family does not harm them. In some of the other works, however, the family evolves throughout and manages to correct its dysfunction, even if the new family system does not entirely eradicate the dysfunction. This is the case of the families in *The Savages*, *Un Conte de Noël* and *We Were the Mulvaneys*: each of these works depict the growth of both the characters and the family unit. On the other hand, in *August: Osage County* the resistance to change of the family leads to its explosion, and *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* reveals that Vigan's family has not confronted its own dysfunction, which her book is attempting to do.

It becomes apparent that the works demonstrate how the identity of the characters are shaped by their family. As mentioned in the second chapter, I use the following definition of identity here: 'any image, or set of images, either conscious or unconscious, which an individual has of himself.'[578] All the works also explore the relationship between the individuals and the family. In *Un Conte de Noël* the characters, and especially Henri, are grappling with the vision others have of

578 Wallace and Fogelson, p. 380

them, and the film shows them trying to recover a different sense of themselves. As Papion notes, they are all

> en quête d'un monde. Chacun à sa façon demande réparation : qu'on lui rende une existence qui lui aurait été dérobée ! Élizabeth accuse son frère de lui avoir volé sa vie entière. Henri se dit victime de « t*entatives d'assassinat mental* ». Quand elle découvre qu'elle a été donnée à Ivan, Sylvia conclut : « *je ne saurai jamais rien de ma vie, ce n'est pas ma vie* ». Simon a perdu sa substance en renonçant à la femme qu'il aimait ; depuis, il erre comme un fantôme, « *accroché aux Vuillard pour ne pas couler* ».[579]

The importance of these self-quests are reinforced by the fact that the characters are all narrators in the film; as Desplechin explains each character 'prend la caméra à partie et dit : voilà, l'histoire, c'était ça. . . Il la raconte de son point de vue. Chacun est persuadé d'être le héros du film !'.[580] They are thus all confronting their own life, and their quest brings them to the family. In Roubaix Henri tells Faunia: 'Tu veux connaître mes défauts ? Ils sont là partout ! Tu veux voir la photo de ma première communion ? La première fois que je me suis battu à l'école ?', thereby showcasing how the family home is a mirror of the family, as well as demonstrating how he sees his family, his childhood and his present identity as intrinsically linked. But the reunion allows each of the Vuillards to solve and move past some of their issues, and in that way the crisis brought about by Junon's illness and the reunion provides the family members with what they need: a confrontation with one another which allows them to discover new ways forward. This confrontation is mirrored by the colours of the subheadings used in the film: at first they are written in white but change to red once the whole family is reunited, mirroring the blood ties of the family, but also the blood spilled between them.

579 Loetitia Papion, 'Invention et re-création de soi dans *Un Conte de Noël* d'Arnaud Desplechin' (unpublished master thesis, Université Toulouse II, 2012), p. 114
580 Elise Domenach and Yann Tobin, 'Entretien avec Arnaud Desplechin: Le songe d'une nuit d'hiver' in *Positif*, No. 568 (June 2008), pp. 10-14 (p. 14)

The fact that the confrontation revolves around a bone marrow transplant is, I would argue, especially telling in that the original trauma of the family is Joseph's death, which occurred because no such transplant was available. Furthermore, as Desplechin states:

> la greffe de moelle osseuse est le type de greffe qui provoque le plus de désordres psychiatriques […]. Elle pose des questions identitaires aux gens, et induit énormément d'accès délirants : chez le donneur, le receveur, la personne qui ne peut pas donner...[581]

Desplechin thus chose to portray a transplant which inherently carries questionings around one's identity. Moreover, this takes place in the context of a family where people's places and identities are unclear: children engender their parents, and the boundary between the living and the dead is blurred, as discussed in the chapter on secrets and traumas. As Serpieri comments, in all of Desplechin's works 'la famille est un legs très lourd, une part de soi exigeante et douloureuse, une histoire partagée d'un passé qui ne peut pas passer, une mémoire forcément à vif où se côtoient les vivants et les morts'.[582] However, *Un Conte de Noël* shows that evolution is possible as Henri being Junon's donor allows for his rehabilitation: he has finally performed the act he was conceived for, and can thus regain his place in the family. Positive evolutions take place for other members of the family as well, as it appears that, at the end, Junon is saved, Elizabeth is at peace, Paul has recovered, and Sylvia has been able to make her own romantic choice. Their return to the family has thus cured them, and a certain harmony is found. The contrast between widely different personalities and a final harmony is mirrored formally, as the film draws on 'toutes les tonalités – humour, gravité, distanciation, emprunts […] – et les procédés formel' which 'par la grâce de la mise en scène […] finissent par se fondre dans une paradoxale harmonie'.[583] Despite the violence of

581 Ibid.
582 Serpieri, p. 16
583 Olivier de Bruyn, '*Un Conte de Noël*. Le lien défait' in *Positif*, No. 568 (June 2008), pp. 7-9 (p. 9)

its relationships and its dysfunctions, in *Un Conte de Noël* the family is ultimately the place where resolution is possible, and the characters come back to it in order to understand their own identities.

This is also the case in *August: Osage County* where a confrontation with their family, exemplified by the violence of the family meals, is necessary for the Weston sisters to move forward. It is only once the secrets have been exposed that they can take charge of their own identities, and not depend on their family. The struggle of finding one's own identity is most explicit with Barbara, who, once she realises she is turning herself into her mother, decides to break free. Similarly, for Ivy the family reunion makes her realise that she should no longer submit herself to abuse by her relatives. As Dekoven explains, a 'healthy balance of give and take' should be the aim of relationships between relatives, whereas the imbalance in the Weston family is extreme.[584] The family is the main problem faced by the Weston daughters in this film, but the only solution to that problem lies in a confrontation with the family. The reunion is therefore an experience of self-knowledge for these characters, as it allows them to examine their lives and evolve. This is also the case for Jon and Wendy in *The Savages*. They begin with the absence of family symbolised by the absence of a family home and meals in the film, and, by the end, the family unit has been reconstituted. Jenkins notes Wendy and Jon's different personalities, stating: 'These are two siblings, two human beings, two specimens, that were subjected to the exact same environment growing up, they lived under the same circumstances, but they responded in completely opposite ways.'[585] The film thus shows that even though our identities are shaped by our family histories, people subjected to the same history can develop widely different personalities. Viorst notes that 'Sisters and brothers share what […] no other contemporaries can share: the intimate, resonant details of family history', but although this history shapes the family members' identities, it is not entirely dependent on it, as siblings have different identities.[586] Like Wells and Desplechin's films, however, *The Savages* demonstrates that in order to evolve individuals need to confront the family.

Oates's novel departs from these work and offers a different perspective on the issue of the individual versus the family. In *We Were the Mulvaneys* the only moments of true happiness are the ones when the family is together, which is made evident in the recurring family meals, and especially in the epilogue. However, the family is only able to be reunited following Michael's death, and after each member has worked though their own individual difficulties. Indeed, as Mike's wife notes in the novel: 'Patrick had become a Mulvaney at last, in his long exile from home.'[587] The members thus need to move away from the family in order to come back to it. In many of her works

584 Dekoven, p. 546
585 Huntington
586 Viorst, p. 99
587 *Mulvaneys*, p. 447

Oates uses the family as a way to question larger issues in society. For example, *The Falls* looks at the environmental disaster that was Love Canal, *Carthage* examines the penitentiary system, *The Sacrifice* tackles racism and police brutality, and *A Book of American Martyrs* explores issues of religion and abortion. In all these novels, the family is the place she starts from, as if, for her, it embodies the whole of American society. In *We Were the Mulvaneys* Oates questions the notion of the American Dream, in part through its embodiment by the family's home. Furthermore, Oates takes the family as her point of departure as identity is linked to the family and, as Cologne-Brookes notes, Oates's view 'has never changed that the most profound mystery of human experience is that each of us exists subjectively and knows «the world only through the self»'.[588] Indeed, in *We Were the Mulvaneys* Judd comments:

> I'd gotten to be proud of myself for the personality I'd built, piece by piece like shingling a roof. Precisely overlapping, imbricating to prevent water damage. […]. I'd built a damned sturdy personality for myself, damned if I was going to dismantle it.[589]

Judd's fear is that the reunion with his family will dismantle his personality, demonstrating that in this novel the family can be a threat to one's identity. These questionings around identity are also present in Judd asking 'what is *Mulvaney*?' before adding 'the concept was genuinely baffling to me'.[590] Identity is thus a concept at the heart of Oates's work, one that preoccupies the characters and which is intrinsically linked to the family.

In *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* Vigan displays a dark view of the family as the locus of death and abuse. Indeed, as discussed in the chapter on secrets and traumas, she uses her work to denounce the family omertà around Georges's sexual abuse, and display its effects – mental illnesses, anorexia – on his descendants. In this novel, individuals have to fight to not be destroyed by the family, as Lucile almost is, and salvation means confronting the family and distancing oneself from it. The following comment by Vigan highlights the link she establishes between family and identity:

> c'est une sorte de «livre fantôme» que j'abritais depuis longtemps, bien avant la mort de ma mère, même si son suicide, il y a deux ans, en est un des éléments déclencheurs. Le mystère qui entoure la personnalité de ma mère, et ce que j'ai vécu enfant avec ma soeur, fait partie de ma construction de femme et d'écrivain. J'ai cherché par tous les moyens à contourner ce livre, mais cette fois j'ai compris que si je ne m'y attelais pas, je ne pourrais plus écrire. Ma trajectoire d'écrivain passait par là. Il n'était pas possible d'y échapper.[591]

588 Cologne-Brookes, p. 203
589 *Mulvaneys*, pp. 451-452
590 Ibid., p. 445
591 Rousseau

She states that her book is an attempt to understand her mother's personality and the book itself explores her mother's life within her family, thus establishing a clear correlation between the two. It seems to indicate that, in her view as well, identity is shaped by the family. This is also the opinion displayed by Delpy in *Le Skylab*. Indeed, the framing of the reunion as a memory activated by the adult Albertine's train journey with her own family shows that Albertine's stubbornness and spiritedness come from her parents, and her family in general, as is demonstrated in the flash-back. Furthermore, what the film explores is the bonds which tie a family together, illustrated by the family meals, even when the individuals have widely different and opposed personalities. Delpy herself states: 'La famille est très importante pour moi […]. Je ne peux pas vraiment expliquer pourquoi, j'ai un amour de ma famille quelles que soient ses disparités.'[592] And indeed her exploration of family is tender and indulgent in her other films as well, even as it displays people's anxieties and insecurities. As Regnier puts it, Delpy 'envisage le clan comme une machine à raconter des histoires', and, reciprocally she uses the family as a way to tell stories, as we saw in the chapter on secrets and traumas.[593]

All the works thus interrogate the relationship between the family and the individual. In all the works, the relationship between the individual and the family needs to be sorted through: be it by returning to the family or by removing oneself from it. In Wells, Desplechin, Jenkins and Vigan, in order to achieve growth and freedom the individual has to settle things within the family in order to move on – whether that means a dissolution of the whole family or on the contrary a new-found closeness –, whereas in Oates the individual has to settle things outside the family in order to be able to return to it. Delpy's film is different, as there is no main conflict to resolve, but she firmly establishes the importance of a strong bond with one's family. These works thus all illustrate Ferreira's claim that 'in many ways the individual and the group (family) are two distinguishable but, in their interreflections, inseparable worlds'.[594] They show that in order to build a healthy future, the reality of the family needs to be confronted and accepted, and that flexibility is required in order for a family to survive. Furthermore, just like the family can be a trap or a refuge, or both, the identity within one's family can be both a prison and a protection.

592 Marie-Noëlle Tranchant, 'Un petit air de famille' in *Le Figaro*, 4 October 2011 <http://www.lefigaro.fr/cinema/2011/10/04/03002-2011004ARTFIG00594-un-petit-air-de-famille.php> [Accessed 04 June 2018]
593 Regnier
594 Ferreira, 'Family Myth and Homeostasis', p. 463.

Filmography

L'Aimée, Written and directed by Arnaud Desplechin (Why Not Productions, 2007) [on DVD]

August: Osage County, Written by Tracy Letts and directed by John Wells (Smokehouse Picture, 2013) [on DVD]

Les Fantômes d'Ismaël, Written and directed by Arnaud Desplechin (Why Not Productions, 2017) [on DVD]

Rois et Reine, Written and directed by Arnaud Desplechin (Why Not Productions, 2004) [on DVD]

The Savages, Written and directed by Tamara Jenkins (This is that, 2007) [on DVD]

La Sentinelle, Written and directed by Arnaud Desplechin (Why Not Productions, 1992) [on DVD]

Le Skylab, Written and directed by Julie Delpy (The Film, 2011) [on DVD]

Trois souvenirs de ma jeunesse, Written and directed by Arnaud Desplechin (Why Not Productions, 2015) [on DVD]

Two Days in New York, Written and directed by Julie Delpy (Polaris Films, 2012) [on DVD]

Two Days in Paris, Written and directed by Julie Delpy (Polaris Films, 2007) [on DVD]

Un Conte de Noël, Written and directed by Arnaud Desplechin (Why Not Productions, 2008) [on DVD]

La Vie des morts, Written and directed by Arnaud Desplechin (Odessa Films, 1991) [on DVD]

Bibliography

Primary

Delvig, Lou, *Jours sans faim* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2012)

Ernaux, Annie, *Les Années* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008)

Fitzgerald, Francis Scott, *The Great Gatsby* (London: Marshall Cavendish, 1988)

Franzen, Jonathan, *The Corrections* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007)

Letts, Tracy, *August: Osage County* (New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc, 2009)

Mitchell, Margaret, *Gone with the Wind* (London: Macmillan, 1949)

Oates, Joyce Carol, *Carthage* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014)

———— 'Food Mysteries' in *Not For Bread Alone: Writers on food, wine, and the art of eating*, ed. by Daniel Halpern (New York: HarperCollins e-books, 2009), pp. 16-22

———— *The Journal of Joyce Carol Oates: 1973-1982*, ed. by Greg Johnson (New York: Ecco, 2007)

———— *The Lost Landscape: A writer's coming of age* (London: Fourth Estate, 2015)

———— *We Were the Mulvaneys* (New York: Plume, 1996)

Proust, Marcel, *Du côté de chez Swann* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988)

Tolstoy, Leo, *Anna Karenina* (1998), p. ii. Project Gutenberg ebook

Vigan, Delphine de, *D'après une histoire vraie* (Paris: Jean-Claude Lattès, 2015)

———— *Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit* (Paris: Jean-Claude Lattès, 2011)

Secondary

http://suncityaz.org

Dictionnaire Flammarion de la langue française, ed. by Bruno Bourdon (Paris: Flammarion, 1999)

OED Online, Oxford University Press, January 2018, <www.oed.com>

Abraham, Nicolas and Maria Török, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1994)

Ackerman, Nathan W., *Treating the Troubled Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1966)

Aissaoui, Mohammed, and others, 'Chroniques familiales' in *Le Figaro*, 8 September 2011 <http://lefigaro.fr/livres/2011/09/06/03005-20110906ARTFIG00707-chroniques-familiales.php> [Accessed 2 February 2017]

Alion, Yves, 'Entretien avec Arnaud Desplechin' in *L'Avant-scène. Un Conte de Noël. Arnaud Desplechin*, No. 572 (May 2008), pp. 3-12

Ancelin Schützenberger, Anne, *The Ancestor Syndrome: Transgenerational psychotherapy and the hidden links in the family tree* (London: Routledge, 1998)

———— *Exercises pratiques de psychogénéalogie* (Paris: Payot, 2011)

Appelbaum, Robert, *Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup, and Other Gastronomic Interjections: Literature, culture, and food among the early moderns* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006)

Ariès, Philippe, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973)

Ascher, Jacques and Jean-Pierre Jouet, *La Greffe, entre biologie et psychanalyse* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004)

Bachelard, Gaston, *La Poétique de l'espace* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957)

Bainbrigge, Susan, '*Les Belles Images?* Mid-Life Crisis and Old Age in Tamara Jenkins' *The Savages*' in *Existentialism and Contemporary Cinema: A Beauvoirian perspective*, ed. by Jean-Pierre Boulé and Ursula Tidd (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), pp. 149-159

Bammer, Angelika, 'Editorial' in *New Formations*, No. 17 (Summer 1992), pp. Vii-xi

Barthes, Roland, *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957)

———— 'Pour une psycho-sociologie de l'alimentation contemporaine' in *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, No. 5 (1961), pp. 977-986

Baudrier, André-Jeanne, 'Avant-propos' in *Le Roman et la nourriture*, ed. by André-Jeanne Baudrier (Besançon: Presses Universitaires Franc-comtoises, 2003), pp. 3-8

Bayer, Gerd, 'History, Dreams, and Shards. On Starting over in Jenny Diski's *Then Again*' in *Trauma in Contemporary Literature: Narrative and representation*, ed. by Marita Nadal and Mónica Calvo (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 88-99

Bayley, Sally, *Home on the Horizon: America's search for space, from Emily Dickinson to Bob Dylan* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010)

Becker, Karin and Olivier Leplatre, 'Introduction: «Faire l'histoire de la gastronomie, c'est faire l'histoire d'une littérature»' in *Écritures du repas: Fragments d'un discours gastronomique*, ed. by Karin Becker and Olivier Leplatre (New York: Peter Lang, 2007)

Becvar, Dorothy Stroh and Raphael J. Becvar, *Family Therapy: A Systemic integration*, 8th ed. (Harlow: Pearson, 2014)

Bennett, Linda A. and Steven J. Wolin, 'Family Rituals' in *Family Process*, 23:3 (1984), pp. 401-420. Accessed via SOLO online, with page numbers running from 1-13

Berghahn, Daniela, *Far-Flung Families in Film: The Diasporic family in contemporary European*

cinema (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013)

Bissa Enama, Patricia and Nathalie Fontane Wacker, 'Avant-propos' in *Le Secret de famille dans le roman contemporain*, ed. by Patricia Bissa Enama and Nathalie Fontane Wacker (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2016), pp. 9-12

Boose, Lynda E. and Betty S. Flowers (eds.), *Daughters and Fathers* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1989)

Bossard, James H. and Eleanor S. Boll, *Ritual in Family Living: A Contemporary Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950)

Boszormenyi-Nagy, Ivan, 'Introduction' in *Intensive Family Therapy: Theoretical and Practical Aspects*, ed. by Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and James L. Framo (New York: Hoeber Medical Divison, Harper & Row, 1965)

———— and Geraldine M. Spark, *Invisible Loyalties: Reciprocity in Intergenerational Family Therapy* (New York: Brunner and Mazel, 1984)

Boughey, Joseph, 'One Widower's Home: Excavating some disturbed meanings of domestic space' in *Our House: The representation of domestic space in modern culture*, ed. by Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 227-246

Bourdieu, Pierre, *La Distinction* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979)

Bowen, Murray, 'A Family Concept of Schizophrenia' in *The Etiology of Schizophrenia*, ed. by Don D. Jackson (New York: Basic Books, 1960), pp. 346-372

———— *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1978)

Brooks, Peter, 'The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism' in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 13, No. 2, The Trial(s) of Psychoanalysis (Winter, 1987), pp. 334-348

———— *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994)

Bowlby, Rachel, 'Domestication' in *Feminism Beside Herself*, ed. by Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 71-91

Bowlby, Sophie, Susan Gregory and Linda McKie, 'Doing Home: Patriarchy, caring, and space' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1997), pp. 343-350

Bronfen, Elisabeth, *Home in Hollywood: The imaginary geography of cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004)

Bruch, Hilde, *Eating Disorders: Obesity, anorexia nervosa and the person within* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974)

———— *The Golden Cage: The enigma of anorexia nervosa* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001)

Bruyn Olivier de, '*Un Conte de Noël*. Le lien défait' in *Positif*, No. 568 (June 2008), pp. 7-9

Bujon, Anne-Lorraine, Carole Desbarats and Arthur Guichoux, 'Voir sans avoir vu. Entretien avec Arnaud Desplechin' in *Esprit* 2016/6, pp. 76-85

Burdeau, Emmanuel, 'Donnez-nous du deuil' in *Cahiers du cinéma*, No. 634 (May 2008), pp. 36-38

———— 'Nouvelle Arcadie. Entretien avec Arnaud Desplechin' in *Cahiers du cinéma*, No. 634 (May 2008), pp. 39-42

Caruth, Cathy, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, narrative, and history* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

Chandler, Marilyn R., *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American fiction* (Berkeley and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991)

Chopra-Gant, Mike, *Hollywood Genres and Post-war America: Masculinity, family and nation in popular movies and film noir* (London: I.B Tauris, 2006)

Ciment, Michel, 'Mercredi Cinéma', *Le Réveil culturel* by Tewfik Hakem (France Culture, 21 February 2018)

Clément, Murielle Lucie and Sabine Van Wesemael (eds.), *Relations familiales dans les littératures française et francophone des XXe et XXIe siècles* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008)

Cologne-Brookes, Gavin, *Dark Eyes on America: The novels of Joyce Carol Oates* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005)

Coltrane, Scott and Randall Collins, *Sociology of Marriage & the Family: Gender, love, and property*, 8th ed (Australia and London: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2001)

Conil, Dominique, 'Rien ne s'oppose à la nuit' in *Mediapart*, 23 September 2011 <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/edition/bookclub/article/230911/rien-ne-soppose-la-nuit> [Accessed 7 September 2018]

Cooper, Clare, 'The House as Symbol of the Self' in *Environmental Psychology: People and their physical settings*, ed. by Harold M. Proshansky, William H. Ittelson and Leanne G. Rivlin (New York and London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), pp. 435-448

Cornford, Tom, '*August: Osage County* is less than the sum of its parts' in *The Conversation* (2014) <https://theconversation.com/august-osage-county-is-less-than-the-sum-of-its-parts-22797> [Accessed 22 June 2018]

Cruickshank, Ruth, 'Eating, Drinking and Re-thinking: Marguerite Duras's *Moderato Cantabile*' in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (2013), pp. 300-312

Daly, Brenda, *Lavish Self-divisions: The novels of Joyce Carol Oates* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996)

Darchis, Élisabeth and others, 'Corps familial souffrant et deuils pathologiques. À partir du film d'Arnaud Desplechin, Un Conte de Noël' in *Le Divan familial* 2010/2 (N° 25), pp. 143-154

David, Sébastien, 'Les figurations de l'ambivalence' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No. 52 (2013), pp. 10-19

Dekoven Fishbane, Mona, 'Differentiation and Dialogue in Intergenerational Relationships' in *Handbook of Clinical Family Therapy*, ed. by Jay Lebow (Hoboken: John Wiley, 2005), pp. 543-568

Delavaud, Michaël, 'Imitation of Life' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No. 52 (2013), pp. 68-73

Demanze, Laurent, *Encres orphelines* (Paris: J. Corti, 2008)

———— 'Sang d'encre. Filiation et mélancolie dans la littérature contemporaine' in *Le Roman contemporain de la famille*, ed. by Sylviane Coyault, Christine Jérusalem and Gaspard Turin (Paris: Lettres modernes Minard, 2015), pp. 37-49

Denis, Fernand, 'L'hommage solaire de Julie Delpy à sa mère et à la famille' in *La Libre*, 5 October 2011 <http://www.lalibre.be/culture/cinema/l-hommage-solaire-de-julie-delpy-a-sa-mere-et-a-la-famille-51b8db84e4b0de6db9c37058> [Accessed 4 September 2018]

Deschamps, Youri, 'D'entre les morts' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No. 52 (2013), pp. 104-113

Domenach, Elise, '*Un Conte de Noël*. La nouvelle Arcadie d'Arnaud Desplechin' in *Esprit* (Août/Septembre 2008), pp. 191-207

———— Yann Tobin, 'Entretien avec Arnaud Desplechin: Le songe d'une nuit d'hiver' in *Positif*, No. 568 (June 2008), pp. 10-14

Douglas, Mary, 'Deciphering a Meal' in *Daedalus*, Vol. 101, No. 1 (Winter, 1972), pp. 61-81

———— 'The Idea of a Home: A kind of space' in *Social Research*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 287-307

———— 'Standard Social Uses of Food: Introduction' in *Food in the Social Order: Studies of food and festivities in three American communities* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984), pp. 1-39

———— and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an anthropology of consumption* (London: Allen Lane, 1979)

Durand, Gilbert, *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire: Introduction à l'archétypologie générale* (Paris: Bordas, 1969)

Edemariam, Aida, 'The New Monroe Doctrine' in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006*, ed. by Greg Johnson (Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 2006), pp. 213-223

Esterson, Aaron, *The Leaves of Spring: A Study in the dialectics of madness* (London: Tavistock Publication, 1970)

Felman, Shoshana, 'To Open the Question' in *Yale French Studies*, Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise, No. 55/56 (1977), pp. 5-10

Ferreira, Antonio J., 'Family Myth and Homeostasis' in *Archives of General Psychiatry*, Vol 9 (1963), pp. 457-463

———— 'Family Myths' in *The Interactional View: Studies at the Mental Research Institute, Palo Alto, 1965-1974*, ed. by Paul Watzlawick and John H. Weakland (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 49-55

Ferry, Jane F., *Food in Film: A culinary performance of communication* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003)

Fiese, Barbara H., *Family Routines and Rituals* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006)

Finch, Janet, *Family Obligations and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989)

Finkielkraut, Alain and Gérard Wajeman in *Répliques* by Alain Finkielkraut (France Culture, 12 July 2008)

Fontane Waker, Nathalie, 'La Fratrie. De la fusion à l'enfermement et l'aliénation' in *Le Roman contemporain de la famille*, ed. by Sylviane Coyault, Christine Jérusalem and Gaspard Turin (Paris: Lettres modernes Minard, 2015), pp. 287-297

Framo, James L., 'Systemic Research on Family Dynamics' in *Intensive Family Therapy: Theoretical and Practical Aspects*, ed. by Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and James L. Framo (New York: Hoeber Medical Divison, Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 407-462

France, Peter (ed.), *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)

Frank, Ellen Eve, *Literary Architecture: Essays towards a tradition: Walter Percy, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Marcel Proust, Henry James* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979)

Freud, Sigmund, 'Symbolism in Dreams' in *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), pp. 149-169

Friedman, Ellen G., *Joyce Carol Oates* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1980)

Furst, Lilian R., 'Introduction' in *Disorderly Eaters: Texts in self-empowerment*, ed. by Lilian R. Furst and Peter W. Graham (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), pp. 1-9

Gallot, Clémentine, 'Le Démon de minuit de Julie Delpy' in *Le Monde*, 22 June 2013 <https://abonnes.lemonde.fr/archives/articles/2013/06/22/p-le-demon-de-minuit-de-julie-delpy_3433565_3246.html?> [Accessed 30 June 2018]

Gautschi-Lanz, Catherine, *Le Roman à table: nourritures et repas imaginaires dans le roman français* (Geneva: Slatkine, 2006)

Girard, René, *Le Bouc émissaire* (Paris: Grasset, 1982)

Gonzales, Rémi, 'Comment (dés)investir l'espace familial' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No. 52 (2013), pp. 94-103

Goutaland, Carine, *De Régals en dégoûts: le naturalisme à table* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017)

Grant, Charlotte, 'Reading the House of Fiction: From object to interior 1720-1920' in *Home Cultures*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (November 2005), pp. 233-249

Gris, Fabien, 'La maladie d'Alzheimer et l'oubli de la famille' in *Le Roman contemporain de la famille*, ed. by Sylviane Coyault, Christine Jérusalem and Gaspard Turin (Paris: Lettres modernes Minard, 2015), pp. 79-93

Gurr, Andrew, *Writers in Exile: The identity of home in modern literature* (Brighton: Harvester Press and Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1981)

Hauri, Roland, 'Christmas Celebration, an Annual Family Gathering' in *Families and Kinship in Contemporary Europe: Rules and practices of relatedness*, ed. by Riitta Jallinoja and Eric D. Widmer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 45-62

Hareven, Tamara K., 'The Home and the Family in Historical Perspective' in *Social Research*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 253-285

Hertweck, Tom, *Food on Film: Bringing something new to the table* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2015)

Hess, Robert D. and Gerald Handel, 'The Family as a Psychosocial Organization' in *The Psychosocial Interior of the Family: A Sourcebook for the study of whole families*, ed. by Gerald Handel (London: Allen and Unwin, 1968), pp. 10-24

Hirsch, Marianne, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, psychoanalysis, feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989)

Hobbie, Christine, 'Review: We Were the Mulvaneys' in *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (February 2004), pp. 45-53

Huntington, Heather, 'Exclusive Interview with Tamara Jenkins' on *ReelzChannel*, 30 December 2007 <http://www.reelzchannel.com/article/463/exclusive-interview-with-tamara-jenkins> [Accessed 30 June 2018]

Isherwood, Charles, 'Mama Doesn't Feel Well, but Everyone Else Will Feel Much Worse' in *The New York Times* (Theatre Reviews, 5 December 2007), <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/05/theater/reviews/05august.html> [Accessed 31 May 2018]

Jackson, Don D., 'The Study of the Family' in *The Interactional View: Studies at the Mental Research Institute, Palo Alto, 1965-1974*, ed. by Paul Watzlawick and John H. Weakland (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 2-20

Jackson, Eve, *Food and Transformation: Imagery and symbolism of eating* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1996)

Jallinoja, Riitta and Eric D. Widmer, 'Introduction' in *Families and Kinship in Contemporary Europe: Rules and practices of relatedness*, ed. by Riitta Jallinoja and Eric D. Widmer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 3-12

Jérusalem, Christine, 'Introduction' in *Le Roman contemporain de la famille*, ed. by Sylviane Coyault, Christine Jérusalem and Gaspard Turin (Paris: Lettres modernes Minard, 2015), pp. 13-16

Johnson, Greg, *Invisible Writer: A biography of Joyce Carol Oates* (New York and London: Dutton, 1998)

Jones, Martin, *Feast: Why humans share food* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

Jung, Carl G., *Essais de psychologie analytique* (Paris: Stock, 1931)

Kantor, David and William Lehr, *Inside the Family* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975)

King, Robert L., 'Alternate Americas' in *North American Review*, Vol. 293, No. 2 (March-April 2008), pp. 41-43

Lafon, Henri, 'Du thème alimentaire dans le roman' in *Dix-huitième siècle*, No. 15 (1983), pp. 169-182

Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 'Le Triangle culinaire' in *Food and History*, Vol. 2, N° 1 (2004), pp. 7-19

———— *Mythologiques. L'Origine des manières de table* (Paris: Plon, 1968)

Leynse, Wendy Hunnewell and Ramona Lee Pérez, 'Metaphor, Food As' in *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture*, ed. by Solomon H. Katz (New York, London: Scribner, 2003), pp. 489-491

Leyris, Raphaëlle, '«D'après une histoire vraie»: Delphine de Vigan mêle la vérité et le mensonge' in *Le Monde*, 19 August 2015 <https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2015/08/19/d-apres-une-histoire-vraie-delphine-de-vigan-mele-la-verite-et-le-mensonge_4730284_3260.html> [Accessed 10 October 2017]

Lieb, Marie-Anne, 'Figures temporelles dans le cinéma arborescent d'Arnaud Desplechin' in *Décadrages*, No. 28 (2014), pp. 79-94. Accessed online, with page numbers running from 1-12 <http://decadrages.revues.org/766> [Accessed 24 October 2017]

———— 'Naitre au monde. Le cinéma de Arnaud Desplechin' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université de Caen, 2010)

———— 'Voix-off et voix(e) narrative: la conscience entre les lignes dans l'oeuvre de Arnaud Desplechin' in *Cahiers de Narratologie*, 22 July 2012 <http://narratologie.revues.org/6519> [Accessed 01 October 2016]

Lindenfeld, Laura, *Feasting Our Eyes: Food films and cultural identity in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017)

Lukacs, John, 'The Bourgeois Interior' in *The American Scholar*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Autumn 1970), pp. 616-630

Mallett, Shelley, 'Understanding Home: A critical review of the literature' in *The Sociological*

Review, Vol. 52, Issue 1 (February 2004), pp. 62-89

Martin, Claude and Blanche le Bihan, 'Caring for Dependent Elderly Parents and Family Configurations' in *Beyond the Nuclear Family: Families in a Configurational Perspective*, ed. by Eric D. Widmer and Riitta Jallinoja (Bern & Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 59-76

Mead, Margaret, *Cultural Patterns and Technical Change: A manual* (New York: New American Library, 1955)

Mennell, Stephen, *All Manners of Food: Eating and tasting in England and France from the Middle Ages to the present* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985)

Mezei, Kathy and Chiara Briganti, 'Reading the House: A literary perspective' in *Signs*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Spring 2002), pp. 837-846

Mijolla, Alain de, *Les Visiteurs du moi* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1996)

Montanari, Massimo, *Food is Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006)

Moran, Joe, 'Houses, Habit and Memory' in *Our House: The representation of domestic space in modern culture*, ed. by Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 27-42

Morley, David, *Home Territories: Media, mobility and identity* (London: Routledge, 2000)

Morse, Margaret, 'Home: Smell, taste, posture, gleam' in *Home, Exile and Homeland: Film, media, and the politics of place*, ed. by Hamid Naficy (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 63-74

Nadal, Marita and Mónica Calvo, 'Introduction' in *Trauma in Contemporary Literature: Narrative and representation*, ed. by Marita Nadal and Mónica Calvo (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1-13

Naficy, Hamid (ed.), *Home, Exile and Homeland: Film, media, and the politics of place* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999)

Nichols, Michael P., *Family Therapy: Concepts and methods*, 10th ed. (Boston: Pearson Education,

2013)

Orbach, Susie, *Hunger Strike: The anorectic's struggle as a metaphor for our age* (London: Penguin, 1993)

Papion, Loetitia, 'Invention et re-création de soi dans *Un Conte de Noël* d'Arnaud Desplechin' (unpublished master thesis, Université Toulouse II, 2012)

———— 'Une mécanique victimaire' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No. 52 (2013), pp. 76-83

Pincus, Lily and Christopher Dare, *Secrets in the Family* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978)

Pinsof, William M. and Jay Lebow, 'A Scientific Paradigm for Family Psychology' in *Family Psychology: The Art of the science*, ed. by William M. Pinsof and Jay Lebow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 3-19

Pleck, Elizabeth H., *Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2000)

Pollock, George H., 'Anniversary Reactions, Trauma and Mourning' in *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (1970), pp. 347-371

Prendergast, Christopher, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992)

Rashkin, Esther, *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992)

Rattez, Grégory, 'Though this house give glimm'ring light' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No. 52 (2013), pp. 114-119

Regnier, Isabelle, '*Le Skylab*: sous le Skybal exactement' in *Le Monde*, 5 October 2011 <https://abonnes.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2011/10/04/le-skylab-sous-le-skylab-exactement_1581987_3476.html?xtmc=le_skylab&xtcr=13> [Accessed 29 June 2018]

Renault, Jean-Baptiste, *Arnaud Desplechin. Trois souvenirs de ma jeunesse* (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Atlande, 2017)

Rhodes, John David, *Spectacle of Property: The house in American film* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2017)

Richardson, Phyllis, *House of Fiction: From Pemberley to Brideshead, Great British Houses in Literature and Life* (London: Unbound, 2017)

Richter, Horst-Eberhard, 'The Role of Family Life in Child Development' in *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, Vol. 57, Part 4 (1976), pp. 385-395

Rousseau, Christine, 'Tout sur mon père, tout sur ma mère' in *Le Monde*, 18 August 2011 <https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2011/08/18/tout-sur-mon-pere-tout-sur-ma-mere_1560765_3260.html> [Accessed 25 July 2017]

Ross, Helgola G. and Joel I. Milgram, 'Important Variables in Adult Sibling Relationships: A Qualitative Study' in *Sibling Relationships: Their Nature and Significance Across the Lifespan*, ed. by Michael E. Lamb and Brian Sutton-Smith (London: Erlbaum, 1982), pp. 225-249

Rutledge, David, 'Distate: Joyce Carol Oates and Food' in *Bearing Witness: Joyce Carol Oates Studies*, Vol. 1, Article 5 (2014)

Rybczynski, Witold, *Home: A short history of an idea* (London: Pocket Books, 2001)

Saggini, Francesca and Anna Enrichetta Soccio, 'Introduction: The paper houses of English literature' in *The House of Fiction as the House of Life: Representations of the house from Richardson to Woolf*, ed. by Francesca Saggini and Anna Enrichetta Soccio (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), pp. 1-9

Saturnino, Céline, 'États d'âme, états des corps' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No. 52 (2013), pp. 20-29

Saunders, Peter and Peter Williams, 'The Constitution of the Home: Towards a research agenda' in *Housing Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1988), pp. 81-93

Scanlan, Tom, *Family, Drama, and American Dreams* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978)

Sceats, Sarah, *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

Scott, Jacqueline, Judith Treas and Martin Richards (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Families* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2004)

Sebesta, Judith A. and E. Teresa Choate, 'Review' in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (March 2009), pp. 105-106

Seknadje, Enrique, 'Judaïsme et judéité' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No.52 (2013), pp. 144-150

Selcer, Richard F., 'Home Sweet Movies' in *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer 1990), pp. 52-63

Serpieri, Victor, 'En famille …' in *L'Avant-scène. Un conte de Noël. Arnaud Desplechin*, No. 572 (May 2008), pp. 15-17

Sheringham, Michael, 'The Law of Sacrifice: Race and the Family in Marie Ndiaye's *En famille* and *Papa doit manger*' in *Affaires de famille: The Family in contemporary French culture and theory*, ed. by Marie-Claire Barnet and Edward Welch (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 23-37

Sicotte, Geneviève, *Le Festin lu: le repas chez Flaubert, Zola et Huysmans* (Liber, 1999)

Simon, Bennett, *Tragic Drama and the Family: Psychoanalytic studies from Aeschylus to Beckett* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988)

Smyth, Gerry and Jo Croft, 'Introduction: Culture and Domestic Space' in *Our House: The*

representation of domestic space in modern culture ed. by Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 11-26

Snyder Hook, Elizabeth, *Family Secrets and the Contemporary German Novel: Literary explorations in the aftermath of the Third Reich* (Rochester and Woodbridge: Camden House, 2001)

Somerville, Peter, 'Home Sweet Home: A critical commentary on Saunders and Williams' in *Housing Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1989), pp. 113-118

Tisseron, Serge, *Les Secrets de famille* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011)

Tranchant, Marie-Noëlle, 'Un petit air de famille' in *Le Figaro*, 4 October 2011 <http://www.lefigaro.fr/cinema/2011/10/04/03002-2011004ARTFIG00594-un-petit-air-de-famille.php> [Accessed 04 June 2018]

Tucker, Aviezer, 'In Search of Home' in *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1994), pp. 181-187

Vally, Hélène, 'Ce que les morts ont à dire' in *Éclipses. Arnaud Desplechin, L'intimité romanesque*, No. 52 (2013), pp. 86-93

Viart, Dominique, 'Fictions Familiales *versus* récits de filiation. Pour une topographie de la famille en littérature' in *Le Roman contemporain de la famille*, ed. by Sylviane Coyault, Christine Jérusalem and Gaspard Turin (Paris: Lettres modernes Minard, 2015), pp. 17-3

Vigouroux, François, *Le Secret de famille* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993)

Viorst, Judith, *Necessary Losses: The loves, illusions, dependencies and impossible expectations that all of us have to give up in order to grow* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986)

Visser, Margaret, *Much Depends on Dinner: The extraordinary history and mythology, allure and obsessions, perils and taboos of an ordinary meal* (London: Penguin, 1989)

———— *The Rituals of Dinner: The origins, evolution, eccentricities and meanings of table manners* (UK: Penguin Books, 2017)

Wakefield, Thaddeus, *The Family in Twentieth-Century American Drama* (New York and Oxford: P. Lang, 2003)

Wallace, Anthony F. C., and Raymond D. Fogelson, 'The Identity Struggle' in *Intensive Family Therapy*, ed. by Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and James L. Framo (New York: Hoeber Medical Division, Harper & Row, 1965) pp. 365-406

Wallach, Jennifer Jensen, *How America Eats: A social history of U.S. food and culture* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014)

White, Nicholas, *The Family in Crisis in Late Nineteenth-Century French Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

———— *French Divorce Fiction from the Revolution to the First World War* (Leeds: Legenda, 2013)

Wood, Denis and Robert J. Beck, *Home Rules* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994)

Wuthnow, Robert and others, *Cultural Analysis: The work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas* (Boston and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984)