# The Family in Contemporary English Language Fiction 1980-2008

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Ljubica Matek

# The Family in Contemporary English Language Fiction 1980-2008

# Obitelj u suvremenoj prozi engleskog govornog područja 1980.–2008.

Doktorski rad

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Osijek, 2012.

To my parents, Anka and Luka Kukić.

Without them nothing would be possible.

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## Introduction

> "Almost anything that can be said about a human being can be told in the form of a story about a family" (Jergović 57).[1]

Family is unarguably the locus – literal and symbolic space – that has crucial influence on human lives, which in turn is best understood, as Meilaender claims, "within narrative" (223). Stories about human existence are the universal topics of literature and because family plays such an important role in human life, many literary texts seem to be stories about families. The aim of this thesis is to examine how families are depicted in contemporary English-language literature (from 1980 to 2008) and how that contributes to a redefinition of the concept of family. For centuries, the traditional nuclear family was perceived as the only possible form of family – other constructs were undeserving of the name, but our world has changed; it has become a global village, simultaneously much bigger because we know more, and smaller because "more" and "further" has become available and reachable. Concepts that stood unchallenged for centuries, such as race, nation and gender are being reexamined and redefined in accordance with the contemporary understanding of the world, but the concept of family, one of most exploited in literature, remains uncontroversial and seemingly untouchable. Yet, fictional families come in different shapes and so it seemed natural to attempt to reexamine and possibly redefine the term *family* in accordance with contemporary literary production. Contemporary fiction shows how a hectic lifestyle has turned the dream of a happy family into a nightmare. In addition, it speaks about the fact that the traditional nuclear family form seems

[1] Original text: "skoro sve što se o čovjeku da ispričati svedivo je na porodičnu priču" (Jergović 57).

to be not only difficult to sustain but also less attractive as a mode of organizing the protagonists' lives.

The literary representations of contemporary families reflect the changes in contemporary attitudes to familial life. Although the family as a concept will probably remain one of the basic organizational units of human lives, it is obvious that its form and meaning have varied, at least to some extent, throughout the history of Western civilization. As Lawrence Stone remarks in his seminal study of the family, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800,* simple models of family evolution can function in primitive, culturally homogenous societies that are not affected by technology, printing, the rise of capitalism, and intellectual consequences of Puritanism, Newtonian science and the Enlightenment. In a sophisticated, diversified and changing society, however, family models become highly complex (24). This thesis is based on the assumption that in the globalized and globalizing Western world of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century other family models have developed alongside the traditional nuclear one. Scientific discoveries of the late twentieth century, most notably new reproductive technologies, and legal and social changes regarding phenomena such as surrogate motherhood, adoptions, abortion rights, working mothers, single (mostly female and poor) parents, and divorce (Weston 1-2) have brought change into the discourse on family. The plurality of voices and lifestyles undoubtedly causes a plurality in family styles and values. My research is directed toward the response of contemporary English-language fiction writers to the social, economic and ideological changes and their impact on the family. However, despite its Anglophone orientation, the study is relevant for all literary contexts both because it deals with a universal topic of family, and because it may be used as a basis for later comparative (literary or cultural) research of families depicted in Croatian or any other national fiction.

The corpus of primary works consists of selected texts written from 1980 to 2008, but several literary texts which fall out of the set scope have also been taken into consideration

because of their critical relevance for the topic of the thesis. Because the body of literary texts analyzed is extensive and because the aim of the research is to reexamine the concept of family as represented in contemporary literary texts, the main method used was synthesis. After having read the corpus of selected literary texts, I was able to identify five types of families that appear as coexistent modes of family life. While it would be possible to look at individual writers to establish the specific perception of the family within their individual oeuvres, this thesis aimed at a somewhat more general result: to propose a new definition of family within the context of contemporary English-language fiction. Admittedly, this may seem like an overambitious task in an age where hundreds of novels and short stories are being published daily. However, I believe that the selected corpus of texts, many of which have been given awards and significant attention both by the critics and the audience, is representative of the whole and offers solid ground for extrapolating patterns that may reveal the types of families that are currently being represented in contemporary Western literature.

The traditional nuclear family is a normative construct which practice itself has deconstructed by proving that there are genuine families structured in ways other than suggested by traditional definition. This dissertation does not aim to (re)present the "ultimate" truth about contemporary literary families, as ultimate truths hardly seem to be (re)presentable any longer. Rather, it aims to show several crucial things about the family in contemporary fiction. First of all, my thesis acknowledges that family is a universal organizational unit of human life that will arguably continue to exist "forever". Secondly, based on the chosen fictional texts, I point to the conclusion that traditional nuclear family can no longer be perceived as the only proper familial unit, although it will undoubtedly continue to exist. Thirdly, I claim that it is possible to identify the coexistence of five different family types in contemporary English-language fiction.

In the last thirty years or so, the effects of the postmodern ideas and values have become evident in the lifestyle of most Western people. The strong sense of individuality and the desire to consume (goods and relationships alike) has made the traditional family lifestyle less attractive, which is why contemporary men and women have been looking for new modes of familial life. So far, a single paradigm existed according to which the only proper way to organize human life on micro-level was in the form of a traditional nuclear family. This thesis will show that it is being expanded into a new paradigm that allows for and demands the existence of (at least) four more different types of families, next to the traditional nuclear one. The thesis identifies five types of families in the contemporary English-language literature; these are: 1) the traditional nuclear family, 2) the single parent family, 3) the childless family, 4) the homosexual family, and 5) the metaphorical family. Each of the "new" families challenges one (or more) of the defining notions of the traditional nuclear family, for example the importance of blood ties, heterosexuality, patriarchal hierarchy, or even procreation. This proves that the features that were considered to be necessary or decisive in forming families are now of secondary importance. Formal features seem to be less important than was believed because family is not a locus of residence, but of meaning and relationships (Stacey, *Brave New Families* 6). It remains to be emphasized once more that the appearance of other types of families does not suggest the demise of the traditional family, but signifies the need to broaden the definition of what a family is and who can constitute a family. More notably, the need to redefine the family only goes to show that the desire for a familial life seems to be one of the universal, human desires (if such exist) making the family a fixed place, a *center*, if we can borrow Derrida's term, which governs, but also limits, the play of human life.

Chapter one, "Re-Thinking the Nuclear Family: From State-Imposed Uniformity towards a Plurality of Familial Forms", represents a historical survey of crucial theoretical texts on family and provides an insight into how dominant ideologies informed family and familial

relations. Plato and Aristotle emphasized the connection between the family and the state, whereas authors such as St. Augustine and Georges Duby testify to the influence the church had upon medieval family relations. Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800* is one of seminal texts that provides insight into England's family matters until the beginning of the nineteenth century and explains how affect gradually became increasingly important in the English family life. The chapter also benefits from insight into works of John Milton, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Edmund Burke. Throughout the most part of the history of Western civilization, the form and function of the nuclear family remained largely unchanged: the dominant ideologies, promoted by the state or church, fostered the traditional patriarchal family, according to which men were allowed to get an education, work, participate in politics and public affairs, whereas women were bound to the sphere of domesticity. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, Oscar Wilde's *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, and John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* and *The Subjection of Women* exemplify the rising concern for human rights in general and women's rights in particular. Twentieth-century authors such as Betty Friedan and Adrienne Rich voice the need to foster an egalitarian family in which both spouses will have equal rights and obligations, whereas the end of the twentieth century is characterized by a growing understanding that people desire to be individuals, a world in themselves, as Marc Augé finds in his anthropological study entitled *Non-Places*.

The continuous process of liberalization of family life, first through the right to choose a spouse of one's own liking, then through the right of both spouses to work and get an education, and finally through the breakdown of certain formal demands (gender of the spouses, duration of marriage, and so on), has led to the fact that twentieth- and twenty-first century families are no longer structured in a uniform way, which is reflected in contemporary fiction. I found this type of contextualization of the subject matter important, since both the literary and

non-literary production of texts reflects the production of different modes of subjection, and family life is undoubtedly our most universal mode of subjection.

Chapter two, "(De)Mythologizing Marriage: Tensions Within and Around the Traditional Nuclear Family in Contemporary English Fiction", addresses the ambivalence between desire and dread with which literary protagonists view the traditional nuclear family, as exemplified in works such as Hanif Kureishi's *Intimacy* (1998), and Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* (1995) and *How to Be Good* (2001). Namely, certain traits of contemporary life, such as consumerist lifestyle and cynical worldview, make it difficult for some protagonists to commit to a traditional family life. More specifically, B. A. Mason's "Shiloh" (1981), Jhumpa Lahiri's "Interpreter of Maladies" (1999) and "A Temporary Matter" (1999), and Raymond Carver's "A Small, Good Thing" (1983) depict the critical importance of the protagonists' (in)ability to communicate with their spouses in keeping the family together. However, for protagonists of Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985), and Tony Parsons' *Man and Boy* (1999) and *Man and Wife* (2001) the traditional family life represents the safe haven against the very threats of "postmodern" lifestyle.

Chapter three, "'Three's a Crowd': Single Parent Family and Childless Family – Deconstructing the Traditional Nuclear Family", tackles families that challenge the traditional father-mother-child(ren) triad. Literary characters who are single by decision, such as Megan Jewell of Parsons' *The Family Way* (2004) and Annie of Hornby's *Juliet, Naked* (2009), have dispensed with the notion of romantic love as a prerequisite for family life and are free from the need to make compromise with his or her partner. In their desire to keep their individuality and yet fulfill the dream of parenthood, they opt for single parenting as their preferred lifestyle. Contrary to this, childless spouses refuse to be pressured into procreation. They have dispensed with the pressures and responsibilities of parenthood and their dreams of family and familiarity are fulfilled in their intimate relationship with each other. Carver's stories "Feathers" (1983)

and "The Compartment" (1983), for example, illustrate how children can be ruinous to marriages. In each of these cases, the family may formally seem incomplete or truncated because it challenges the form of the traditional nuclear family, but functionally and emotionally both of these appear in contemporary literature as valid family forms.

Chapter four, "The Voices of 'Others': The Homosexual Family and the Metaphorical Family", turns to families that challenge the traditional family model even further. Families with same-sex parents do not seem to be "grounded in biology or procreation [and] do not fit any tidy division of kinship into relations of blood and marriage" (Weston 3), which is why they are often deemed as ideologically improper and unacceptable. Christopher Isherwood's *A Single Man* (1964) and Annie Proulx's "Brokeback Mountain" (1999) are cases in point. A more encouraging example is Jodi Picoult's *Sing You Home* (2011) which depicts a romantic relationship between two women who manage to legalize their relationship and start a family. Similarly to same-sex families, metaphorical families do not rely on the symbolism of the order of blood and law (Schneider 26-37). Metaphorical families consist of people who share the kind of emotional intimacy that is normally considered to be a part of the familial life without being bound by legal or religious contracts, blood kinship, and sexual attachment and sometimes not even by the same shared space of living. Hornby's *About a Boy* (1998) describes how the construction of one such family may even be literally life-saving, as it was in case of Marcus' mother. Through the voices of their homosexual characters and members of metaphorical families contemporary authors remind us that actual – psychological and emotional – family ties are created when there is mutual love and the feelings of permanent trust and safety among the family's members, whereas matters of sex, gender and blood ties turn out to be of secondary importance.

Contemporary fictional families can hardly be discussed without an insight into the complete discourse on families, which includes relevant sociological, philosophical and

economical texts. Thus, my critical approach included historical, sociological, psychoanalytical and postmodern deconstructionist methods in order to match the complexity of the topic of family. Because literature does not occupy a "trans-historical" aesthetic realm which is independent of economic, social, and political conditions and is subject to timeless criteria of artistic value (Abrams 249), it needs to be examined within a broader context. Moreover, the discourse on the relations of power, most notably how subversive ideas and practices may effect drastic social changes (Abrams 253) and how these ideas may in fact be produced by the hegemonic system, seems relevant when it comes to the issue of family. For this reason, I found Louis Althusser's theory of ideology as basis for social conditioning and repression of the individual as well as Michael Foucault's studies on sexuality appropriate for my analysis. Rather than being contained by the forces of the dominant power structure, the traditional family framework is being challenged and practice shows that different types of families have become our reality. However, it may be argued whether the various familial practices are a result of a "subversive" way of life – one that favors the desires of the individual – or is this actually the result of values promoted by the dominant consumerist ideology.

For this reason, the research of the transformation of the family will benefit from comparing "the multiplicity of discourses" (Barry 176) in order to be able to create a general picture of the contemporary family. For example, one of the forces that influences the contemporary society, and therefore also our lives, are the media. Values and ideas promoted in the newspapers and magazines, in TV shows and in films largely shape the lives of contemporary people as well as determine the expectations they have of themselves and others. In that sense, it seems useful to take into consideration both the ideas of family as they are promoted in the contemporary media and look into the results of anthropological or sociological studies about human habits and practices.

Jacques Lacan's idea of cultural subordination, which implies that procreation is a cultural construct supported by our genital libido, proves to be significant for the research on literary families. According to Lacan, our unconscious is structured like language and comes from the "outside". This implies that the notions about ourselves and our life – about what is "wrong" and "right" – do not originate within us, but are acquired from the symbolic, that is the social. This enables the myth of the nuclear family as "universally good and right" to be dismantled and reveals the close connection between family and ideology. In addition to this, Sigmund Freud's ideas on the tensions between the civilization and the individual as expressed in his *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) along with Friedrich Engels's and Claude Levi-Strauss's studies on the family point to the tensions between its form and "content", as well as to the possible origins of these tensions. The significance of individualism as highlighted by the poststructuralist literary theory's concept of the subject will provide a useful theoretical frame for my analysis, as will Jacques Derrida's scholarly attempts to expose the "binary oppositions" that have largely shaped Western thought as the source of prejudice against and intolerance of "others". A Derridian view on the family will be used in order to deconstruct the idea of the nuclear family as the only acceptable family form. The theoretical studies of space by Henri Lefebvre and Gaston Bachelard will enable me to contextualize family as a specific social space that defies binaries such as "outside" and "inside", both because different phenomena in human life rarely allow for clear-cut definitions, and because the outside and the inside are not at all comparable since they are not symmetrical. The "outside" option is vast, as Bachelard argues, and "the dialectics of inside and outside multiply with countless diversified nuances" (216) in all spheres of human life. Finally, Kath Weston's research on gay families and Judith Butler's writings on kinship provide a theoretical framework for discussing homosexual and metaphorical families.

Additionally, the dissertation will also benefit from occasional parallel reading of contemporary literary and non-literary texts, such as newspaper or magazine articles. Because the concept of family transcends literature and is a major cultural (sociological and anthropological) concept, it was necessary to occasionaly turn to the reading strategy of New Historicism. It implies viewing the text and context as equal as well as understanding that literature influences culture, and vice versa. The critical method of new historicism emphasizes the "interaction between the historic context of a work and a modern reader's understanding and interpretation of a work" (Meyer 2042). The thesis will apply the tenets of new historicism on contemporary texts insofar as the aim of the thesis is to point out that the topics appearing in contemporary media reflect the topics appearing in literature, and vice versa. This, combined with the previously mentioned sociological, anthropological and poststructuralist approaches, will enable a deeper understanding of the current social, cultural and economic forces that provoke changes and demand a reexamining of the definition of family.

## 1. Re-Thinking the Nuclear Family: From State-Imposed Uniformity towards a Plurality of Familial Forms

> The dream, or nightmare, of the happy family, haunts us all; it is one of the few Utopian ideas we have, these days. (Kureishi, *Intimacy* 82)

Knowing that the human condition is the main focus of literature makes it unsurprising that family is one of its most persistent and recurrent themes. Family is our most intimate environment, our private place that is created biologically, socially and psychologically. In a review of a recently published Croatian graphic novel about a family of anthropomorphic wolves, Miljenko Jergović reiterates this idea:

> Since literature deals with human beings and their problems, and not, let's say, with the nation, universe or noodles, a vast number of literary texts, especially novels, can be read as a story about family. … It would be hard to write a story about a person whose family does not exist; who never thinks about his father and mother, and who never sees any other families around him. The Holy Family is Christianity's most perfect brand. Because it is unavoidable, because everyone has their family. (57)[2]

Moreover, in his "Imagining the Postmodern Family", Sanford Pinsker argues that "Fiction is not finally made from other fictions but from the tougher, heart-wrenching business of defining oneself in the larger context of one's family" (514). Yet, families as they are

[2] Original text: "Kako se književnost bavi čovjekom i njegovim problemima, a ne recimo nacijom, svemirom ili šufnudlama, golemi broj književnih tekstova, osobito romana, svedivi su na porodične priče. … Teško bi bilo napisati priču koja bi govorila o čovjeku čija porodica ne postoji, koji se nikada ne sjeti oca i matere i koji nigdje oko sebe ne vidi baš nijednu i ničiju obitelj. Sveta obitelj je najsavršeniji brand kršćanstva. Zato što je nezaobilazna, pošto svatko ima svoju obitelj" (Jergović 57).

represented in literature may differ from one another considerably, even the happy ones, despite Leo Tolstoy claiming otherwise.[3]

The idea of the family as the basic cell of human society is not new. As Freud asserts in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, human beings had adopted the habit of forming families already in their "ape-like prehistory" (53). The instinct to form a family was one of self-preservation. Members of the prehistoric family were each other's helpers; they worked together to gather food, to find shelter and to procreate.[4] The interest of the male was primarily of a sexual nature because the desire for genital satisfaction motivated him to keep his sexual objects near him, whereas the female decided to stay with the male in the interest of her helpless young (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 53).[5] Communal life eventually led to the formation of states that have always depended on and consisted of families. Plato's idea that a properly organized family would be "the source of the greatest good to the State" (147) influenced the Western society in many ways. Although in its essence the family represents a private union of two people who decide to live together and have children together, family is a social institution as well; the changes in the structure of the family influence the society and vice versa. Increased desire to form families that do not correspond to socially prescribed patterns supports the notion that family should no longer be a public affair but a private institution with strong individual markings. At the same time, a full detachment of the family from the state seems impossible

[3] "All happy families resemble one another; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (Tolstoy 1).

[4] According to Freud, this kind of family lacked one essential feature of civilization because it was subjected to the unrestricted, arbitrary will of the family's head – the father (53). Unlike Freud, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* Friedrich Engels speaks of a matriarchal prehistoric family where the natural mother had uncontested supremacy in the life of the tribal family appointing and disempowering the formal chief at will (374-375).

[5] Freud asserts that human beings naturally strive toward a communal life for two reasons: "the compulsion to work, which was created by external necessity, and the power of love, which made the man unwilling to be deprived of his sexual object – the woman – , and made the woman unwilling to be deprived of the part of herself which had been separated off from her – her child. Eros and Ananke [Love and Necessity] have become the parents of human civilization too" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 55). In this, he undoubtedly echoes Aristotle who in Part 3 Book 1 of his *Politics* claims that the family has two purposes: one of procreation and one of the preservation through labor (2).

because people who wish to form an "unorthodox" family (a gay family, for example) seek legal recognition. The government laws regulate not only issues such as inheritance, health care and insurance, but also crucial issues such as who has the right to enter a marriage and thus start a family in the first place.

Typically, in discussions about family it seems to be implied that family always means *nuclear family*, that is "the basic family group consisting typically of father, mother, and their dependent children, regarded as a social unit" (*OED*). The word family comes from Latin words *familia* meaning household, and *famulus* meaning servant, both of which suggested the primary meaning of family as a group of people sharing the same living space and serving the same goal or master.[6] It also referred to descendants of the same lineage, implying thus the connection established not only by blood but also by common history, honor and (noble) heritage of the ancestors. In the seventeenth century, the meaning of the term *family* was broadened in that it referred to parents and children who may or may not live together, as well as to a group of people who are connected by blood or affinity (*OED*).[7] Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries the dominant meaning of the term family was that of a small kin-group living in one house, so in the twentieth century more specific terms had to be invented to distinguish between this, known now as the nuclear family, and the large-kin group, the so-called extended family, which included aunts, uncles, grandparents and other family members.[8] Taking into consideration the multiple meanings and historical changes that the terms family and nuclear family underwent, the term *nuclear family* or *traditional nuclear family* will be used in this

[6] In Ancient Rome the family referred to a troop or school of gladiators (*OED*) and in this sense it is also reminiscent of the relationship based on *comitatus code* between the lord and his thanes in the Middle Ages (examples of which are amply shown in medieval literary works such as, for example, *Beowulf*).

[7] The word family has other meanings: for example, it refers to objects, plants or animals that have some common features or properties, or to Mafia (*OED*), which are not related to the topic of this research and will therefore not be considered in the thesis.

[8] The term *extended family* includes aunts, uncles and cousins as close relatives who have an obligation to help and support each other (*OED*). The term o*ne-parent family* or *single-parent family* refers to families in which there is only one parent.

thesis in the sense that it refers to a married heterosexual couple – a mother and a father, and their children living together in the same home.[9]

The perception of family has always been subjected to what many have called "the spirit of the age", which only added to the complexity of the concept. In Book 5 of *The Republic*, entitled "On Matrimony and Philosophy", Plato records Socrates' statement that those who ask about family life are "ignorant of what a hornet's nest of words [they] are stirring" (130-131). Still, certain general ideas on the family may be distilled as dominant throughout history. The philosophers of the Antiquity made first observations on the function and form of the family relevant for the development of the Western civilization as we know it today. Placing the emphasis on the family as a public institution, Aristotle asserts in Book 1, Part 13 of his *Politics* that "every family is a part of a state" (14). In the same sense, but even more radically, Plato believed that families as private units should be abolished and that everyone should "belong" to the state: "the wives of our guardians are to be common, and their children are to be common, and no parent is to know his own child, nor any child his parent" (139). This "plan, if executed, will be of the greatest benefit to the State and to the guardians" (140) because the best-ordered State is the one in which every citizen perceives everyone else as immediate kin so that everyone can have a sense of belonging and common interest, eradicating thus every possible discord:

[9] It is relevant to note that when discussing the transformation of the nuclear family different authors tend to use different terms to indicate the "old" or traditional nuclear family and the "new", "contemporary" family that emerged or is still emerging as a result of its transformation. Judith Stacey, for example, uses the term *modern family* to indicate "a family form that most Americans now consider to be traditional – an intact nuclear unit inhabited by a male breadwinner, his full-time homemaker wife, and their dependent children" (*In the Name of the Family* 6). She uses the term *postmodern family* to "signal the contested, ambivalent, and undecided character of our contemporary family cultures" ((*In the Name of the Family* 7). Lawrence Stone, on the other hand, in his book *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800* uses the term traditional family to indicate families of old who were closely connected to a large kinship network, and modern family to indicate emotionally self-sufficient families set apart from the kinship networks. To avoid ambiguity, especially of the term "modern", the author of this paper will use the terms *traditional nuclear family* to indicate the "old" patriarchal nuclear family and *postmodern or contemporary family* to indicate a family that has undergone some sort of transformation caused by recent changes in the postmodern/contemporary society.

> Both the community of property and the community of families, as I am saying, tend to make them more truly guardians; they will not tear the city in pieces by differing about "mine" and "not mine;" each man dragging any acquisition which he has made into a separate house of his own, where he has a separate wife and children and private pleasures and pains; but all will be affected as far as may be by the same pleasures and pains because they are all of one opinion about what is near and dear to them, and therefore they all tend towards a common end. (148)

People will only be able to call themselves "their own," everything else will be common, so there will be no quarrels because of issues such as money, children or relationships (Plato 148). Private property and individuality – values highly regarded in the contemporary (late twentieth and early twenty-first century) Western world, often turn out to be the causes of discord, fights, divorce, and jealousy. Plato suggests that harmony in the entire state can and will be achieved through common property and familial feelings for everyone because due to feelings of "shame and fear" (148) the citizens (soldiers, protectors, guardians) will not want to hurt each other. Plato's utopian communist society based on Socrates' idea of the State as one big family has not yet been achieved in actual life.[10] Rather, it has been continually used as a model in utopian (and dystopian) fiction.[11] Most notably, the suggestion to practice eugenics – controlled

[10] It is not within the scope of this thesis to analyze the reasons for the failure of a communist society. However, the most probable reason or cause is certainly the lack of freedom in a society where there is no room for individuality in any sphere of life, no private property, and no tolerance for those who think or act in a way that is different from what the "society" expects and endorses. Thomas More depicted one such society in his *Utopia* where the lack of freedom is the dominant feature "hidden" under the pretense of a perfect society where everything is decided for everyone beforehand and no individual initiative is needed (or tolerated). Marx's ideas can, similarly, easily be criticized for ignoring the non-economic aspects of a society (culture and tradition) that largely influence individuals and society in general.

[11] Starting with Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, as the seminal work of the future utopian/dystopian genre, highly influenced by Plato's ideas, over Bacon's *The New Atlantis*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* or Huxley's *Brave New World*, to utopian fiction and films, such as, for example, Capra's *Lost Horizon* (1937), based on James Hilton's novel of the same name (1933) or more contemporary ones, such as Michael Bay's *The Island* (2005), to name just a few.

breeding of the finest human specimens – in order to create the best possible citizens for the Greek State, as well as to control the population growth, makes Plato's idea of the family somewhat repelling as it becomes an instrument of the all-seeing and all-pervading state. The mechanics of controlled procreation implies that the offspring of the superior couples will be taken care of by nurses, whereas the offspring of the inferior will be "put away in some mysterious, unknown place, as they should be" (143). Because matrimony should be made "sacred in the highest degree" (141), weddings cannot be private ceremonies but rituals of public importance and should be organized and approved by the government. Citizens should not fall in love of their free will, but they must be manipulated into mating with "proper" partners; the "courting" process should be carefully controlled:

> You, I said, who are their legislator, having selected the men, will now select the women and give them to them; — they must be as far as possible of like natures with them; and they must live in common houses and meet at common meals, none of them will have anything specially his or her own; they will be together, and will be brought up together, and will associate at gymnastic exercises. And so they will be drawn by a necessity of their natures to have intercourse with each other. … and this, Glaucon, like all the rest, must proceed after an orderly fashion; in a city of the blessed, licentiousness is an unholy thing which the rulers will forbid. (140)

Emotions, passions and any kind of unauthorized intimacy are not welcome because they cannot be predicted and controlled, which only further reveals the repressiveness of the state-equals-family model. Nevertheless, centuries later Thomas More described a society equally repressive as the one proposed as ideal in Plato's *Republic*. By describing a non-existent society which was supposed to counter the corruption and codedness of the England of his time, he created a state-as-family which was as coded as Renaissance England was.

His *Utopia* (1516) clearly expresses the idea that marriage customs must be very strict because human nature is easily corruptible. Among many rules concerning marriage and family, the most important ones refer to enforcing monogamy, which, as More acknowledges, is not a natural feature of the human animal.[12] Utopians must follow strict procedures in the choice of their partners because "in that part of the world they are the only people who practice monogamy" so they have to choose their partners wisely (570). Extramarital sex (both premarital and adulterous) is punished severely because "they suppose few people would join in married love – with confinement to a single partner, and all the petty annoyances that married life involves – unless they were strictly restrained from a life of promiscuity" (More 570). More acknowledges that the state must find means to contain natural human impulses in order to sustain its legal order and have ultimate control over the citizens' lives. He also stresses the idea that every individual *must* get married in order not to disrupt the perfect order of things in the uniformed Utopia, which would be forever destroyed by allowing the citizens to lead various lifestyles. The "viewing ritual" replaces the arrangement of marriages and gives the young couple the feeling of autonomy over their decision, even though love and romance are still out of the question.[13]

The Aristotelian school of thought, however, takes individuality into account and is therefore much closer to the contemporary view of the family. Although Aristotle agreed that family is a part of the state, he found Plato's extreme communist ideas unsustainable. In Part 3

[12] Similarly, monogamy is according to Engels, the invention of the patriarchal family which served only men. It was "based not on natural but on economic conditions, namely, on the victory of private property over original, naturally developed, common ownership. The rule of the man in the family, the procreation of children who could only be his, destined to be the heirs of his wealth-these alone were frankly avowed by the Greeks as the exclusive aims of monogamy. For the rest, it was a burden, a duty to the gods, to the state and to their ancestors, which just had to be fulfilled" (Engels 739).

[13] It also unknowingly foreshadows the behavior of consumerist generations of the future (the bride and groom get to see each other naked before "closing the deal", so as not to be cheated with their purchase). More's *Utopia* also seems to prefigure the Puritans' search of religious freedom in a New World, a utopian place across the ocean. The Puritan family, however, bears a slight difference in the fact that it has regard for love and affection for family members.

of Book 1 of *Politics* Aristotle claims that "even supposing that it were best for the community to have the greatest degree of unity, this unity is by no means proved to follow from the fact 'of all men saying 'mine' and 'not mine' at the same instant of time,' which, according to Socrates, is the sign of perfect unity in a state" (16). Quite contrary, Aristotle claims that should the State be organized in the way that Plato suggested it, "each citizen will have a thousand sons who will not be his sons individually but anybody will be equally the son of anybody, and will therefore be neglected by all alike. … how much better is it to be the real cousin of somebody than to be a son after Plato's fashion!" (16). The degree of community suggested by Plato will not result in perfect peace and satisfaction, but will foster many doubts. Children will undoubtedly look for and find their real parents: "children are born like their parents, and they will necessarily be finding indications of their relationship to one another" (16). The loss of individual identity will not foster harmony among the citizens: quite the contrary "quarrels and slanders…are much more likely to occur if the relationship is unknown" (Aristotle 17). What is more, in a state organized according to Plato's suggestion, people will not be able to have real feelings for others: "love will be watery … The idea of relationship which is based upon these names will be lost … Of the two qualities which chiefly inspire regard and affection – that a thing is your own and that it is your only one – neither can exist in such a state as this" (Aristotle 17).

In addition to this, Aristotle also criticizes the idea that lovers should only have intercourse for the purpose of procreation because this would be nothing but a mere "violence of the pleasure" (17). The idea of the state as one big family is hardly feasible, which is why Aristotle rejects it as impossible: "In framing an ideal we may assume what we wish, but should avoid impossibilities" (21). Although "the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part" (Aristotle 3), still the family has the right to its own existence within the state as its constituent part (15). The nuclear family,

according to Aristotle, should be formed naturally, for the sake of survival of the species, and not politically as a result of governmental manipulation (1); "the first and fewest possible parts of a family are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children" (3).

Although in Book 7 Aristotle proscribes who (and at what age) is fit to marry, he is more concerned with the citizens' *individual* benefits or harms that can occur if they do not follow the ideas he advocates (having children at a right age, not too young and not too old, in order to make the transition of generations in the family more comfortable; giving birth at a right time, so as to avoid illness and death of women and babies, and so on). His principle is more an "inductive" one, supporting the idea that happy and healthy individuals form a stable state, as opposed to Plato's "deductive" reasoning whereby the State should be the highest principle that regulates the individuals' private lives, erasing all boundaries between the family and the state.

In medieval feudal society the Church appears as the additional authority over the family, since "the construction of a marriage system and a sexual economy was connected with the construction of political and ecclesiastical systems and an economy of feudal property" (Davis ix). The medieval feudal society relied heavily on family ties because land, name and titles were inherited. For this reason, marriage is once again represented as a political issue: it is an instrument of the society through which the society controls its future (Duby, *The Knight* 18) and serves to maintain the uniformity of familial form.[14] In that sense, the function of a medieval marriage was to pass on "valor and honor", that is reputation, from one generation to the next by uniting a man and a woman in order to produce a legitimate son who will bear the blood and name of a well-respected ancestor continuing thus the family line (Duby, *The Knight*

[14] In her book *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, Archibald points out that kinship structures are socially constructed, which is why even the rules about endogamy, exogamy and prohibitions on intercourse or marriage between certain members of a kin-group vary from culture to culture and century to century. Just as the incest taboo is not universal (9) or naturally (biologically) determined, so is not the idea of the family.

37). "For the knight, or baron, just as for the prince himself, marriage is a political act, an opportunity for the accession of power through new alliances; the interests of the House and not individual inclination are the decisive factor" (Engels 747).

Feudal society in many ways depended on the marital ties and family heritage that the woman brought into marriage: first and foremost her land, but also castles, and even her name, that is family connections that secured political strength for the husband. Even more so, because the purpose of marriage was procreation, women, as bearers of children, were crucial constituent parts of a family. However, the medieval social practice hardly acknowledged their importance. Quite contrary, due to misogynist attitudes fostered by the Church through sermons "on lust illustrated by Adam, Samson and Solomon, all of whom were ruined by women" (Duby, *The Knight* 10), women were perceived not merely as inferior,[15] but positively evil. They were essentially sinful beings – "the devil's gateway" (Tertullian 14)[16] –which is why the medieval marital union, indispensable as it was, seemed to be forever tainted by the fact that it needed a woman as one of its constituents. Moreover, the medieval misogyny was the source of another stereotypical notion, namely that marriage, and thereby family life as well, is a source of "pain" for men. *Molestiae nuptiarum*, the pains of marriage, also arise from the fact that women make men's life a living hell. Wives[17] in medieval Christian orthodoxy, literature and vernacular culture are portrayed as "contentious, prideful, demanding, complaining, and

[15] The Ancient Greek philosophers proclaimed the idea of male superiority and female inferiority (See: Aristotle's *Politics*, Part V or Plato's *The Republic*, Part V, "On Matrimony and Philosophy", p.136.), but their attitudes were not nearly as extreme as those proposed by medieval Church.

[16] More specifically, the "devil's gateway" was the woman's body which was perceived with ambivalence. The naked female body symbolized *voluptas*, bodily desire and other sinful wishes, which is why, when it appeared in art, the female body was often depicted as "consumed by the flames of hell" (Duby, *Cathedrals* 258). Nevertheless, precisely because of her body (and only as a body) the woman had to be tolerated as the crucial instrument in the perpetuation of feudal social ties: she was "merely a body, a womb, a breeding organ, a secret place where blood might mingle to produce future knights and heirs" (Duby, *The Knight* 234).

[17] Wife is usually represented by means of the medieval topos of the lascivious and talkative Eve, "one who through speech sowed discord between man and God" (Bloch 15). Bloch explains that in medieval terms a *wife* is a degree "worse" than a woman. A wife is the source of constant anxiety and dissatisfaction because of her verbal abuse against men. He quotes Juvenal's *The Sixteen Satires* in which Juvenal says that not even another woman could match the sea of a wife's words. is motivated by the desire to silence them (13-17).

foolish; they are pictured as uncontrollable, unstable, and insatiable" (Bloch 14); in other words, they are the source of constant threat to both the husband's well-being and his masculinity.[18]

St. Augustine, in Book 1 Chapter 5 of his *On Marriage and Concupiscence,* asserts that the purpose of marriage is procreation, and not corporeal pleasure. The ideal marriage is between one man and one woman, as was the case with Adam and Eve, yet some "good" men may have several wives "for the purpose of a greater number of children springing from him", whereas a woman with more husbands (or sexual partners) can be nothing but a "harlot" (Book 1, Chapter 10). The promiscuity of women was problematic because of the medieval idea that once a man and a woman had sexual intercourse, they became one flesh (*unitas carnis*) and the man's relatives become the women's relatives, too – married or not, and regardless of length of their affair (number of sexual encounters, that is) (Archibald 29). This presented a great danger of complicating the network of kinship, so female adultery had to be prevented for reasons of social stability.[19] Unlike the communist ideal of the state-as-family where everything belonged to everyone, feudal arrangements implied a number of small regions or even mere castles as independent units under undisputed authority of the lord and proprietor. Therefore, all deviations from the strict form of the traditional family had to be prevented. As the basic feudal ideological unit that had the function of sustaining social, political and religious order, family was of utmost importance.[20]

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[18] Jean de Meun's *Roman de la rose* is just one example of medieval texts which support this claim. If a woman is poor, the man must take care of her; if she is rich, she cannot be controlled; if she is beautiful, everyone will desire her; if she is not as beautiful and therefore lacks suitors, she will offer herself willingly to other men; if she is reasonable, she can be seduced and if she is irrational, she becomes mad and prone to suicide (Bloch 17).

[19] The possibility that another man, and not the husband, could impregnate a woman, whereby some other man's flesh and blood would carry the husband's name and inherit the family fortune was unbearable (Duby, *The Knight* 47).

[20] Not before the fourteenth century will marriage be represented as a joyful union of a man and woman in which both of them, especially the woman, can take advantage of legally approved sexual relations. Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale", a late fourteenth-century literary text, breaks new ground regarding marital and sexual relations in that it reflects the emerging changes in marital and sexual relations of the time by depicting an assertive woman who takes pleasure both in being married and having sex, without tying either with the possibility or obligation of procreation. From that point on, many literary texts will take it upon themselves to challenge dominant ideologies and represent human reality as it is being practiced, not as it is expected to be.

During the English Modern Period (and European Renaissance) the secularization and the thirst for knowledge, admittedly, suppressed the fear of damnation and altered the perception of women as evil incarnate. However, in a society without a police force, the household, that is the family, continued to be seen as very valuable both to the Church and to the state as the institution for social control. Marriage was now looked on with approval (Stone 28) and not as the necessary evil. Still there occurred no radical changes in the "prescribed" structure and function of the Early Modern English nuclear family.[21] This points to the continuing importance of gender hierarchy with the man at the top which was perceived as instituted by God and nature.[22] The sacramental, indissoluble marriage and patriarchy were thought to be the secure foundation of society and the patriarch's role as analogous to that of God in the universe and the king in the state.

The chief reason for perpetuating the patriarchal family is no longer the fear of God, but, according to Findlay, the fact that "the family structure was a fundamental basis for political and social order in Renaissance England" (1). Marriage among the wealthy in sixteenth-century England was not a matter of the individual, but a collective decision of family and kin (Stone 70). Renaissance power rested on genealogical (paternal) myths and so both the family wealth as well as the family name[23] had to be carefully preserved. Consequently, love was not a legitimate reason to get married; in Renaissance England one did so out of interest – for money, status or power. Stone clarifies this by referring to literature, more specifically,

[21] While the nuclear family was the accepted and expected mode of living, contemporary research oriented at specific underrepresented voices shows that other types of families did occur, always, however, pressured to conform. (See: *The Family in Early Modern England* , Ed. Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster, Cambridge UP, 2007.)

[22] Normative texts of the time, such as the *Book of Common Prayer* (1559) and *The Law's Resolutions of Women's Rights* (1632), are based on the biblical story of Adam and Eve.

[23] Illegitimacy deconstructed the patriarchal social and political structure. An illegitimate (fatherless) child was born of a female sexuality outside the divinely ordered pattern, unsanctioned by patriarchal authority. An illegitimate family – one created and headed by a woman – was a "non-family" (Findlay 2-3) because the non-democratic Renaissance society did not allow for multiple familial forms (cf. footnote 19).

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* claiming that to Elizabethan audience the tragedy did not arise from the unhappy romance, but from the fact that the young lovers violated social norms (as did Desdemone by marrying Othello) of filial obedience and loyalty to the lineage (70).

It is not surprising then that in a society as coded as the Elizabethan was, the printing of manuals and guidebooks for "proper" family life flourished.[24] These books and essays deal with the issues of family duties and specific gender roles; they prescribe and explain how the family life is supposed to be organized and why. Virtually all of them support the same ideas of patriarchy and obedience to the husband. As marriage and family life became an interesting topic for philosophers and writers, it was inevitable that different literary representations of marriage and family life should appear next to the prescriptive ones. Ben Jonson, for example, in his poem "On Giles and Joan,"[25] resorted to humor in order to describe married life realistically instead of teaching the reader a moral lesson or representing marriage as a beautiful fairy-tale. As Stone explains, "the expectations of felicity from marriage were pragmatically low" (81), since marriages, especially among the well-off, were arranged. This was not as tragic as it may seem to the contemporary readers who are educated in the romantic culture: the expectations of happiness in arranged marriages are not unrealistically high and sentiment can adapt to social command (Stone 82). What is also important is that Jonson's Giles and Joan seem to be a pair of equals, not only by social rank, which was a must at the time, but as life partners. Both the husband and the wife are equally dissatisfied with their married life, but the wife is not the partner whose destiny is to suffer in silence; in Jonsons's poem both of them

[24] *A Godly Forme of Housholde Government* by John Dod and Robert Cleaver (1598); *The English Hus-Wife* by Gervase Markham (1615); *English Gentlewoman* by Richard Brathwaite (1631); *The Servant's Duty* by Thomas Fosset (1613) and *Exposition of the Ten Commandments* by John Dod (1604).
Interestingly, a famous book by a female author, Dorothy Leigh's *The Mother's Blessing* (1616), proclaims a different attitude: she stresses the need to educate and love children as well as that man should marry the woman he will love and see as a companion, not a servant.

[25] Some other famous texts that record the discord between norms and practice when it comes to complex issues such as love, marriage, and family are, for example: Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

have the right to express their dissatisfaction with each other. In this, Giles and Joan's family bears resemblance to typical Puritan families.

The Puritan family was in many ways a family where both spouses were acknowledged as important and, to a significant extent, equal. The degree of egalitarianism arose from the fact that it served as a partial substitute for the parish (where all were equal before God). As such, it also increased the importance of the nuclear core – not as a place of living, but in the form of an affective bond between spouses and their children (Stone 93-94), and it had the responsibility to ensure order and well-being of all. "In the Puritan's conception of the social order, the family was the fundamental building block upon which all else rested" (Dizard and Gadlin 16).

Moreover, the Puritans did not view celibacy as a condition purer and holier than marriage. On the contrary, acknowledging that "Adam and Eve were husband and wife as naturally as they were man and woman" (Morgan 29), the Puritans perceived marriage as a positive good and women as "Creatures without which there is no comfortable Living for man … They are a sort of Blasphemers then who despise and decry them, and call them *a necessary Evil*, for they are *a necessary Good*; such as it was not good that man should be without" (Cotton Mather qtd. in Morgan 29). The family was the original society, created and organized by God as an ideal environment for human beings and, had Adam and Eve resisted temptation, family would have been the only structure needed in human life. However, after their transgression, the need arose for an organization that was stricter and better equipped than the family to deal with the evil of human nature (Morgan 133). Thus the entire Puritan community, represented by church and courts, became an interventionist force in family life (Dizard and Gadlin 17), promoting both the importance of duty and responsibility, as well as the idea that we are all equal before God.

Despite the strict family requirements, the Puritan family introduced the idea of love as a necessary "ingredient" of marriage, not necessarily as the cause but obligatorily as a result of

marriage. Young people were encouraged to choose the person, among their own rank, whom they believe they could love (Morgan 47-54; Engels 741), a concept that was completely disregarded before when marriage and family were seen merely as a matter of lineage and heritage and when (Roman-Catholic) parents chose the appropriate wife for their son (Engels 741). Now marriage is a desirable union between two people whose duty is to show their love of God by loving and respecting each other. In addition, the Puritan family introduces care for the children as a major parental task. As opposed to the sixteenth-century English mothers who gave their children to wet nurses and had no contact with them until they were two or so, a custom that made it impossible for any kind of emotional attachment to the child to develop,[26] the first duty of a Puritan parent was to give food, shelter and protection to his children as well as to provide for their education and spiritual development (Morgan 65).

Most notably, the Puritan community accepted the possibility of a lifestyle that departed from the usual traditional family form which included parents, children and servants. Namely, a man was allowed to live a single life if he could afford to live in his own household with his servants, which in fact constituted his family and was accepted by the community (Morgan 27). The progressive ideas of the first American settlers find their correspondent in the ideas of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century European philosophers. For instance, Francis Bacon's early seventeenth-century essay "Of Marriage and Single Life", discusses alternative lifestyles, taking into consideration that men differ in their interests and virtues and as such cannot all conform to the strict demands of married life.

> He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune; for they are impediments of great enterprises, either of virtue or mischief. Certainly the best works, and of greatest merit for the public, have proceeded from the unmarried

[26] For details, cf. Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*.

> or childless men, which both in affection and means have married and endowed the public. (1553)

Although he grants the right to make decisions about their private life only to men, Bacon's idea that certain tempers ("grave natures" as he calls them) or professions function better in a family (soldiers) whereas others should remain single (priests), is quite progressive for a time when the idea of individuality is not favored by the church nor proclaimed in other normative texts about familial life. Even if this private decision should be made according to careful examination of its consequences on the public life, still this concept favors the possibility of individual choice of one's marital status according to one's own personal and professional preferences.

John Milton, inspired by his own unhappy marriage, wrote a treatise entitled *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643) where he questions the idea of indissoluble marriage and argues for the right of divorce on grounds of incompatibility, with right of remarriage. He argues that marriage is not a mere carnal coition; a true matrimony is a social unity of two people who understand and love each other, whereas the canon paradoxically treats marriage in such a way as if the satisfaction of lust is (or should be) its ultimate goal (708). Claiming that "Marriage is a covenant" (711) Milton criticizes the perception of marriage as a matter of divine intervention. As a concept it is wholly susceptible to human understanding and interpretation:

> It was for many ages that marriage lay in disgrace with most of the ancient doctors, as a work of the flesh, almost a defilement, wholly denied to priests, and the second time dissuaded to all, as he that reads Tertullian or Jerome may see at large. Afterwards it was thought so sacramental, that no adultery or desertion could dissolve it. (703)

Moreover, he finds it strange that "if it happen that nature hath stopped or extinguished the veins of sensuality, that marriage is annulled" (708), but not if the marital problems are not of

a sexual nature, but a matter of disagreement of tempers. Milton argues that God is more appreciative of families that are truly able to live in love and peace instead of just compulsively performing a marriage. The real nature of marriage is much more offended by its forceful continuance by partners who are unhappy with each other "than by a needful divorce" (711).[27] Religious doctrines, according to Milton, prevent people from being happy although happiness is what God ordained for the human race. Love and peace should be the ultimate goal, and they are, paradoxically, threatened by the church's misinterpretation of what God had planned.

Like Bacon's, Milton's ideas are also quite modern in the sense that they largely prefigured the ideas prominent today, as we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century. Milton gives priority to the social aspect of marriage, treating it as a partnership of souls, an institutionalized friendship, whereas procreation, whether as a matter of biology or a question of lineage, and relief from lust are secondary. The idea that people have the right to choose a partner who will not only serve as a means for sexual relief, procreation or as a household servant, but above all a "soul" who will be a friend and companion, was quite radical at the time.[28]

The introduction of concepts such as love for the partner, multiple family forms and the possibility of a divorce, allows for a more flexible familial life. Still, the unquestioned hegemony of the patriarchal order prevents people to structure their families in any other way but as pyramids with the father on top, mother and children below and the servants at the bottom. The eighteenth century, however, brought more politics into the family matters thanks to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Edmund Burke, and Mary Wollstonecraft, who all wrote extensively

[27] Engels echoes later the same view of marriage: "If only marriages that are based on love are moral, then, also, only those are moral in which love continues. The duration of the urge of individual sex love differs very much according to the individual, particularly among men; and a definite cessation of affection, or its displacement by a new passionate love, makes separation a blessing for both parties as well as for society" (751).
[28] Cf. for example, Shakespeare's idea of "marriage of true minds" as expressed in Sonnet 116, or John Donne's in "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning".

on the issues of family and its social and political function. While Rousseau and Burke spoke for a patriarchal family as the only sustainable form of family, Wollstonecraft "hoped that the egalitarian transformation of the family would eliminate unjust hierarchies and abuses of power between husbands and wives, parents and children, and brothers and sisters" (Botting 1).

Rousseau's essay *The Social Contract* argues that family is the oldest and most natural social form the purpose of which is procreation and preservation of the young (1.2). In *Émile*, published the same year as *The Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau proposes the idea that the perfect state can be made by careful education and upbringing of children, preferably in a corruption-free rural environment. Male and female children should be brought up differently and separately, so that they can be prepared for their respective social and familial roles. As some scholars have noted, Rousseau's clear support for the patriarchal order and strict gender roles seems to be in conflict with his proposition that the state should be an egalitarian republic. Others, however, attempt to reconcile his views of the family and the state by suggesting that the family plays crucial role in the formation of good male citizens because women, who are in charge of the domestic realm, teach men how to channel their passions toward the common good (Botting 19-20).[29] In many ways Rousseau bases his philosophy on Plato's ideas on the family and state and builds on them in the spirit of his time.

Similarly to Rousseau, Burke was alarmed by the idea that a hierarchical family might get destroyed through societal changes: the demand for an egalitarian society proposed by the French Revolution would be detrimental for the strict hierarchy of the patriarchal family. Burke

[29] Scholarly response on Rousseau includes, among others, these authors: Judith Shklar, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau's Social Theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1969; Allan Bloom, „Introduction", in *Emile, or on Education*, ed. and tr. by Allan Bloom, New York, Basic Books, 1979, 3-29; Arthur Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau's Thought*, Chicago, U of Chicago P,1990; Susan Okin, „Women and the Making of the Sentimental Family", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 11:1, 1982, 65-88; Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, Stanford, Stanford UP, 1989; Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Stanford, Stanford UP, 1988; Joel Schwartz, *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Chicago, U of Chicago P, 1984; Elisabeth Rose Wingrove, Rousseau's Republican Romance, Princeton, Princeton UP, 2000.

therefore introduces the concept of the "little platoon" as the available social identity to which people must remain loyal in order to preserve humanity and morality threatened by the brute revolutionists:

> To squander away the objects which made the happiness of their fellows would be to them no sacrifice at all. Turbulent, discontented men of quality, in proportion as they are puffed up with personal pride and arrogance, generally despise their own order. One of the first symptoms they discover of a selfish and mischievous ambition is a profligate disregard of a dignity which they partake with others. To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed toward a love to our country and to mankind. The interest of that portion of social arrangement is a trust in the hands of all those who compose it; and as none but bad men would justify it in abuse, none but traitors would barter it away for their own personal advantage. (Burke, *Reflections*)

Afraid of any change of the status quo, Burke supports the strictly structured, patriarchal view of the family and social order in general as well as the desire to keep the wealth in the hands of the rich through hereditary possession:

> The power of perpetuating our property in our families is one of the most valuable and interesting circumstances belonging to it, and that which tends the most to the perpetuation of society itself. It makes our weakness subservient to our virtue, it grafts benevolence even upon avarice. The possessors of family wealth, and of the distinction which attends hereditary possession (as most concerned in it), are the natural securities for this transmission. (Burke, *Reflections*)

Burke's rhetoric concerning gender roles and family provoked angry response of those who did not perceive social change as a threat but an opportunity for progress and improvement.

Taking into consideration the close connection between family and state and the fact that the political structures of a state can change, Mary Astell wonders why it should be unthinkable that the structure of a family may also change:

> Again, if absolute sovereignty be not necessary in a state, how comes it to be so in a family? or [sic] if in a family why not in state; since no reason can be alleged for the one that will not hold more strongly for the other? If the authority of the husband, so far as it extends, is sacred and inalienable, why not of the prince? … Is it not then partial in men to the last degree to contend for and practice that arbitrary dominion in their families which they abhor and exclaim against in the state? (Astell, "A Preface" 2835) [30]

Although Astell's political argument is primarily focused on the struggle for women's rights, it also speaks for the possibility to structure private, family life differently. Namely, in *Some Reflections upon Marriage* she suggests that "So long as the institution of marriage perpetuates inequality rather than a true partnership of minds" (*Some Reflections* 2285) women should turn to God instead of men, promoting in fact, in terms then acceptable, single life for women. What is more, she questions the institution of marriage itself saying: "If marriage be such a blessed state, how comes it, may you say, that there are so few happy marriages?" (*Some Reflections* 2285). For the most part, Astell argues that the cause for dissatisfaction is women's lack of the right to choose – the patriarchal system allows women merely to accept or refuse what was already offered, but not to make alternative choices as they see fit (2286). What is more, she

[30] Astell very astutely recognizes the absurdity of the idea of female inferiority, which was later on repeated by Engels in his *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*: "That woman was the slave of man at the commencement of society is one of the most absurd notions that have come down to us from the period of Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Woman occupied not only a free but also a highly respected position" (735).

claims that if a woman was taught "to have a higher design than to get her a husband" (*Some Reflections* 2286), to understand the world and the way men truly feel about women, many women would choose not to get married at all, and those who would want to marry would then be able to do it as better informed persons and have happier marriages (*Some Reflections* 2287).

Education is crucial both for female equality and for the liberalization of family life. It would give women the possibility to choose and such possibilities, as social practice several centuries later will prove, will directly influence family life and enable the diversification of family forms. Critically, she points to the hypocrisy of the social conventions according to which all men are born free, but all women seem to be born slaves to men: "why is slavery so much condemned and strove against in one case and so highly applauded and held so necessary and so sacred in another?" (*Some Reflections* 2835-2836). The only true reason for a woman to get married, according to Astell, would be to get married because of a selfless desire to do good in the name of God; to give up on individuality and own desires and submit herself to the family life abandoning everything else in order to teach and enlighten her children (*Some Reflections* 2288). In this, as well in her idea of the need for female self-improvement Astell is quite prophetic. Yet, she was not the only one who gave voice to similar ideas.

In line with literature's inclination to deal with concerns from the actual life, Daniel Defoe's novel *Roxana* gives us a story of an independent young courtesan, who does not wish to get (re)married and enjoys her freedom. Quite convincingly, she talks of the fact that marrying meant giving up her liberty because "the very nature of the marriage contract was, in short, nothing but giving up liberty, estate, authority, and everything to the man, and the woman was indeed a mere woman ever after--that is to say, a slave" (Defoe 109). What is more, she is prepared to be a single mother and in case she has a child with her lover, she would give everything she owns to the child, but would still not wish to get married because marrying would jeopardize her financial independence (108). In the end, however, Defoe equals

Roxana's emancipated worldview to vanity and sin, proving through Roxana's regret that marriage is the only proper social form for a woman:

> Thus blinded by my own vanity, I threw away the only opportunity I then had to have effectually settled my fortunes, and secured them for this world; and I am a memorial to all that shall read my story, a standing monument of the madness and distraction which pride and infatuations from hell run us into; how ill our passions guide us; and how dangerously we act, when we follow the dictates of an ambitious mind. (118)

With his novel, Defoe perpetuates the postulates of the dominant social order. He reveals ambition and independence as chief female vices in a patriarchal society because they undermine the very core at which such society rests: the male dominance.

With the dawn of industrialization and rise of economic theory, family life becomes subjected to yet another force from the public life: production. In his "Essay on the Principle of Population" (1798) Thomas Robert Malthus proposes two basic postulates of human life: that food is necessary for human life and that passion between the sexes is both necessary and everlasting (1.14), proving once again that family is the nexus where the public and the private come together. If the government leaves the regulation of the private life entirely up to its citizens, giving up any control over their private lives, it can lead to famine and thus jeopardize the well-being of the state. For this reason it is necessary that the state has control over human private (familial) life: "Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio. … By that law of our nature which makes food necessary to the life of man, the effects of these two unequal powers must be kept equal" (1.18 -19). Apart from having control over the food production and procreation, that is the economic side of life, the state took control over the basic human instincts as well. Church dogmas were being replaced by economic theory to the same effect: prevention of unchecked

sexual behavior. Marriage was still seen as a means of preserving morals (and the economic well-being of the state) by making sexual relations legitimate only within a controllable family structure; Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) is a case in point. In the novel a young servant resists her master's advances on her virtue until he marries her. This establishes marriage as the proper framework for sexual relations, suggesting that sexuality should be somehow contained. It is transferred from the realm of the instinct and the uncontrollable into the realm of family through the acceptable ritual of marriage.

However, human desires can hardly be contained. The constant changes within human culture are fuelled by desire. So, according to Stone, the development of market economy in England enabled the theory of economic or possessive individualism: man's infinite desire for more and new goods was moved by egotism, vanity, envy, greed and ambition; his main desire was to differentiate himself from his neighbors in some way or another (173-179). The need to separate one's private life from the public, and thus also from the state interventions, was becoming increasingly stronger in the eighteenth century.[31]

The focus on the individual stimulated radical social thinking that advocated equal rights for men and women as well as democratization in works such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791-1792) or William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) which spoke against the institution of marriage as an inadequate form of property rights. There is an abundance of both philosophical

[31] The growing importance of the private life can be seen in the literary production of the time. Richardson's epistolary novel *Clarissa*, for example, testifies that the story of someone's private life (the novel is subtitled "the History of a Young Lady") can be far more popular than the stories about nations. Apart from elaborate letter writing and diary keeping, the novel itself shows how crucial the life of an individual is becoming. The individual is no longer subordinated to one's social rank, and tradition becomes far less important than individual rights. In other words, "The modern individual had been invented; no product of the age is more enduring" (Lipking and Noggle 2066). For more details see: Tom Keymer's *Richardson's "Clarissa" and the Eighteenth-Century Reader*, Cambridge UP, 2004; John P. Zomchick's *Family and the Law in Eighteenth-Century Fiction: The Public Conscience in the Private Sphere*, Cambridge UP, 1993; Raymond Martin and John Barresi's *Naturalization of the Soul: Self and Personal Identity in the Eighteenth Century*, Routledge, 2004.

and literary texts that argue for violation of conventional laws and limits forced upon humans. Philosophically, this is most clear in texts that spoke for the emancipation of women, such as Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, where she asserts that women are intellectually equal to men and therefore deserve the same privileges as men do. The focus on the private and on individuality led to a Gothic revival in architecture which flourished with towers, turrets, battlements, arched doors, and rich ornaments. This was closely connected with the Gothic revival in literature[32] which began to feature untypical heroes – dark outcasts full of guilt and greatness that pride themselves in their nonconformity.[33] Tremendous popularity of this genre among women[34] can be explained by the fact that they needed attractive distractions from their idle days,[35] so they indulged in stories about fear, cruelty and eroticism, which only further fuelled their fantasies of romantic love and sexual fulfillment as well as their frustrations with everyday life.

Private, family life felt the influence of the new age, which was, among other spheres, reflected in the way life was structured architecturally. Stone identified three most significant symbols of the new view of the world that changed the way families lived: the ha-ha, the corridor, and the dumb waiter. The ha-ha, a sunken ditch that represents a physical barrier into a garden without restricting the view from it, was a change from the symmetrical, man-made

[32] The revival was spurred by Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), and followed by many other novels situated in haunted castles, featuring a Byronic villain and a damsel in distress, mysterious deaths and supernatural happenings. They were loaded with intense emotions of terror, anguish and romance.

[33] Characters such as Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, Shelley's Frankenstein, and Byron's Manfred who were all modeled after famous mythological and literary "transgressors" – Cain, Satan, Faust or Prometheus.

[34] "It is noteworthy in this period that the best-selling author of the genre (Ann Radcliffe), the author of its most enduring novel (Mary Shelley), and the author of its most effective send-up (Jane Austen) were all women" ("The Gothic: Overview"). Interestingly, Shelley's *Frankenstein* can also be read as a story about the degenerate and underappreciated role of women in the family (cf. Stone 247), where the creator (the man) loathes the monster he himself created (an idle woman). Despite the proof that "the monster" can be educated and deserves love, still the man scorns the monster marginalizing it and even hating for its "otherness".

[35] Women of the upper class began reading romances which increased not only their expectations of romantic love and sexual fulfillment in marriage, but also their frustrations because these expectations could not be satisfied. They became "idle drones" (Stone 247), since they had servants to take care of the house and contraception to control their reproduction, so what they were left with is immeasurable amount of leisure time for "novel-reading, theatre-going, card-playing and formal visits" (Stone 247), which turned women into ornaments – decorative yet purposeless objects.

high walls that made seventeenth-century gardens orderly areas of enclosed space. The corridor was a new feature in the house that enabled physical privacy of one's own room, as opposed to long lines of walk-through rooms that posed a constant threat of someone walking in. The dumb waiter enabled a family to have private meals without the surveillance of waiters and other servants (245-246). Thanks to the emphasis on privacy and individuality, the nuclear family was left to hang on its own internal cohesion, without any influence from the state or church. The affective individualism, as Stone concludes, was not an exclusively positive development. The growing independence of the nuclear family tore vertical family ties, so domestic life became applicable only to parents and little children (252-253). Even such closeness among family members did not result in familial happiness: the women were frustrated by unrealistic romantic expectations and by loss of any sense of purpose in a life condemned to eternal gossip-parties and absolute tolerance for any of their husbands' escapades.[36]

This state of affairs provoked Mary Wollstonecraft to criticize the conformity of women to male expectations regarding marriage and family. Female intellectual passivity and their dedication to physical beauty as a means to establish themselves in the world are, according to Wollstonecraft, undesirable and humiliating traits. Women neglect their education, and sacrifice the strength of their mind in order to be simply beautiful because the only way available for women to rise in the world is through marriage. Moreover, she criticizes the infantilization of women achieved through their activities (dressing up, painting) and infantile language (nicknaming everything). Such women, continues Wollstonecraft, cannot be fit to take care of the children they bring into this world (*The Vindication* 169). However, the infantile woman is useful to men and the status quo. Namely, women, like soldiers or children, are taught

[36] Lord George Saville, Marquess of Halifax's *The Lady's New-Year's Gift or: Advice to a Daughter* (1688), which was continuously reprinted throughout the eighteenth century, advises women to tolerate adultery, alcoholism and any other vice the husband may be guilty of, as well as never to try to separate from their husbands, so as not to cause doubt about the legitimacy of offspring and inheritance.

to obey and accept authority without questioning; "Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience" (*The Vindication* 174).

Wollstonecraft "called for reform in marriage, divorce, and property law that would encourage equality between spouses and siblings" (Botting 132). Her own unconventional life was an example of how a woman can and should be able to make choices different from those expected by others in order to realize her own individual idea of happiness because she is aware of the fact that unjust social practices are being perpetuated, among other things, through the family structure. Wollstonecraft "creates an alternative 'family' life outside of the bounds of the patriarchal family. She abandons the hope of building an ideal marriage or family" (Botting 145), which makes her a "theorist of the relationship between familial structures, political equality, and human freedom in the modern Western tradition" (Botting 214). Wollstonecraft's ideas regarding an egalitarian family are still highly relevant because they can validly be applied to contemporary debates about how to make marriage a truly egalitarian social institution for all adult couples, including same-sex couples. Thus, her ideas support rather than exist in tension with the values of the liberal democratic state (Botting 212).

The radical voices of the Romantic period were somewhat stilled by the Victorian demand for propriety. The rise of the bourgeois family and the development of capitalism, which fosters an isolated monogamous family as a working economic unit, promoted the idea of the family as a small kin-group in a single house (Engels 739-745). Industrial production and urbanization caused working class families to move into smaller separate houses because of which the term family no longer primarily referred to lineage, property or to a household (which also included servants). Instead, this was the way the near kin-group could define its social relationships positively: *family* or *family and friends* represented the only immediately positive attachments in a growing and complex wage earning society. For the middle-class families, however, the term family still combined the blood-connection and the strong implicit sense of

property (Williams 132-133). Moreover, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert served as powerful role-models for the traditional patriarchal family and its constraints. Having a "proper" family was a duty, to the society rather than to oneself, and a matter of "good taste". Personal happiness was not an issue at all, and neither was the affective side of the relationship. Again, the family had a distinct social purpose: it was supposed to perpetuate and preserve common decency and status quo. This caused the Victorians, men especially, to live according to a double standard.

Since their marriages had all the qualities of a business deal, they turned to extramarital life for the satisfaction of their affective needs and sexual desires.[37] The result was paradoxical: in an age when propriety and common decency were the ultimate goals, so much so that the private familial life was constantly under the scrutiny of the public, prostitution soared. Criticizing the patriarchal "civilization", Engels concludes:

> everything engendered by civilisation is double-sided, double-tongued, self-contradictory and antagonistic: on the one hand, monogamy, on the other, hetaerism, including its most extreme form, prostitution. Hetaerism is as much a social institution as any other; it is a continuation of the old sexual freedom-in favour of the men. Although, in reality, it is not only tolerated but even practiced with gusto, particularly by the ruling classes, it is condemned in words. In reality, however, this condemnation by no means hits the men who indulge in it, it hits only the women: they are ostracized and cast out in order to proclaim once again the absolute domination of the male over the female sex as the fundamental law of society. (Engels 739-740)

[37] For details on female sexual desires and relationships, see: *Between Women. Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* by Sharon Marcus (2007).

Similarly, Oscar Wilde's aestheticist orientation[38] in general and his comedies in particular turned against the Victorian duplicitous way of living and familial values. They mocked the Victorian ideal of being "earnest" by turning it into a mere pun, ridiculing thus the imposed highly moral expectations of a highly immoral and hypocritical Victorian society in which the ultimate – and the only morally acceptable – role for a woman was to become a wife and mother, yet one where prostitution flourished not only because the "moral" Victorian fathers sought excitement outside the wedlock but also because thousands of women were not given a chance to make a living doing something other than selling their bodies.[39]

A further attack on Victorian patriarchal values ensued in politics[40] and in philosophical works of authors such as John Stuart Mill who advocated individual liberties, rights and obligations for both sexes in *On Liberty* (1859) and *The Subjection of Women* (1869). The Industrial Revolution changed the conditions of women's work; it also created and challenged traditional views of gender roles. Feminists demanded better educational opportunities for women and their struggle was recorded in literary texts such as Tennyson's *The Princess* (1847).[41] Unmarried women could choose between prostitution and being a governess, which did not guarantee any kind of security. Still, many women opted for the opportunity to work and live on their own, and so "the governess novels" such as *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair* became

[38] "Wilde, a disciple of Pater, was a quintessential aesthete, cultivating an extravagant style of living and defying conventional opinion with his wit" (Bergonzi 386). Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) was highly influential for the ideas that he expressed. Since human life is fleeting, one should give up on searching for the ultimate truths, which can never be truly accessed, and turn to refining one's senses. This can be best achieved through art. The Aesthetic movement offers a new view of socially constructed expectations because Pater and his followers understood that the traditional social forms do not offer solutions or answers for a satisfying life and for that reason man should turn to the beautiful and enjoy life without any scruples.

[39] *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (Seventh edition, Vol. 2.) contains a letter by an anonymous prostitute to the Editor of *The Times* (1858) entitled "The Great Social Evil", offering the contemporary reader insight into the life of a woman of respectable origin who worked as a governess, but was ultimately "encouraged" by a "gentleman" to become a prostitute (1728-1732).

[40] The passing of Married Women's Property Acts (1870-1908), The Factory Acts (1802-78), The Custody Act (1839), and The Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act (1857) changed the status of women both at work and in the family.

[41] Much like Defoe's Roxana who with her regret perpetuates the ideal of the happily married woman, Princess Ida ends up as a wife and mother after all.

a popular genre. Women appeared as both writers and protagonists of Victorian novels because the novel was an ideal form to discuss many themes, and among them also those familiar to women: family life, courtship, and marriage.

Similarly, domestic fiction is an important genre of American nineteenth-century fiction. Referred to also as the "woman's fiction", it romanticizes the home and the domestic sphere as an ideal place for a woman. As Baym explains, it discussed the issues of female emancipation through stories of a young girl who, for some reason, loses her financial support and she now has to find her own way in the world. At first she looks for others to protect her, but she soon realizes that she needs to rely on herself and her own inner resources (19).[42] Later, thanks to works such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, female domestic fiction becomes indeed feminist emancipatory fiction and loses the epithets of triviality because the social and political significance of these texts that are questioning and defying the traditional women's role in the home does not go unacknowledged.

Finally, as an important contribution to emancipatory writing, Wilde remarks in his essay, *The Soul of Man under Socialism,* that people cannot conform and remain free at the same time (26), which is why people should strive toward a "social system" of voluntary Individualism, where there will be no form of coercion that prevents people to truly live, not just exist. He claims it is selfish to demand of people to be uniform in their lifestyles, when life is all about diversity (58). Family life is one of the areas in which the dominant ideology finds its way to control people. Families that are formed as sacrifices in a rite of passage, that is that serve as proofs of our maturity and selflessness will not endure as models for living but families that are created from pleasure and for the pleasure of those who live in it will (63-65). This

[42] The genre began with Catharine Sedgwick's *New-England Tale* (1822), but there were many other representatives, such as Caroline Hentz, Maria McIntosh, and Elizabeth Wetherell, to mention just a few. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* added a political dimension to the home as the central place of action and is therefore often not considered a true domestic novel. These novels were both written and read by women, and since they were schematic and uninteresting to the educated population, that is men, they were deemed trivial.

means that the ideology cannot propose or impose the "proper" familial model but that it should be left up to the individual to decide how he or she will organize her family life. Wilde did not live to see his ideas come to life, but was humiliated and exiled by the ideology he criticized. However, the beginning of a new century, coinciding with Queen Victoria's death, also meant the beginning of a new era that favored individuality far more.

Modernist writers turn to their protagonists' inner life under the assumption that it best reflects their individuality. Analogous to this, in her essay "Modern Fiction" (1919), Woolf suggests that life cannot be easily defined or "realistically" captured in words:

> Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being "like this". Examine for a moment any ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; … Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. (Woolf 2150)

Life cannot be defined because its essence is evanescent and changeable; all humans are individuals and there cannot be a recipe for the proper way of living.[43] While Woolf talks about writers and writing, her ideas transcend the world of fiction and resonate in all aspects of life. If one thinks about family and marriage, it becomes clear that there cannot be one prescribed

[43] Woolf herself led an untypical, "modern" life: excellently educated, with an active professional and social life, openly bisexual and married to a husband who tolerated her extramarital relationship with Vita Sackville-West. The liberty that she displayed as a woman free and able to make unorthodox and independent decisions about her private (personal and sexual) life became highly influential and indicative of later social developments concerning relationships between sexes and familial expectations imposed upon women. Similarly, the ideas she expressed in her essay about women and fiction entitled "A Room of One's Own" (1929), suggest that women need to be independent in order to be writers – they need money and a room of their own so that they can write what they think. This points to the need of every individual to be able to decide on their own destiny and not merely follow traditions of old.

form of living, of marital, familial or sexual arrangements that can possibly suit every single person. In many ways, Woolf suggests, our life is a result of a coincidence, of random order formed by atoms falling incessantly around us shaping our destinies. This kind of groundbreaking views, both in art as in life, will contribute to the change in attitudes toward family and familial relations in the twentieth century.

Of course, Woolf was not the only one who believed that life cannot be defined, prescribed or captured by a specific formula. D. H. Lawrence's essay "Why the Novel Matters" (1936) in a way continues to support her ideas of uniqueness of individual experiences:

> What we mean by living is, of course, just as indescribable as what we mean by *being*. Men get ideas into their heads, of what they mean by Life, and they proceed to cut life out to pattern. Sometimes they go into the desert to seek God, sometimes they go into the desert to seek cash, sometimes it is wine, woman, and song, and again it is water, political reform, and votes. You never know what it will be next: from killing your neighbour with hideous bombs and gas that tears the lungs, to supporting a Foundlings Home and preaching infinite Love, and being correspondent in a divorce. (2345)

Despite the undeniable richness of human experience, so far the perception of the institution of the Western family has only been limited to what is assumed by the term of "traditional nuclear family". However, the idea that family is, or can be, only what is implied by that term cancels out the idea of history and change, or as Lawrence puts it "You never know what it will be next" (2345), and implies that family is one of the universal, timeless structures resilient to all economic and social events. While, to a certain extent, this may be true because humans obviously do live in families and generally prefer some form of communal living to single life, it does not necessarily hold true that the family has a fixed and timeless structure. Rather, what

may be observed is that the paradigm of the family is being broadened with, not exchanged for, some other types of families which coexist with the traditional nuclear one.

In that sense, Lawrence continues to remind his readers that nothing is always good or bad; life is not black and white. While certain modes of living or behavior are good for some, they may mean "death" to others:

> In life, there is right and wrong, good and bad, all the time. But what is right in one case is wrong in another. And in the novel you see one man becoming a corpse, because of his so-called goodness, another going dead because of his so-called wickedness. Right and wrong is an instinct: but an instinct of the whole consciousness in a man, bodily, mental, spiritual at once. And only in the novel are all things given full play, or at least, they may be given full play, when we realize that life itself, and not inert safety, is the reason for living. For out of the full play of all things emerges the only thing that is anything, the wholeness of a man, the wholeness of a woman, man alive, and live woman. (2345)

While the concept of *family* is inevitable as an organizational form or specific space within which human life is organized and which originates as a "consequence" of human life, it can no longer be taken for granted that the family has or should have one specific form, namely that of a traditional nuclear one. Because the nature of our metaphysical thinking often seems to be geometrical, we tend to imagine metaphysical phenomena in geometrical terms. A traditional nuclear family is often perceived as a closed off, round unit consisting of their parents and children who are "inside," whereas the rest of the world is on the "outside". This opposition of the two would imply some sort of antagonism, as well as find its full significance in alienation (Hyppolite qtd. in Bachelard 212). This can explain why family is often also perceived as prison, a space that confines the personal freedom of those "inside" it. In his elaborate discussion on the poetics of space, Bachelard, however, noted that the dialectics of the outside

and inside is not at all that simple, since their opposition is not symmetrical. Inside is concrete, whereas outside is vast and thus there cannot be a true opposition between them:

> inside and outside, as experienced by the imagination, can no longer be taken in their simple reciprocity; consequently, by omitting geometrical references when we speak of the first expressions of being, by choosing more concrete, more phenomenologically exact inceptions, we shall come to realize that the dialectics of inside and outside multiply with countless diversified nuances. (Bachelard 216)

Following this line of argument, it seems to be too simplistic to speak of a traditional nuclear family as one possibility of arranging one's life ("inside") and not having one as the other ("outside"). The contemporary discourse on families must include more concrete expressions which will reflect the phenomenology of the organization of human life more specifically, because claiming that only one unique concept of a family is in fact "proper," would mean that the concept of family, just like, for example, the concept of nation excludes those that deviate from a unified definition of "nationhood" (Bhaba 939-940), is built on exclusion of all those who inhabit hybrid forms of "familyhood". If we consider the family to be a part of the social space, as Lefebvre suggests (32), which is an incorporation of the actions of all individual and collective subjects (33), the demand to make it less uniform is not surprising. Social space encompasses the interrelationships of all things produced in their coexistence and simultaneity (73), which is why different modes of familial arrangements should be accepted as legitimate since they exist anyway, even if they are not acknowledged by the legal or religious authorities. The problem with non-acceptance of diversity is in the fact that, as Lefebvre explains, "State-imposed normality makes permanent transgression inevitable" (23), which in turn results in "incessant violence" (23), often embodied in different equal-rights movements and social revolutions of different scope and magnitude. The nuclear family of the 1950s is a case in point.

In the 1950s in America the image of an ideal nuclear family, consisting of a mother, the housewife, the working father, and their children, was strongly promoted as a desired familial model. Mintz and Kellogg write about the 1950s as the golden age of the American family: men and women married younger than in the period before and after, moved to suburbs and devoted themselves to the family, which became a refuge from the public concerns of the postwar period (177-186). Because in the aftermath of World War II anger and fear, as Dodsworth suggests, were the dominant emotions of the fifties (461), it is not unusual that politicians and economists tried to construct an artificial image of the "perfection" of middle-class life. Anger and fear threaten any *status quo* because people tend to behave erratically. For this reason, the capitalist society of abundance and consumption resorted to the promotion of the ideology which placed emphasis on specific values, such as material wealth and familial security in order to keep the citizens happy and their behavior under control: "The standardized 'American family' is a mythological creature, but also – like its reified subsidiaries ('the' black family, 'the' gay family) – an ideologically potent category" (Weston 56).

Precisely because family was being used as a strong ideological tool, and because the ideology now had new means of self-promotion – the mass media[44] – it was this particular era that left such deep marks upon the general Western perception of family; it enabled the myth of the nuclear family as the ideal way to organize one's life to live on until today. For example, Jonathan Franzen's 2010 novel *Freedom* depicts the (American) nuclear family as indestructible; it is a place and space of warmth and safety to which one can return after all sorts of mischief only to be greeted with open arms, and where stay-at-home mom is, just like in the 1950s, "a sunny carrier of sociocultural pollen" (5). While it was being claimed that "the family stands out as a haven of intimacy" (Mintz and Kellogg 180), the family was (and

[44] Mintz and Kellog discuss the role of television and cinema in the promotion of family values and ideals in greater detail (190-194).

arguably still is) in fact under heavy influence of public discourse in which psychologists, educators and journalists insisted on the idea that marriage was necessary for personal well-being, that a woman's place was in the home, and that those who deviated from this norm were inevitably "unhappy or emotionally disturbed." Work was coded as masculine, whereas home as feminine, which only fostered the segregation of sexes (Stacey, *Brave New Families* 8). All women had to do was devote their lives to finding a husband and bearing children; their role was to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers (Friedan 11-12). "Gender expectations about family and work responsibilities" (Stacey, *In the Name of the Family* 22) were pretty clear and had the purpose of sustaining a traditional family structure.

> Nobody argued whether women were inferior or superior to men; they were simply different. Words like 'emancipation' and 'career' sounded strange and embarrassing; … If a woman had a problem in the 1950's and 1960's, she knew that something must be wrong with her marriage, or with herself. (Friedan 14)

Moreover, women's magazines pictured housewives as happy and career women as neurotic, unhappy and dissatisfied (Mintz and Kellogg 181). At the same time, suburban men who commuted to work became part-time fathers, symbolic disciplinary and money-making figures in the mother-run households (196). American poet and essayist Adrienne Rich captured the spirit of the fifties in her essay entitled "When We Dead Awaken":

> these were the fifties, and in reaction to the earlier wave of feminism, middle-class women were making careers of domestic perfection, working to send their husbands through professional schools, then retiring to raise large families. People were moving out to the suburbs, technology was going to be the answer to everything, even sex; the family was in its glory. Life was extremely private; women were isolated from each other by the loyalties of marriage. I have a sense

> that women didn't talk to each other much in the fifties – not about their secret emptiness, their frustrations. (173)

The same idea is expressed through the voice of Jill, a lesbian protagonist of David Leavitt's short story "Out Here":

> "No institution," Jill says, "has been more destructive to women than the nuclear family. . . It's a means of exploitation. Since the sixteenth century, the nuclear family has fit in perfectly with the capitalist system and its whole exploitative program of gender roles. And nothing has caused more psychological damage to women." (165)

Rich was determined at the time "to prove that as a woman poet I could also have what was then defined as a 'full' woman's life, I plunged in my early twenties into marriage and had three children before I was thirty" ("When We Dead" 173). However, despite the fact that she was considerably successful both as a poet, a mother and a wife, she had periods of depression or despair, which, says Rich, "could only mean that I was ungrateful, insatiable, perhaps a monster" ("When We Dead" 173). Finally she realized that the true nature of conflict is in the fact that her job as a poet required her to actively and imaginatively transform reality into poems, whereas her roles of a mother and wife demanded a different attitude: "to be maternally with small children all day in the old way, to be with a man in the old way of marriage, requires a holding-back, a putting-aside of that imaginative activity, and demands instead a kind of conservativism" ("When We Dead" 174). When the modern woman "fulfils her duties in the private service of her family, she remains excluded from public production and cannot earn anything; and when she wishes to take part in public industry and earn her living independently, she is not in a position to fulfil her family duties" (Engels 744). Although Rich rejects the myth according to which a successful (masculine) artist or thinker must become either unavailable to others or a devouring ego, she is aware that trying to fulfill traditional female functions in a

traditional way is in direct conflict with the subversive function of poetic imagination. Therefore, new ways of living must be found that will enable women (and also men) to function satisfactorily both in the family and at work: "there must be ways, and we will be finding out more and more about them, in which the energy of creation and the energy of relation can be united" ("When We Dead" 174), so that every individual may live a "full" life without feelings of guilt or inadequacy.

Richard Yates' novel *Revolutionary Road* (1961) also reflects the anxiety of young American couples in the 1950s and their struggle to break free from the boring suburban life. The predictability of every day, a family consisting of the housewife-mother, two or three children, and the working father becomes a nightmare scenario rather than an ideal young people should strive for.

> What is distinctive about Yates in *Revolutionary Road*–and throughout his work–is not merely the bleakness of his vision, but how that vision adheres not to war or some other horror but to the aspirations of everyday Americans. We share the dreams and fears of his people–love and success balanced by loneliness and failure–and more often than not, life, as defined by the shining paradigms of advertising and popular song, is less than kind to us. (O'Nan 1)

It is in texts such as these that the contemporary reader can begin to see how the social expectations and fixed paradigms of living not only seem to be unsatisfying but are also highly frustrating to the point of being fatal for an individual, just as it was for Frank Wheeler who was only able to be rid of his illusions after his wife's unfortunate death (O'Nan). The only means through which an individual can break free from the suffocating life is the cessation of the desire for an "ideal" family. What was once believed to be the only possible way to live one's life properly is now perceived to be the very source of misery.

Rich's essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" points to the control mechanisms which made it impossible for women to organize their lives as they saw fit: "The institutions by which women have traditionally been controlled – patriarchal motherhood, economic exploitation, the nuclear family, compulsory heterosexuality – are being strengthened by legislation, religious fiat, media imagery, and efforts at censorship" (204). Although she was primarily concerned with the social position of women, with good cause considering the fact that the women's position was the inferior one, her ideas may easily be applied to every (postmodern) individual who tries to find a mode of living without feeling pressured into fitting into certain "universal" paradigms: "The retreat into sameness – assimilation for those who can manage it – is the most passive and debilitating of responses to political repression, economic insecurity, and a renewed open season on difference" ("Compulsory Heterosexuality" 204).

Despite the wide-spread sense of discontent among mothers in typical traditional nuclear families as well as theoretical and literary reflections on the disadvantages of the "perfect" suburban family, the idealistic picture of such a family was so deeply imprinted into the minds of the Anglo-American people that it became a sort of a role-model. One's success as a parent and a spouse depended on how well one could mimic the arrangements in the traditional nuclear family, and for some it still does. Namely, structural anthropology insists that kinship relations occur in predictable binary pairs (Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* 155-187) and that pairs of opposites are a basis for all human signifying systems (Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked* 341), which seems to have been influential in the general perception of the family. Later on, Derrida argues that within such structures based on binary pairs, one part of the pair is always perceived as better, positive and with a higher cultural value than the other, like, for instance, in the speech/writing pair, where speech is the privileged part, whereas writing seems to be secondary, derivative, accidental, a mere transcript of speech (27-29). Conveniently, for a long time, a traditional family with two heterosexual parents and their

biological children has been perceived as "proper", whereas any sort of deviation from that model presented its "improper" binary opposite; so improper, in fact, that it does not deserve to be signified as a "family": "And the choices here are a traditional Christian family or a unit that doesn't even come close to approximating that definition" (Picoult 260).

Regardless of what the "opposite" family situation was, it typically bore suggestive, biased terms such as a "broken family, an "alternative lifestyle," an "old maid," and so on, making it very clear that they indicate a (negative) deviation from the (positive) norm. This kind of perception of the family has become obsolete because like the structuralist approach to a text, which disregards history and the individuality of the author, his or her text, and its reader, a structuralist approach to family disregards the individual. Moreover, structural distinctions between binary oppositions in fact obscure the great dialectical movements that traverse and help define our world (Lefebvre 218). Quite logically, the structuralist approach had to account for the fact that not everything can function in forms of pairs of opposites, and so Lévi-Strauss acknowledges that there are elements that did not fit into such pairs; they are discarded, but cannot be eliminated. Instead, they remain latently present (*The Raw and the Cooked* 341). So, rather than saying that a family is, or can be, only what we assume under the term *traditional nuclear family*, that is a specific structure which could be expressed in a formula such as F = HP + BC (family equals heterosexual parents and biological children), it should be acknowledged that the traditional nuclear family is no longer the only kind of family that people live in. Rather, a family may take several different forms, each of them equally valid, as this paper will show.

Analogous to this, the dominance of the nuclear family model in practice began to decline. While seventy percent of American families in 1960 indeed were traditional nuclear families, consisting of dad the breadwinner, mom the homemaker and their children, by the late 1980s this type of family accounted for less than fifteen percent of all American families. In

fact, since 1960, in line with the dominant postmodernist worldview,[45] the traditional nuclear family had to face substantial challenges to its form, ideals and role expectations (Mintz and Kellogg 203-204). Most notably, these challenges occurred as direct effects of the struggles for equality: women's liberation movement, 1960s counterculture, gay rights movement, and so on.

The liberalization of literature and culture allows for women's voices, regional, gay, postcolonial and immigrant voices to be heard, to promote certain marginal genres toward the "literary mainstream", and a spirit of general liberalization and democratization of life seems to have become a dominant value. According to Stone, contemporary Western culture has three preconceptions about marriage, all of which greatly foster the individuality versus social demands. The first is that there is a great difference between marriage for interest (money, status, power) and marriage for affect (love, friendship, sexual attraction), whereby marriage for interest is morally reprehensible. The second preconception is that sexual intercourse outside an emotional relationship is immoral, and so marriage for interest is a form of prostitution. The third is that personal autonomy, that is the pursuit of one's own happiness is paramount. Such ego-centrism is justified by saying that the well-being of the individual in fact contributes to the well-being of the group (70). Accordingly, it seems increasingly difficult to sustain the format of the traditional nuclear family as the single mode of familial living. The postmodern society seems to crush and change the framework of the nuclear family by allowing numerous other familial arrangements to be regarded as acceptable, as long as they make the

[45] One of the main features of postmodernism – whether in literature or art is the incredulity to the universal stories, "metanarratives" (Lyotard xxiv). What is true for some does not have to be true for all. Postmodernism erases boundaries between genres, blurs the distinction between high and low art, denies traditional hierarchies and questions great "truths" that we have believed in for centuries. The traditional family is one of these truths or hierarchies that is being questioned and redefined according to the needs and tastes of the postmodern individual. "Like postmodern culture, contemporary family arrangements are diverse, fluid and unresolved" (Stacey 17). After all, "Postmodernism believes that we should celebrate difference, plurality, the pied and dappled nature of our cultures" (Eagleton 32).

individual(s) in question happy. As a result, women today feel more empowered and often opt for single parenting as their life choice, since they must no longer depend on the man for financial support. Homosexual people wish to form families with the people they love instead of being forced to either live the lives of isolation if they stay true to themselves, or lead double lives, using a traditional heterosexual family as a cover.

These social changes bring about the need for a change in the paradigm of the family, both the actual and the literary one, because "other" kinds of families face various social or legal problems, since they are not recognized as legitimate familial forms. The fear that the acceptance of other types of families will jeopardize the traditional family form in such a way that it will become extinct and cause moral decline of the human kind is the most frequent argument of those unwilling to accept the possibility of coexistence of several different family types. Jodi Picoult addresses this issue in her novel *Sing You Home* by allowing it to be voiced through the character of an evangelical priest:

> We wouldn't be here if the homosexuals weren't promoting their own agenda, their own activism. If we sit back, who's going to speak for the rights of the traditional family? If we sit back, who's going to make sure our great country doesn't become a place where Johnny has two mommies and where marriage is as God intended it to be – between a man and woman? (Picoult 129)

The hegemonic discourse, of course, resorts to the kind of rhetoric according to which no coexistence is possible. Typically, a change of ideologies seems to imply a total annihilation of all traces of the previous ideology along with its leaders, followers and symbols (consider, for example, the consequences of the fall of the totalitarian communist regimes in some Eastern European countries, where the change of the government also implied the removal and, in some cases, destruction of monuments and the rewriting of national history). In other words, the "new" will replace the "old", and thus cause a cataclysmic ending of an era. Yet, this is not the

pattern we may observe in the case of the traditional family. In reality, despite centuries of social change, persistently accompanied by apocalyptic forecasts of the doom of the traditional family, nothing has yet jeopardized the traditional nuclear family in such a way as to annihilate it. More precisely, the most obvious mutation the traditional family has suffered is the change from a family where the father is the sole bread winner into the family where both parents work. Still, this has not made the traditional nuclear family obsolete. Instead, in line with the postmodernist worldview, it allows for the possibility to start families that are somewhat different from the traditional one.

In his 1995 anthropological study of supermodernity and space, *Non-Places*, Marc Augé suggests that in Western societies "the individual wants to be a world in himself; he intends to interpret the information delivered to him by himself and for himself" (30). Such a strong sense of individuality is even reflected in the Catholic practice because now "practicing Catholics intend to practise [sic] in their own fashion" (Augé 30). The idea that Catholics can interpret their faith for themselves, without any mediation of the Church and priests, is revolutionary to the extent that, in this context, the desire of the contemporary person to define his or her own terms regarding his private and familial life becomes self-evident and natural. The rise of "the postmodern sensibility, the belief that one mode is worth the same as another" (Augé 21) can easily be applied to the family, just as it is applied to art, literature or architecture. In that sense, the family may be perceived as a metaphorical place subject to change. "The image of a closed and self-sufficient world" is, according to Augé, "not a lie but a myth, roughly inscribed on the soil, fragile as the territory whose singularity it founds, subject (as frontiers are) to possible readjustment" (38-39). The "place" that we call a family cannot be defined easily. Its boundaries can be and are constantly readjusted by those who decide to live together, just as boundaries of

any other place and non-place[46] are fluid: "Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten" (Augé 64). Because one can never fully and unequivocally define oneself or one's relations to other people, it is also impossible to fully and unequivocally define what, who and under what terms constitutes our family.

The Western society has gone through a dramatic change. Divorce rates have soared, unmarried cohabitation and homosexuality ceased to be cultural taboos, and people have become more and more disinclined to marry or remarry. The new lifestyles and varied intimate relations led to a "definitional quandary", that is a general confusion about "what kinds of relationships can legitimately be regarded as constituting a family" (Dizard and Gadlin 6):

> It is no longer possible to declare with confidence that a family consists of husband, wife, and their child(ren). Such a definition excludes the nearly twenty-five percent of American households that are headed by a single parent. It also excludes homosexual couples as well as heterosexual couples who have not married. And of course it excludes those who have chosen to live communally as well as those who prefer to live alone. (Dizard and Gadlin 6)

According to Dizard and Gadlin, the traditional "marks" of a familial relationship such as blood relation, legal relation established by means of a marriage contract or sacrament (in Roman-Catholic Church) and spatial relation established by the fact that members of a nuclear family live together under one roof, should be abandoned for a new concept called *familism*, that is "a reciprocal sense of commitment, sharing, cooperation, and intimacy that is taken as defining

[46] Augé defines place as "relational, historical and concerned with identity" (63). Such places are places of worship or of different social bonds. A non-place represents the opposite of place: one that cannot be defined as relational, historical or concerned with identity, such as transit points (airports), means of transport, temporary abodes (hotels, motels, refugee camps), supermarkets, and so on.

the bonds between family members" (6). Clearly, family can only exist as an emotional institution in which none of the members is "forced" by blood, law or housing arrangements to participate in family life, but chooses to do so of their own free will. Family implies "a set of 'loving obligations' that entitles members of the family to expect warmth and support from fellow family members" (6) making home the base "to which you can always return" and find people who are willing to love you unconditionally, be loyal to you and even make sacrifices for you (7).

In line with this is Tara Parker-Pope's article published in the *New York Times* in December 2010, entitled "The Happy Marriage Is the 'Me' Marriage", in which she claims that people no longer wish to be married for children, religion or other practical reasons but seek a meaningful, sustainable relationship which will make their lives more interesting and provide a self-expanding experience (1), suggesting that the focus is now on the individual and his or her personal benefit from sustaining a relationship with someone, instead of on the potential benefit that the relationship may bring to others (children, family, community, or society). Similarly, sociological research has proven that values and norms have indeed shifted, bringing into foreground concepts such as *growth*, *self-realization* and *fulfillment*. This was in great deal caused by the appearance of new, "humanistic" psychologies of Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers and Erich Fromm that put emphasis on growth and self-actualization as a way to maturity, whereby maturing is not a process of "settling-down" but of achieving one's potential. Thus, a significant rise in the expectations of personal happiness collides with the traditional concern and sacrifice for the family. Simultaneously, the traditional functions of the family such as caring for children and providing economic security are supplanted by functions that become equally, if not more, important: sexual fulfillment, intimacy and companionship (Mintz and Kellogg 205-206).

Talking about the crisis of the family or its transformation, it is important to note that "our desire to form families may remain strong, and in that sense the abstract idea of the family may be secure, but our capacity to sustain real families, and with them a sense of familism, is clearly questionable" (Dizard and Gadlin 8). In other words, there is "a contrast between the family lives many of us forge and those we claim to esteem" (Stacey, *In the Name of the Family* 10). For the modern person, the family is supposed to be a place of security, cooperation and mutual caring because the world outside, that is the market, is highly competitive, amoral and cruel. Today it seems that the traditional nuclear family cannot provide that kind of security and with it the sense of "familism" for everyone. Therefore, unconventional families are being created: those which do not necessarily consist of a mother, father and their biological children. Nevertheless, the family of today is still a place of security and warmth regardless of the fact who its members are; the focus is on how they make each other feel.

Contemporary English fiction dealing with the issues of family and marriage clearly reflects these changes by taking into account the diversity of human characters and desires and thus representing different types of families. Hanif Kureishi's cynical male protagonists search for freedom from the restraints of a legalized marriage, but at the same time they crave for intimacy. Nick Hornby's protagonists are similarly looking for human connection, an experience that is deeper than shopping or listening to music, but one that does not necessarily have to be in the form of a traditional family. Tony Parsons writes about Harry Silver who is more concerned with his son and his own role as a father than the one as a husband or a career man. While there is an apparent – biologically, psychologically and socially explainable – need to have close relationships with other people and to procreate, it becomes clear that this does not have to happen within the framework of the traditional nuclear family which seems to have become "an endangered species" (Parsons, *Man and Boy* 33).

In *Sing You Home* Picoult shows just how central the idea of starting a family is in a human life, making it one of the basic stages in the cycle of life: "it's a story most guys can identify with: you're born, you grow up, you start a family, you die" (49). Similarly, despite his failed marriage, Victor, a character from Kureishi's *Intimacy*, is still haunted by the idea of marrying the "right" woman and having a successful marriage:

> there has always been one thing he has wanted. To have another chance at an *ideal* love, to marry *the right* woman, before it is too late … for him to play on the floor with his children … to see if he can do it as it is *meant to be* done … to know that this *most important of things* is not beyond him. After all, a lot of people do it and some of them are happy. (83, my emphasis)

Victor's attitude reflects the cultural significance given to the institution of family. It appears that the feeling of self-esteem and success is based on a person's ability to start a family and sustain it for life. Although "family" remains, and will arguably always remain, the basis from which and on which we build our identities, the idea of a traditional nuclear family as the only acceptable mode for communal living is changing. The "traditional nuclear family" refers to a family consisting of a father and mother, who are each other's first and only spouses and their children, all living together under one roof. Today, families take up many different forms and the traditional nuclear family, although surely not extinct, is no longer the single mode of familial life in the Western society. For this reason, the thesis will be based on the analysis of a selection of contemporary literary texts dealing with familial issues and try not only to determine the reasons why the traditional nuclear family no longer presents an equally satisfying familial model for everyone, but also to identify other familial models that seem to appear as literary representations of family.

Family is, indeed, a universal unit, but in the humanist sense, which prioritizes the symbolic meaning of the concept as well as its practical function: to provide constant love,

support and safety to its members, rather than form or structure.[47] A new family ideal cannot be proposed "because no singular family structure or ideology has arisen to supplant the modern family" (Stacey 17), but we also do not aim to propose a *single* family ideal. On the contrary, the nuclear family is being replaced by a number of different types of families that correspond to different needs of postmodern individuals. The fact that units consisting of different members can perform the same function proves that when discussing family, we ought to move away from form towards meaning. Paradoxically, this thesis will focus on the form, more precisely, the plurality of family forms, to prove that what makes a group of people a family is not necessarily a specific form, but necessarily the function they have and the meaning that their relationship provides to those close to them. In the age of ideology criticism there is no other way, but to try and live with "the plurality of ideologies" (Sloterdijk 18) which occurs as one theory after another is being unmasked or outdone and then succeeded by new one(s). In that sense, contemporary literature deals with a *plurality* of familial forms, acknowledging that there is not one ultimate truth, path or structure. Speaking of the etymology of the word family, Williams notes:

> It is a fascinating and difficult history, which can only be partly traced through the development of the world. But it is a history worth remembering when we hear that "the family, as an institution, is breaking up" or that, in times gone by and still hopefully today, "the family is the necessary foundation of all order and morality". In these and similar contemporary uses it can be useful to remember the major historical variations, with some of their surviving complexities, and

[47] In his *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* Friedrich Engels asserts that the family began to evolve in prehistoric times by continually narrowing the circle of its members (734), suggesting that the family structure is by no means fixed or unchangeable.

> the sense, through these, of radically changing definitions of primary relationships. (133-134)

Contemporary English language fiction portrays family in ways that suggest obsoleteness and inconsiderateness of "imposing a narrow definition of legitimate family structure on a heterogeneous population" (Stacey, *In the Name of the Family* 5). Fiction dealing with family has also moved away from the idea of domestic fiction as it was perceived more than hundred years ago. For example, men appear both as authors and main protagonists of "domestic" fiction, that is fiction dealing with family and home, which was not the case in the past because family was a topic reserved for women. While most, though not all, of the nineteenth-century domestic fiction was considered trivial or performed a specific function of *female* emancipation, family fiction today discusses home differently. It does not only talk about equal partners who are trying to find personal pleasures in a highly demanding and frustrating society, but also about a kind of *male* emancipation, where men and fathers are increasingly exchanging their interest in the public life for the private life as a venue where men can find new feelings of accomplishment through their relationship to their children. It also discusses the emancipation of homosexual couples, that is their struggle to be recognized as family. At the same time, contemporary fiction represents home and domesticity as a very undesirable, prison-like sort of place[48] where people lose their freedom and their individual identities.

The multiplicity of approaches to the question of family signals a change in the basic ideology of the Western society. The "deep ambivalence" about the familial roles, the nostalgia for older ideals of family life, such as lifelong marriage and full-time mothering of children,

[48] The idea of marriage as a prison is not a postmodern or contemporary invention, but a constant feature in the perception of marital institution. For example, the medieval men spoke of m*olestiae nuptiarum*, the pains of marriage, and the protagonist of Mary Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel *The Wrongs of Woman* expresses the exact same view of marriage as a prison: "Marriage has bastilled me for life" (2.34).

and the desire for more freedom, flexibility and self-absorption, causes tensions in the process of juggling individual, familial and social demands, which, so it seems, results in the forming of different types of families. Namely, there is not one ideal picture or form of the family that can help accomplish and foster the harmony in each individual's life. Old assumptions about the traditional family roles and expectations have eroded, and the families have become less uniform (Mintz and Kellogg 236-237). Some of these "new" forms at the same time reflect the dynamics of a traditional nuclear family and take advantage of certain legal options currently available. For example, people who have been divorced may wish to get remarried and use this as a second chance to form a new traditional nuclear family with a new partner and children from previous marriage(s). These families are called blended families. Similarly, there are families in which the parents never made their relationship official by means of a legal or religious ceremony, but they still technically function as a nuclear family. However, there are other types of families that challenge the structure and dynamics of a traditional nuclear family: single-parent families, childless families, families where both spouses are of the same sex and families that include friends as their full members. Moreover, in line with Freud's idea of the pleasure principle, Wilde's idea of Individualism, and with the possibilities that our fast-paced consumerist culture offers, many people simply choose single life as their preferred option.

The plurality of contemporary voices demands the plurality of choices in every aspect of life, even or especially in the private sphere such as the family. Instead of lamenting and feeling nostalgia for the traditional family as it once was, it is necessary "to come to grips with the postmodern family condition by accepting the end of a singular ideal family and begin to promote better living and spiritual conditions for the diverse array of real families we actually inhabit and desire" (Stacey, *In the Name of the Family* 11). The subsequent chapters attempt to identify the "array of families" as they are represented in selected contemporary literary English language texts.

## 2. (De)Mythologizing Marriage: Tensions Within and Around the Traditional Nuclear Family in Contemporary English Fiction

> So marriage has persisted, now, for yet another thousand years, shedding its skins, dowries giving way to prenups, vows to wishes, virginity to "virginity". (Harrison 83)

The traditional nuclear family is the familial form sanctified by history and culture, and its function and functioning, as well as its qualities, are well-known. This, however, does not mean that literary representations of nuclear families imply pastoral depictions of things familiar and comforting. On the contrary, contemporary literature often tackles the obvious tensions between the requirements of a traditional family life and the desires of contemporary literary protagonists, pointing to the unequivocal conclusion that the traditional nuclear family cannot be (remain) the only/right choice for everyone. While the requirements of family life resemble in many ways the requirements of a business company, the desires of literary protagonists still seem to be heavily influenced by the mythological ideas of the perfect mate and eternal love. Contemporary authors detect the incongruence between reality and desire, and it becomes the focus of their interest. Some of them, like Tony Parsons for example, view this as a definite sign that nuclear families are "dying out" (*The Family Way* 41). However, it rather seems that the ambivalence between desire and dread with which literary protagonists view the traditional nuclear family points to the fact that certain traits of contemporary life, such as consumerist lifestyle and cynical worldview, put additional strain on the traditional nuclear family model making it harder, but not impossible, to sustain.

Many of the tensions that appear in connection with the traditional nuclear family life result from the ambivalence toward marriage. For some, marriage evokes an idyllic romantic picture synonymous with a positive security and stability that ensues after a turbulent youth, like it does, for example, for Florence O'Hara in Hanif Kureishi's short story "Strangers When We Meet": "I imagined in some superstitious way that marriage would solve my problems and make me feel secure" (169). However, even more often marriage is represented not as an end to loneliness and insecurity, but as the end of life as an individual knows it with a strong negative connotation. For example, Rob, the protagonist of Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* fears marriage as it reminds him of prison: "See, I've always been afraid of marriage, because of, you know, ball and chain, I want my freedom, all that" (318). Harry Silver, the protagonist of *Man and Boy* suggests that getting married is a voluntary act of isolation from the world. With the decision to get married one gives up on personal freedom and dedicates all one's resources and vital energy to the family: "Gina and I found ourselves separated from the rest of the world by our wedding rings. … Our little family was on its own. … Yes, we had given up our freedom" (Parsons 12). The idea of a self-sufficient, closed-off family may seem romantic, but – like most romances – it is usually unsustainable.

In *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages*, Phyllis Rose defines marriage as "a narrative construct" (7) influenced by the narrative tradition of romance. Like romance, the idea of marriage is carefully constructed in order to produce a specific effect limiting thus the possibilities of human life:

> The plots we choose to impose on our own lives are limited and limiting. And in no area are they so banal and sterile as in this of love and marriage. Nothing else being available to our imaginations, we will filter our experience through the romantic clichés with which popular culture bombards us. … [This is] a betrayal of our inner richness and complexity. (Rose 8)

Similarly, in her essay "Connubial Abyss: The Mysterious Narrative of Marriage", Kathryn Harrison sums up the story of marriage as "Boy loves girl; girl loves boy; boy and girl transcend obstacles to that love" (83). It is precisely because of the romanticized notion of marriage as a union of two soul mates who live "happily ever after", as ambiguous as that may be, that most marital tensions seem to occur. Because such stories usually end right after the perfect couple is married, or begin after the marriage has already been unraveled by adultery or disaffection, the readers cannot know what preceded its breakdown (Harrison 83). This, in effect, fosters the myth of a perfect love through the implication that the spouses were not "meant for each other" after all. It also leaves the readers fully unprepared for the marital life since it falsely represents romance as both the crucial marital ingredient and its purpose, giving thus people "unrealistic expectations about relationships" (Hornby, *High Fidelity* 278). Victor, one of the minor characters in Kureishi's *Intimacy*, voices the humanity's greatest wish: "there has always been one thing he has wanted. To have another chance at *ideal* love, to marry the right woman" (83, my emphasis), and so does Rob's depiction of young people's expectations of love: "that dreamy anticipation you have when you're fifteen or twenty or twenty-five, even, and you know that *the most perfect person in the world* might walk into your shop or office or friend's party at any moment" (Hornby, *High Fidelity* 305, my emphasis). Contrary to this, the daily routine of a marriage causes friction between spouses as it demands of them to perform all sorts of roles for which they are largely unprepared or disinclined to do; namely, they have subscribed to "happily ever after", and whatever this may mean, it certainly cannot mean doing the dishes and getting up at three in the morning to comfort a screaming baby. As Rob explains, these romantic ideas are so ingrained into the human subconscious that even if life proves us otherwise, we still tend to cling onto our romantic notions: "it's much harder to get used to the idea that my little-boy notion of romance, of negliges and candlelit dinners at home and long, smoldering glances, has no basis in reality at all" (*High Fidelity* 274).

For the most part, the fixed, overdetermined picture of the traditional nuclear family is what provokes ambivalent feelings toward it. In fact, all contemporary literary texts that thematize family matters do so by positioning the protagonists in some sort of a conflict with the traditional nuclear family. The protagonists either struggle to maintain their traditional families despite all the difficulties and frustrations that arise from it, as is the case with Harry Silver in both *Man and Boy* and *Man and Wife*, or they attempt to create different modes of family life because they are sure that the traditional model is inadequate. Such is the case with Jay in *Intimacy*. For many literary protagonists the tensions in marriage arise from the basic notion of inequality incorporated into the civilized Western perception of marriage. Contemporary marriage resembles a company in which various duties and chores must be done in order to sustain it, and in which one of the partners is usually "in charge" whereas the other one does the actual work. Although Friedrich Engels recognized monogamy as essentially misogynistic because it represents the actualization of gender inequality, that is male supremacy (738-745),[49] the late twentieth and the early twenty-first century is a time of (at least nominally if not practically) emancipated spouses in the Western world. Both of them have the right to work and pursue their personal interests as well as enjoy the rewards of family life. Still, not even this seems to be the "perfect" solution. The possibilities that became available with emancipation made lives even more complex. Apart from having successful careers, which often includes long hours at work, both partners today should also do the housework, look well,

[49] While women lost the sexual freedom they had in the prehistoric society, men did not. Monogamy kept the wives in check in order to ensure the direct line of inheritance via legitimate heirs. At the same time, men were enjoying the advantages of adultery, essentially a byproduct of monogamy (Engels 738-745). In ancient Greece, for example, "A man's marriage did not restrict him sexually" (Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* 147), or otherwise. Greek men were allowed to have more than one woman in their life, so as to be able to satisfy all their desires. Demosthenes explained: "Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians to our households" (qtd. in Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* 143). Because the same freedom that was granted to men was not granted to women, such familial arrangements cannot be considered moral by today's standards. Still, they seem to have been quite clever, for men at least, because they took into account the multitude of roles that the spouses are expected to perform. Today, monogamy does not simply imply sexual faithfulness, but imposes an obligation to take on all other responsibilities necessary to sustain family life.

and be gentle and caring both to each other and the children. The ramifications of the overwhelming expectations are exhausted, dissatisfied parents who lack the time and energy to enjoy each other and their children, and who perceive marriage as heavy toil. Despite the fact that we are all different and have different expectations in life, society expects of us all to fit into a very elaborately constructed framework of familial life, regardless of whether this complies with our individual desires, abilities and expectations in life or not. Jodi Picoult addresses this issue in her novel *Sing You Home* in which she questions the appropriateness of the myth of the perfect family:[50]

> the traditional family. Surely you remember it…: a husband and a wife, two kids. White picket fence. A minivan. Maybe even a dog. A family that went to church on Sundays and that loved Jesus. A mom who baked homemade Toll House cookies and was a Boy Scout den mother. A dad who played catch, who walked his daughter down the aisle at her wedding. (347)

It is precisely because such a definitive picture of the family has been constructed and because there are such elaborate expectations of women and men that people fail to be successful at it: there are simply too many things that can go wrong. More importantly, there are too many things that one may not *want* for oneself: to go to church, to be a cookie-baking mom, to own a minivan or even have children. Because people are often unable to reconcile their personal expectations with those of the society, the traditional nuclear family frequently turns out to be a dysfunctional form. In the novel, Picoult describes the failure of a marriage in which the spouses, Max and Zoe, had different expectations. While he enjoyed their life as a married couple, she was obsessed with the desire to have a baby. Their inability to create a "perfect" family destroys their marriage and, eventually, they find other partners with whom they seem

[50] Picoult's novel will be dealt with more extensively in the chapter on homosexual marriages, as it centers on the struggles of two female partners who wish to get married and start a family.

to find exactly what they are looking for. Max enjoys a loving, childless relationship with Liddy, and Zoe finds both romantic and parental happiness in her marriage to another woman, Vanessa, with whom she has a child.

In his novel, *Intimacy*, Kureishi depicts one such family through the first-person narration of the main protagonist, Jay, who reflects on his family life and the family life of his friends, Asif and Victor, just before he is about to abandon his wife and two sons. His monologue on his memories, fears, desires and expectations reveal that he is obsessed with finding his "true love", which his unmarried wife, Susan, is not. Jay reveals himself to be a "Self-obsessed, miserable" man whose life is "polluted by notions of romance" (Harrison 86). Although he tries to find faults in Susan and thus get an excuse for leaving, we learn that he has been having various affairs for years. He suffers from "chronic unfaithfulness" (Harrison 86) which seems to be his trial and error method of finding his soul mate. He is unable to truly commit to anyone of his sexual partners, and he does not want to accept the responsibilities of marriage. The fact that, as Kathryn Harrison points out in her essay "Connubial Abyss: The Mysterious Narrative of Marriage", "Marriage is work, sometimes drudgery, the same as required to build any lasting structure" (88) is unappealing to the self –obsessed romantic, and instead of recognizing the value of a lasting structure (relationship), he is only able to focus on "the burden of effort" (Harrison 88), claiming: "There is little pleasure in marriage; it involves considerable endurance, like doing a job one hates. You can't leave and you can't enjoy it" (*Intimacy* 50).

Jay's obsessive search for "true love" through a series of meaningless sexual encounters may also be a consequence of his feeling of entrapment in the familial relationship with Susan and their children. The act of forming a traditional family by means of a contract, legal or religious, does have a limiting effect on certain liberties of the partner. To illustrate, in a traditional family there is a strong demand for sexual exclusiveness, not as a choice, but an obligation. Our "genital love," to use Freud's term (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 58), is

supposed to be of monogamous nature and "altruistic" (Freud, *Three Essays* 73), that is reproductive and heterosexual. Taking all this into account, it seems logical that for someone like Jay marriage and family no longer represent a "safe harbor", the end of search for one's soul mate and the ultimate goal in one's private life through which all social, cultural and biological expectations become realized. Instead, marriage is perceived as a rather restrictive union, not just in the sexual sense, which pressures the spouses into behaving a certain way. Moreover, the wedding band that Jay refused by refusing to get married can very well be a symbolic rejection of the marital shackles.

Kureishi's fiction in general, but *Intimacy* especially, is marked by the continuous ambivalence between the protagonists' desire for romance, which involves a lifetime love with a soul mate, and the need to expose marriage as a "job one hates". Dizard and Gadlin recognize this ambivalence in their sociological research explaining that "We may still wish for 'happily ever after,' but it is no longer believable" (97). To show his contempt for the institution of marriage which cannot guarantee eternal love, but also to retain the appearance of "freedom", Jay has never agreed to marry his partner, Susan, although they live together and have two sons. Despite the fact that "cohabitation does not resolve the dilemmas inherent in any attempt to combine long-term commitment with recognition of each partner's needs for autonomy" (Dizard and Gadlin 142) and that technically (and in most Western countries even legally) cohabitation with children counts (and functions) as a traditional nuclear family,[51] Jay feels that he is making a statement by renouncing the traditional way: "I still took it for granted that not marrying was a necessary rebellion. The family seemed no more than a machine for the

[51] This paper treats cohabitation as marriage, because "the longer a cohabiting relationship endures, the more it is likely to resemble a formal marriage. Over time, partners inevitably grow accustomed to and dependent upon one another such that dissolving the relationship is likely to be no less traumatic than it would had they been formally married" (Dizard and Gadlin 142). Thereby, cohabitating childless partners reflect the dynamics of a childless family, whereas cohabitating partners who have children reflect the dynamics of a traditional nuclear family.

suppression and distortion of free individuals. We could make our own original and flexible arrangements" (*Intimacy* 60). These arrangements, according to Jay, supposedly mean that one does not need to make any sacrifices but has a prerogative to only enjoy the (illusory) freedom and the good things in life, whereas marriage seems to prove that the good things are long gone: "people marry when they're at their most desperate, … the need for certificate is a sure sign of an attenuated affection" (*Intimacy* 76). This is ironic, of course, since in practice he simply replicated the arrangement he claimed to despise. Moreover, his relationship with Susan has not been saved by his refusal to marry her. Instead, they have long ago passed from the stage of attenuated affection and arrived at the point when what they feel for each other is close to contempt, which makes Jay miserable: "There are few things more desolate than undressing in the dark beside a woman who won't wake up for you" (*Intimacy* 95). In addition, his constant referrals to Asif, his happily married friend who still adores his wife Najma, and the cynicism with which he describes Asif's steadfast infatuation with Najma, only go to show that Jay, in fact, "self-protectively ridicules the very kind of union that has become his unattainable grail" (Harrison 86). He is jealous of their happiness to the extent that at times he fantasizes of raping Najma just to see "what was there, what the secret was" (Kureishi, *Intimacy* 37).

Jay's destructive impulse resembles one of a child so fascinated by a toy that it needs to break it in order to "understand" it. Similarly, many of those who seem unable to find happiness in their own family find other people's functional nuclear families fascinating. In *Man and Boy,* for example, Harry Silver's wife, Gina, whose father "had buggered off when Gina was four years old, and she had grown up pining for the security of family life" (19), is enthusiastic about the fact that Harry grew up in a traditional home, which she perceives as a rare thing:

> Families like us, we're practically an endangered species. Gina acted as though my mum and my dad and I were the last of the nuclear families, protected wild life to be cherished and revered and wondered over. … These days coming from

> an unbroken home is like having independent means, or Paul Newman eyes, or a big cock. It's one of life's true blessings, given to just a lucky few. (Parsons 33)

In his other novel, *The Family Way*, which features a range of different families,[52] Parsons reiterates the idea that nuclear families are "dying out in this country" (41) and represents the protagonists who have grown up in a traditional family, like Paulo, as lucky and rare: "Some of his [Paulo's] friends lived with just their mother, one of them lived with just his father, many were in strange patchwork families, made up of new fathers, half-brothers and stepmothers. His own family was much more simple, and old-fashioned, and he was grateful for that fact" (*The Family Way* 41). According to Kureishi's Jay, living within a traditional family is a matter of talent and personal preference, not the only proper way to live: "But why do people who are good at families have to be smug and assume it is the only way to live, as if everybody else is inadequate? Why can't they be blamed for being bad at promiscuity?" (*Intimacy* 38). Jay's ironic comment should not be read as an apology for promiscuity, although Jay himself is indeed promiscuous, but as a criticism of the uniformity that is still expected of people in a highly individualized world. Goods are being customized and sold as if made uniquely and exclusively for one particular customer, whereas the most intimate mode of living, the familial arrangement, is being forced upon us in the form that has not been changed for decades or even centuries, and which, after all, is quite arbitrary.

[52] *The Family Way* is about three sisters, Megan, Cat and Jessica Jewell. Megan, the youngest, is a doctor who becomes a single mother after a one night stand. Cat served as a mother figure to her two younger sisters after their mother Olivia had left them to pursue her career and a life of pleasure, and she is not interested in having children of her own. She and her boyfriend, Rory, enjoy the life of a childless family until Megan has a baby and Cat begins to doubt her choices. Jessica is married to Paulo and is desperate to have children, but is unable to. Paulo is perfectly happy in their childless family, but to make Jessica happy, they adopt a baby. Paulo's brother Michael is married to Naoko and they have a daughter, Chloe, but Michael is unable to accept the dynamics (or boredom) of the family life and has an affair with a colleague from work.

Although essentially unhappy with his family life, Jay, the narrating voice of *Intimacy*, allows for a possibility of happiness if only we would allow ourselves to accept that we are different and that the same things, or same family arrangements, cannot bring happiness to everyone:

> For Aristotle the aim of life is "successful activity" or happiness, which for him is inseparable from, though not the same as, pleasure. … But perhaps happiness – that condition in which there is completion, where one has everything, and music, too – is an acquired taste. Certainly I haven't acquired it in this house. … yet velvet curtains, soft cheese, compelling work and boys who can run full-tilt – it isn't enough. And if it isn't, it isn't. There's no living with that. The world is made from our imagination; … Wanting makes it thrive; … You can only see what you are inclined to see, and no more. We have to make the new. (*Intimacy* 37-38)

Instead of perpetuating the one model of family life for centuries, it may well make sense to allow for some freedom in arranging our private lives because unhappy families have no positive impact either on the individuals that make up a particular family, or on the society that is comprised of such families. Jay concludes: "My unhappiness benefits no one; not Susan, not the children, not myself" (*Intimacy* 37).

Despite "the temptations of self-sufficiency, the idea that we can secure everything we need within" (*Intimacy* 62-63), the finality of the act of "promising" oneself to someone else for life is often seen as limiting and leading toward predictable outcomes. In Jhumpa Lahiri's "A Temporary Matter" the dullness and predictability of marriage is symbolized by the present the young wife gave her husband for their first anniversary: "The vest depressed him. 'My wife gave me a sweater-vest for our anniversary', he complained to the bartender, his head heavy with cognac. 'What do you expect?' the bartender had replied. 'You're married'" (18). The event echoes many well-known jokes about marriage, anniversary presents and desperate

husbands sitting and drinking at bars because marriage killed all the joy in their lives. Even the presents, something one generally looks forward to, become boring and depressing in marriage.[53] This line of thought contributes to one of the paradoxes of contemporary Western life, namely that getting married and starting a family is seen as a rite of passage towards adulthood and maturity. In other words, contrary to the undisputed human disposition towards pleasure, one of our basic social goals is to enter a state in which it is, apparently, very difficult to experience it.

Because humans are, as Foucault theorized, "desiring individuals" who practice on themselves and on others a hermeneutics of desire (*The Use of Pleasure* 5), it became unacceptable to perpetuate marriage as an institution resembling prison,[54] an isolated place where one has to endure a pleasureless, drab reality and simply devote one's time to fulfilling one's duties. Although getting married and having children still seems to have a central importance for many, fewer and fewer Westerners tend to have solely these expectations in life. There is a prevalent attitude according to which the children will no longer take precedence over other commitments but will have to compete with parents' careers and other interests which the parents refuse to give up on for the benefit of dedicating themselves to family life alone (Dizard and Gadlin 96). This attitude is the origin of a sort of a "crisis" of the traditional family, which is not necessarily the result of the questioning of its justification and of its purpose in the postmodern world but of the desire to construct family life in such a way as to take into account the individual desires of family members, most notably parents. Through their desires, people try to discover the truth of their being (Foucault *The Use of Pleasure* 7),[55] which is why

[53] A Croatian brewery released a beer commercial to the same point just before Christmas 2011. Four men receive disappointing Christmas presents from their families (a heart-shaped pillow, a sweater, a set of encyclopedia and a vacuum cleaner) and take comfort in drinking beer together.

[54] Indicated, among other things, by the well-known pejorative term "ball and chain," referring to a marriage partner or fiancée who weighs down his or her spouse or partner with all kinds of restrictions and demands.

[55] Although Foucault speaks of desire specifically in connection to sexuality, human desires can be seen as somewhat broader in meaning and goal. While it is undoubtedly true that people are often motivated by sexual

they are inclined to either avoid unpleasure or produce pleasure (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 3).

Admittedly, the security one expects from self-sufficient family life can often be interpreted as dullness and passiveness which ensues as a consequence of "having it all". What else is there to do, now that one has got a spouse and children? The pessimistic answer to that question seems to be: Nothing, but wait for one's imminent death. This attitude is so prevalent that married couples who do not reflect such entropy of vital energy and love appear to be strange and unusual, an exception to the rule. Such are, apart from Asif and his wife Najma, also Veronica's grandparents Ada and Charlie Spillane in Anne Enright's novel *The Gathering*: "They are lovers. Even though they are married they are lovers" (57). Their ability to feel passionately about each other is surprising because it is not in line with the perception of marriage as the official end to the life of pleasure, passion, and freedom that precedes it. In his novels, Nick Hornby takes a "middle-ground" approach toward family life. In *How to Be Good* and *High Fidelity* he depicts the gradual process of maturation of the novels' respective female and male protagonists. Katie Carr of *How to Be Good* feels suffocated and bored with her family life, and one day, on impulse, she asks her husband David for a divorce. He is going through a midlife crisis of his own in which he succumbs to the allure of the New Age movement. In his newly found goodness and enlightenment, he tolerates Katie's tantrums, her infidelity and her decision to spend her nights at a friend's bedsit in order to have some time for herself. He is determined to save the marriage, which in the end he manages to do because, in a somewhat bleak ending which suggests resignation rather than illumination, Katie realizes that the grass is not necessarily greener next door. Rob of *High Fidelity* is recapitulating his entire love life

desire, still other types of desire influence human behavior as well: the desire for material and professional success, the desire for fame, the desire to be loved and accepted as an individual, or the desire for pure joy, caused by whatever reasons.

once his girlfriend Laura leaves him because she sees no perspective in their relationship. His inability to commit to a serious job (he owns a small music shop and is practically making no money at all) or to their relationship is frustrating for Laura, who is a successful lawyer. Their break-up is a chance for both of them to reconsider their plans for the future, and after Laura's father dies, they admit that they love each other and want to stay together. Both Katie Carr and Rob ultimately realize that family life is neither a glamorous romance nor a prison sentence. Although Rob's viewpoint "that if you got married to someone you know you love, and you sort yourself out, it frees you up for other things" (*High Fidelity* 318) is somewhat more optimistic than Katie's, who says "there is a sort of virtue in having no choices remaining, I think. It certainly clarifies the mind" (*How to Be Good* 299), they both appear to become more reasonable and realistic in their expectations.

Unrealistic expectations of marriage, fuelled by Catholic demand for premarital abstinence, could be one of the reasons why during the 1950s, unlike any period before or after, marriage was thriving. As the narrator of David Lodge's novel *How Far Can You Go?* remarks, "In the fifties, everyone was waiting to get married" (30) because "You weren't allowed to have sex outside marriage, so naturally having sex came to seem the main point of getting married" (Lodge 198).[56] Simply stated, for a while marriage meant sexual freedom, the opportunity to practice and explore one's sexuality without guilt or fear which was imposed upon believers through the act of confession. For example, as Angela confessed to her fooling around with her boyfriend Dennis, she "emerged weeping from the confessional of the parish priest of Our Lady and St Jude's, and for a long time there was no touching of legs or breasts in any circumstances" (31). Conversely to most contemporary protagonists, after "all these years of the tiresome game

[56] Lodge's novel centers on the tensions between religion-imposed expectations and natural human impulses in the realm of sexuality and romantic relationship. Lodge depicts the lives of a group of young Catholics (Angela, Dennis, Adrian, Michael, Miles, Polly, Ruth, Violet, Edward and Tessa) during the period of some twenty years (1950s-1970s). (Mis)led by their religious beliefs, they make different familial choices as they struggle to reconcile their faith and personal desires.

of How Far Can You Go" (66) Angela and Dennis decided to get married in order to be able to "make love … properly" (66) because marriage was promoted as the institution that enables unburdened joy. However, even for the youth of the fifties, marriage quickly turned out not to be simply an arena for pleasure. Quite the contrary, "marriage, a lifetime's commitment" (Lodge 64) imposes such responsibilities to and expectations of the family members that marriage has become a synonym for the loss of freedom, constant arguments with your spouse, and lack of any kind of pleasure due to constant housework and responsibilities with one's children. This attitude leads towards a demythologization of marriage; it no longer represents an institution of eternal love and happiness, but a matter of business. In truth, it is impossible to keep a household without doing all sorts of chores, and the way that the spouses deal with physically tiring and tedious chores often becomes a decisive factor for marital success: "You might be in love, but whether you can get four chairs home together is another matter" (Kureishi, "Four Blue Chairs" 182). The problems occur when the household duties become so overwhelming or such an importance is given them, that the spouses' relationship becomes secondary. Then the businesslike nature of marriage gets its full expression, as Angela, one of the protagonists of David Lodge's novel *How Far Can you Go?*, clearly saw in her parents' marriage:

> her mother's part in all this had been a lifetime of drudgery, her father's a lifetime of worry. The family was like a shop – a tyrant that kept them slaving from morning till night, so that they never had a moment to themselves. Their sexual life was unimaginable … because they seemed so exhausted, so drained of tenderness to each other, by the clamorous demands of their offspring. (64)

The spouses do not have the time or energy to consider each other's feelings and desires, but worry about such things as the dishes, laundry and feeding the children. They take each other

for granted, as extra-help in the household, not necessarily out of lack of love, but because they perceive themselves as partners in the situation from which there is no real way out.

In this type of "business" dynamics, one of the spouses often embodies the role of an inconsiderate boss, whereas the other one plays the irritated worker who has to comply with the boss's instructions, and therefore resorts to irony or sarcasm in order to alleviate one's humiliation: "I go along with what Susan wants, but in an absurd parodic way, hoping she will see how foolish I find her. But she doesn't see it and, much to my annoyance, my co-operation pleases her" (*Intimacy* 31). This business-oriented behavior, the overemphasized need to "get things done" causes the alienation of the spouses, brought about by the feelings of resentment so intense, that partners begin to "dream up" an alternative life for themselves, one in which the partner has no place: "It isn't surprising that you become accustomed to doing what you are told while making a safe place inside yourself, and living a secret life" (*Intimacy* 33). In the same vein, the disillusionment may occur in children too, who, like Angela, after having witnessed or participated in the household "drudgery" (Lodge 64), feel reluctant to repeat the same:

> When she went home for weekends now, she threw herself into the domestic front line at her mother's side – washed, ironed, swept and hovered – but it seemed to make no difference: the dirty washing accumulated as fast as ever, people tramped through the house leaving mud and dirt everywhere… the shop bell pinged insistently. (Lodge 64-65)

In Tony Parsons' novel *Man and Boy*, marriage is also depicted as a tiresome, function-oriented institution, instead of a joyous union with a partner one loves. The novel's protagonist, Harry Silver, feels instrumentalized at home, but can not find the incentive or energy to make things more pleasurable for himself: "Still, you can get tired of always being the man who pays the mortgage and calls the plumber and can't put together the self-assembly furniture. You get

tired of being that man because in the end you don't feel like much of a man at all, more of a domestic appliance" (Parsons 44). Overworked partners seem to be at a loss to understand where "the romance" has gone. In our universal imagination, a married couple, having successfully overcome the obstacles that divided them, is supposed to grow old sitting together, arms wrapped around each other, looking at the sunset, constantly evoking the happy ending of a romance or a fairy tale. Of course, the contemporary couple is hindered only by minor obstacles (if even that) from being together. The real obstacles appear after they begin to share, not just their bed, but their kitchen and purse, too – an issue that the narrative of a perfect marriage and a perfect family blatantly ignores. To make things worse, the marital venture seems to offer less security than the business one: "As with any other business, in marriage there soon develops an accepted division of labour, and a code of rules. But couples are never quite sure if they are both playing by the same ones, or whether they might have changed overnight, without the other having been informed" (Kureishi, *Intimacy* 28).

No wonder then that the twenty-first century saw the rise of a new kind of fear: gamophobia – the fear of marriage. Marriage has become one of the epitomes of unpleasurable life, burdened with obligations and strife. According to an article in the Croatian edition of *Playboy* magazine (September 2008), more and more men prolong their decision to get married because they "expect only the worst from marriage" (Šarec 71).[57] Šarec claims that today, almost thirty percent of the planet's male population is gamophobic precisely because they perceive the marital union to be some sort of prison. In fact, they may be right in the sense that marriage is a difficult institution to uphold, and that it requires constant hard work. Asif, one of Kureishi's protagonists, testifies to this: "marriage is a battle, a terrible journey, a season in hell and a reason for living. You need to be equipped in all areas, not just the sexual" (*Intimacy* 39).

[57] Original text: "Upoznajte gamofobičare, sortu koja od braka uvijek očekuje samo najgore" (Šarec 71).

It follows that in order to make a marriage work, one must almost be at a par with medieval knights who were bestowed with all kinds of virtues needed to complete dangerous quests. The marital "battle" requires maturity, honesty, selflessness, persistence, strength and many other qualities from the spouses battling to make it work. However, as Nick Hornby points out, young people's priorities have changed, and not everyone perceives marriage as worthy of all kinds of sacrifice: "[monogamy is] against the law because we're all cynics and romantics, sometimes simultaneously, and marriage, with its clichés and its steady low-watt glow, is as unwelcome to us as garlic is to a vampire" (*High Fidelity* 179). It may even be argued that the demythologization of marriage, that is the loss of faith in the romantic version of it or the fear that one may not attain it despite the desire to do so, have fostered a cynical attitude towards marriage and family as a means of self-preservation, which is demonstrated by characters such as Kureishi's Jay who simultaneously searches for intimacy with a soul mate and looks down upon the marital happiness of others.

Consequently, instead of trying to start a family as soon as possible, young people today attempt to avoid sacrifice, especially for the benefit of others, and prefer to spend their time indulging in life's pleasures or working on their self-improvement. They sublimate their romantic expectations by investing both time and money in education, buying real-estate or just having fun (Šarec 72). "Marriage is a compromise that many men are not prepared to make"[58] (Šarec 73) because as single they have less responsibility and more personal freedom. In this sense, it should be easy to understand why starting a family no longer is a *desirable* (or pleasurable) task, and not only for men, but for women, too. In July 2011 *Lisa*, a weekly magazine for women, published an article entitled "Single girls. The time has come for women

[58] Original text: "Brak je kompromis na koji mnogi muškarci nisu spremni" (Šarec 73).

to walk through life alone and happy,"[59] to mention just one out of a myriad of similar articles being published daily in all sorts of magazines.

Nevertheless, centuries of human history prove that it is not quite plausible to believe in the idea that being single is what people truly desire. Rather, it may well be claimed that the new media trend of promoting the happy, wealthy single person into an ideal we should strive for is a direct result of the economic circumstances. In the consumerist society the single people represent a very important market segment because, in their lack of commitments that come with family life, they become dependent on the marketplace. Consumerism is important for sustaining the autonomy of the single person and the marketplace is a setting for social encounters, which is why the single individual is very important for the current economy. However, research has shown that the constant focus on the self always creates satisfaction of limited duration and even those who are professionally successful, financially well-off and have an active social and sexual life, still report that something is missing (Dizard and Gadlin 149). In her dissertation entitled "Signifiying Families in Postmodern American Fiction" Mary Katherine Holland makes a similar assumption. Namely, in her examination of four postmodern novels,[60] she finds that their protagonists, mostly unsuccessfully, try to overcome the disaffection and narcissistic solipsism bred by a culture saturated with mediation and simulation (vii). According to Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, the society is dominated by images which we continuously consume (43-56), and owing to the contemporary focus on the image, selflessness cannot be a virtue because it brings one no tangible or visible good. The potential feeling of moral or emotional satisfaction can only be enjoyed intimately; it cannot be "consumed" nor flaunted in front of friends as, for example, a new gadget or a new hairstyle

[59] Original text: "Single cure. Ovo je vrijeme žena koje kroz život koračaju same i sretne".
[60] Don DeLillo's *The Names* and *White Noise*, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, and Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves*.

can be. This shifts the focus of human interest from intimate relationships to sexual encounters, from intimate friendships to casual meetings with acquaintances, from reflection to intense experience which must always be followed quickly by another one, and from stability to movement and change:

> If only I could sit here contentedly in the middle of my life as children seem to in theirs … I've needed something to happen every day that showed a kind of progress or accumulation. I can't bear it when things go slack, when there isn't sufficient intensity.
>
> Susan … thinks we live in a selfish age. She talks of Thatcherism of the soul that imagines that people are not dependent on one another. In love, these days, it is a free market; browse and buy, pick and choose, rent and reject, as you like. There's no sexual and social security; everyone has to take care of themselves, or not. Fulfillment, self-expression and "creativity" are the only values. (*Intimacy* 103, 58)

As we consume goods, suggests Kureishi, so we also consume people, that is relationships, blaming in effect the capitalist production for the failure of the traditional family. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* Engels proposed the same:

> By transforming all things into commodities, it [the capitalist production] dissolved all ancient traditional relations, and for inherited customs and historical rights it substituted purchase and sale, "free" contract. … the closing of contracts presupposes people who can freely dispose of their persons, actions and possessions, and who meet each other on equal terms. To create such "free" and "equal" people was precisely one of the chief tasks of capitalist production. (748)

Such circumstances influenced a whole generation of people whom Kureishi refers to as the

> privileged and spoilt generation … the children of innocent consumerism and inheritors of the freedoms won by our seditious elders in the late sixties. … We weren't much restrained by morality or religion. Music, dancing and conscienceless fucking were our totems. We boasted that we were the freest there'd ever been. (*Intimacy* 58-59)

The protagonist of Hornby's *About a* Boy, Will Freeman, is a case in point. Will's freedom, or rather unattachment, is not only symbolized by his last name, but is also realized through his lifestyle. He refuses to have intimate friendships, his romantic relationships are acceptable only as occasional sexual encounters and he even refuses to commit to a job because he lives quite comfortably off of the royalties for a Christmas song his father wrote. Mesmerized by the ideology of simulation and consumption, he represents the contemporary individual who wishes to indulge in all sorts of pleasures, to be free and not responsible to anyone:

> Will wondered sometimes … how people like him would have survived sixty years ago … people who didn't really do anything all day, and didn't want to do anything much, either … there was no daytime TV, there were no videos, there were no glossy magazines … Which would have left books. Books! He would have had to get a job … Now, though, it was easy. There was almost too much to do. You didn't have to have a life of your own anymore; you could just peek over the fence at other people's lives, as lived in newspapers and *EastEnders* and films. (*About a Boy* 7-8)

The unrestrained life of a young, well-off, educated single person is the ultimate goal and so it seems that being selfless in a selfish society might be nothing other but stupid and naïve. In order to determine how "cool" he is, Will decides to complete a questionnaire in a men's magazine:

> he had slept with a woman he didn't know very well in the last three months (five points). He had spent more than three hundred pounds on a jacket (five points). He had spent more than twenty pounds on a haircut (five points). … he owned more than five hip-hop albums (five points). He had taken Ecstasy (five points), but in a club and not merely at home as a sociological exercise (five bonus points). … He was, according to the questionnaire, sub-zero! … You couldn't get much cooler than sub-zero! (*About a Boy* 6-7)

In his humorous way, Hornby pinpoints the essence, or rather the superficiality, of the contemporary individual. Casual sex and immodest consumption seem to be the most important personal traits, which confirms Freud's assertion that "people commonly use false standards of measurement – that they seek power, success and wealth for themselves and admire them in others, and that they underestimate what is of true value in life" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 10). The fact that a single person commits to relationship in ways that the consumer commits to commodities keeps one continually dissatisfied because it leaves hardly any possibility for achieving true intimacy. What is more, at times intimacy does not seem to be desirable at all: "Jessica and Will split up when Jessica wanted to exchange the froth and frivolity for something more solid; Will had missed her, temporarily, but he would have missed the clubbing more" (*About a Boy* 10). The "clutter" of family life seems like "disgrace" (8) to Will, and he doesn't even want to spend time with friends who have a family: "he had no use for them whatsoever. He didn't want to meet Imogen[61], or know how Barney was, and he didn't want to hear about Christine's tiredness, and there wasn't anything else to them anymore. He wouldn't be bothering with them again" (*About a Boy* 10). One could claim that, paradoxically, under the auspices of the humanistic psychology that fosters self-realization, the prevailing human

[61] John and Christine are Will's friends who have a two-year old son Barney and a week old daughter, Imogen.

attitudes, values and beliefs have become distinctly hedonistic, if not selfish – and thus less humane – in nature.

The reluctance to take up family life often does not simply result from the desire for personal freedom and independence, but also from fear of failure: what if I am not good enough to be a husband or wife, a mother or father? Yet, because they need to present themselves in such a way as to be "marketable", single people cannot afford to show their vulnerability. Instead, searching for some sort of external reassurance that they are not cowards or failures because they are single, they – like Will Freeman – read magazines and books that tell them that being single is "cool". The promotion of the "single ideal" is so dominant that to Katie, the narrator and main protagonist of Hornby's novel *How to Be Good*, it seems far more attractive than her married life with children. She is a middle-aged doctor who became somewhat bored with her marriage and ventured into an affair she had not especially enjoyed, but which had made her feel "new". Her husband David, is a sarcastic and bitter man and writes a column for the local paper called "Angriest Man in Holloway" in which he releases his frustrations by writing badly about anyone and anything. As Katie rashly asks for a divorce, this prompts her husband to spiritual conversion. David decides to become a man of virtue and invites his spiritual adviser named GoodNews to live with them. David's transformation is deeply upsetting to Katie and their children, Molly and Tom. He gives away his family's Sunday lunch and their son's computer, encourages people on their street to invite homeless people to live with them, and stops writing his current novel in favor of a new book called *How to Be Good* which he writes with GoodNews. Because she always seemed to be the good one, being a doctor, mother, and wife, Katie is confused by David's conversion to sainthood and displeased by the chaos that their life has turned into. All of a sudden, being single seems like the best possible life. So, Katie decides to spend her nights in the flat of her single friend, Janet, while Janet is away. Janet's flat seems like a haven, a place she can run away to so as to escape the chaos of family

life (and the ongoing marital crisis) and have some time for herself. Thus, every evening after she and her husband put their children to bed, she goes to Janet's bedsit and gets a feeling of single life. She spends time with other tenants, who are all young and single, and lead lives quite different from hers; they "drank wine, and listened to Air, who are French … to me Air sounded modern and childless and single, compared to say, Dylan, who sounds old and married and burdened – who sounds like home" (212-213). To Katie, home is the "old and burdened" place she is trying to run away from, whereas single life is about "cool music and white wine and letter boxes and a closed door when you need it" (213). Although it seems perfect for a while, Katie soon discovers that single life is not that "cool" at all and returns home. She realizes that David has become the kind of person she was – a good, kind one instead of being an angry cynic. His transformation forces her to reexamine her own values and to think about what is "good". For the Carr family, this turns out to be the traditional nuclear family life, "Molly, this is our family. You, me, Daddy, Tom. That's it. Not GoodNews, not Brian, not Monkey, nobody else" (292). They give GoodNews three months to find somewhere else to live: "He says he appreciates that he has been a burden on us; we are, after all, a middle class nuclear family, he knows that, and he should respect our, y'know, our nuclearness. We know we are being insulted, but we don't care very much" (298).

Moreover, according to Hornby's novel, traditional family life seems to be what everyone wants. Despite the fact that all Katie's new friends are single, it does not seem to be anybody's chosen lifestyle: "None of them want to be single, I suspect; even the other night there were lots of very forced, very self-deprecating, and very well-rehearsed jokes about their romantic status," a topic which "would come up in a discussion about anything at all" (*How to Be Good* 213). The forcedness of their jokes about themselves is, in fact, a defense mechanism. Their defensiveness proves that they do not desire single life, but are simply trying to make the best of it. It helps them avoid the potential embarrassment in case that someone else makes a remark

about their singleness proposing that their own inadequacy was the real reason for them not having a partner. So they force the issue out in the open themselves, preventing any further "uncontrolled" discussion. In the end, Katie is "sorry for them, if they are sorry for themselves" (213). By labeling their single status as temporary and undesirable, they prove that only a "proper" romantic relationship can give legitimacy to a person's life. The irony is in the fact that Katie runs away from home to be alone and unburdened, only to find that those who are alone and "unburdened," desire more than anything to find a partner and settle down. Hornby makes a similar point in *High Fidelity* when he asserts that the "single-person culture" (184), that is sleeping around with people you do not care about, is "sad" (184).

Magazines, newspapers, and TV commercials all "teach" us that satisfying one's individual needs is, or should be, our ultimate goal. The dominant consumerist ideology interpellates individuals as its subjects, by imperceptibly imposing "obviousnesses" on us, which we cannot but recognize as true (Althusser 170); indeed, what could be more "true" and necessary than taking care of ourselves? Sacrificing our own needs for the benefit of the family is therefore no longer perceived as a desirable, altruistic choice. Instead, one should turn to oneself, not because by sacrificing for others we have been wronged in some moral or psychological way, but because, as ridiculous as it may seem, sacrifice and the frustration it causes make you look old and worn out.[62] The final outcome is that "personal growth", which predominantly implies attractive and youthful looks, is one of the most important duties of the contemporary individual. Katie Carr is troubled by the amount of attention placed upon the superficial beauty and the "need" to appear as if one were leading a beautiful life. Being a wife

[62] Consider, for example, any of the commercials for L'Oreal beauty products (both for men and women) with the obligatory punch line "Because you're worth it", suggesting that we have the right (if not an obligation?) to first and foremost look well, that is be youthful, sexy and desirable, but also to consume beauty products without feeling guilty for spending money on ourselves and investing in our appearance. While there are courses, methods and books that may foster inner (psychological and emotional) self-improvement, they are not by far as visible or represented in the media as the products, methods and books that aim at our outer (physical) self-improvement.

and a working mother of two makes it hard for her to understand what the phrase "beautiful life" is supposed to mean:

> in a book review someone talks about how Virginia Woolf's sister Vanessa Bell led a "rich, beautiful life". I follow the phrase all the way up a blind alley. What can it possibly mean? How can one live a rich and beautiful life in Holloway? With David? And GoodNews? And Tom, and Molly, and Mrs. Cortenza? With twelve hundred patients, and a working day that lasts until seven o'clock in the evening some nights? If we don't live rich, beautiful lives, does it mean we've screwed up? Is it our fault? (*How to Be Good* 245)[63]

The empty phrases which bombard people from magazines and TV daily are only meant to make people consume, that is buy and spend more because that is how the late capitalist society functions. Unless people consume more and more, the market will collapse. However, this "simple" economic demand has severe consequences. In fact, the pressure to consume has a much deeper psychological impact on the public: bombarded by all sorts of beauty products, fashionable clothes and "healthy" food, people begin to feel anxiety that they are not cool enough or beautiful enough to be truly happy, and if they only had more money, they would find true happiness. Despite the fact that the categories of "rich" and "beautiful" are vague and

[63] Norma Jean, the protagonist of Bobby Ann Mason's "Shiloh", for instance, takes various courses for physical and educational self-improvement, ignoring at the same time both her feelings and the feelings of her husband Leroy. She does this in order to avoid talking to him about their grief and dissatisfaction, even though a serious conversation is the one thing that may help them deal with their problems and possibly even save their marriage. Her behavior points to the conclusion that mere self-focus can be helpful in dealing with a troubled relationship. Quite similar to this, in her novel *Changes* Ama Ata Aidoo describes the meeting of two close female friends whose remarks prove that their appearance is what matters the most in determining the quality of their life. After Opokuya complains that her family "squeezes her dry" (34), Esi looks at "her plump, smooth-skinned, shining-haired friend, and [thinks] if that's how people who are squeezed dry normally look, then long live the 'dry-squeeze'" (35), and compliments Opokuya on her full life because she is able to keep a solid marriage, raise four children, and have a job. Despite Esi's praise, Opokuya insists: "see how ragged I have become in the process of having a 'full life'" (35). Although we learn that she is truly overworked and that her duties largely surpass those of her husband, what worries Opokuya the most is her appearance. Her anxiety is rooted both in the superficial standards of the contemporary world, which values the image over substance and in the traditional view according to which the woman is responsible for the home and children. If she wishes to work, too, well, she simply must find a way to manage all that on her own, without complaints.

lead one right "up a blind alley", people nonetheless take the bait trying to be "perfect" and to live up to the contemporary standards for success. With expectations such as these, it is hard to selflessly put personal interests and desires aside and dedicate one's life or the majority of one's time to "the family". This leads to (or is a result of) "the waning of affect in postmodern culture" (Jameson 11). One such example is Olivia Jewell of Parsons' *The Family Way*, whose self-oriented behavior and lack of affect make it impossible to sustain a traditional family. A mediocre actress, she had left her husband and three daughters because she could not stand the "everyday chaos" (*The Family Way* 4) of family life. She wanted to look well and "feel good about herself" (3), which she could not do while she was in charge of three underage girls. Unlike some parents who have abandoned their children, she has never regretted having left her daughters, which is not surprising for "someone as selfish as Olivia" (*The Family Way* 21). On the contrary, once her daughter Megan begins thinking about having a family, she discourages her: "They take over your life. … Darling. You don't want anyone taking over your life, do you?" (*The Family Way* 20). Her motives are not just to protect Megan but also to protect the image she created for herself – one of an unburdened, good-looking woman who even at sixty-two does not want to become a grandmother. It is her looks that give Olivia the sense of success, not her professional accomplishments or her personal relationship:

> "Oh, you're far too young to be having a baby, dear," Megan's mother told her. "And I'm certainly too young to be a grandmother." … But it was true – Olivia Jewell didn't look like anyone's idea of a grandmother. And Megan thought, why should she? She never really got the hang of being a mother.
>
> Olivia Jewell still turned heads. Not because of the modest fame that she had once enjoyed – that had evaporated more than twenty years ago – but because of the way she looked. (19)

The consumerist society does not promote family values unless the picture of an ideal family can be used as a means to sell more of a certain product. Both fiction and sociological research prove this. In his article entitled "Family in Crisis" Michael S. Malone asserts that "There is an endangered species in Silicon Valley, one so precious that when it disappears Silicon Valley will die with it. This endangered species is the family. And sometimes it seems as if every institution in this valley – political, corporate, and social – is hellbent on driving it into extinction" (15). The contemporary demands that an individual should excel at work, travel, look well and have an exciting social life corrode the traditional family framework because there is no time to devote oneself to one's partner or children. Harry Silver, the protagonist of two Parsons' novels, is aware of the current unfavorable perception of traditional family values:

> [his father's generation] had faced up to its responsibilities in a way that my lot never could. His generation had looked after their children, they had lots of early nights … but my generation had grown up with our own individual little pile of happiness at the top of our shopping list. … My generation wanted perfect lives. … My dad had learned early on that nobody gets away with a perfect life. (*Man and Boy* 232)

Protagonists of contemporary family fiction appear to be more explicitly self-oriented, even selfish, which is why the traditional family seems to be at a decline. People do not take their responsibility towards the spouse and children as seriously as their responsibility toward themselves and their personal happiness.

However, personal happiness is nowadays mostly perceived as an ability to indulge in different pleasures, not as a consequence of certain (selfless) actions that may bring about some greater good. In their critical view of the contemporary generations, writers seem to suggest that personal happiness used to be much less important. What used to be important was to keep

the family together even if it required making sacrifices. “Separation wouldn’t have occurred to a lower-middle-class couple in the fifties” (Kureishi, *Intimacy* 51) because their feeling of responsibility was much more selfless: they felt responsible to the children, to the spouse and to the institution of marriage itself. Jay, for example, is about to leave his family even though he is completely aware that, by leaving, he will destroy “an innocent, complete, ideal family” (*Intimacy* 10), but as Harrison asserts, “how much he betrays of his life” is not as important to him as his romantic quest for the “perfect mate … [for] what symbiosis with such a creature would offer” (86). Jay’s father, on the other hand, was a typical representative of the older generation: “He didn’t approve of leaving and he liked to be chivalrous. He didn’t see that the women could take care of themselves. The man had the power and had to be protective” (*Intimacy* 48). Although his father’s beliefs reflect the traditional patriarchal division of gender roles, they also prove that his generation used to take marriage more seriously. They were ready to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of the family, and it was implied that they would use their physical and economic dominance to support and protect their wife and children. Moreover, Jay’s father claims that “it was hopeless to take up something that wasn’t going to provide me with pleasure for the rest of my life” (49), which signals his lifelong dedication to his wife and family. The readiness to think things through before making a choice, the determinacy to persist with the choices they made and to refuse to linger on inconsequent pastimes is not what characterizes young people nowadays. Instead of committing, they rather wish to meander through life, from one person or activity to the next, paradoxically trying to “find themselves” in relationships or activities deprived of any depth at all. Jay’s friend, Asif, is more similar to Jay’s father than to Jay in that he is a dedicated father and husband and that he rejects the contemporary consumerist values: “Asif has integrity and principle. Without being especially pompous, he is not ashamed to say what he believes in. He refused all that eighties cynicism. His beliefs give him stability, meaning, and a centre” (*Intimacy* 38). Most importantly, unlike

Jay who never seems to be satisfied and always wants to have more – of women, of time – Asif is more realistic and less greedy in his desires: "When he yearns – he is not a fool – he yearns for what he has already, to play in the same cricket team as his son, for a garden pond with frogs, and a trip to the Grand Canyon" (*Intimacy* 36).

Of course, the decision to hold on to a marriage is not an easy one and it takes strength and determination to push through the rough times. Jay remembers the tough times his parents had gone through: "Both he and Mother were frustrated, neither being able to find a way to get what they wanted, whatever that was. Nevertheless they were loyal and faithful to one another. Disloyal and unfaithful to themselves" (*Intimacy* 50). Keeping a marriage means that one needs to put others first, to put up with unpleasant times in order to get to the good ones. Hornby also takes note of the stoicism typical for older generations who valued the institution of marriage more than it is valued today. Annie, the female protagonist of his novel *Juliet, Naked*, visits a psychotherapist, Malcolm, who was "an Englishman of a certain age and class … [and] believed that there was almost nothing too grim to be endured" (83-84). During a session, Annie tries to explain that she has broken up with Duncan because of her dissatisfaction with their fifteen-year long relationship, but the therapist comments: "'It's funny, you know, with your generation. … lots of people I know have an unhappy or frustrating marriage. Or a boring one.' 'And?' 'You see, they're quite content, really.' 'They're happy in their misery.' 'They put up with it, yes'" (Hornby 83). Malcolm's point is that the willingness to put up with the "misery" actually proves that we assign certain value to our specific partner as an individual who cannot be easily replaced. At the same time, the generation so intent on individualism proves that the only valuable individual is oneself, whereas anyone else – a parent, a lover or a friend – can be discarded as some generic persona replaceable at will.

While it is true that the struggle to save a marriage can cause frustration, it can also be rewarding if it results in the betterment of a marital relationship, as it did in case of Jay's parents.

After having suffered together through the years of his mother's depression and dissatisfaction, they came to see much better days:

> But when my brother and I left, our parents started going to art galleries, to the cinema, for walks, and on long holidays. They took a new interest in one another, and couldn't get enough of life. Victor says that once the lights on a love have dimmed, you can never illuminate them again, any more than you can reheat a soufflé. But my parents went through the darkness and discovered a new intimacy. (Kureishi, *Intimacy* 52)

Arguably, unlike today, families used to operate on the *reality principle*, rather than the pleasure principle. Freud defines the reality principle as one that allows for a postponement of satisfaction and temporary acceptance of unpleasure as a step toward the point when we would eventually achieve pleasure (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 7). It is not that the people fifty or more years ago did not want to live a pleasant life, but because the ideology then promoted different values, they believed that pleasure did not have to be achieved immediately. They had the necessary endurance and confidence that eventually and indirectly pleasure can be achieved. Moreover, they believed it is worth the wait, even if the waiting sometimes lasted a whole lifetime. Decades ago, one would repair appliances that got broken instead of buying new ones; today the desire to repair an appliance has transformed into a desire for a new and better model. Once things get broken, people tend to throw them out and buy a new one, because "it pays off" (and the manufacturers make sure it does). This behavioral pattern is often reflected in relationships as well. As Kureishi suggested in *Intimacy*, people, love and sex have become a commodity like any other (58). The outcome is that there are more and more people who perceive divorce as a solution to their problems, identifying thus the traditional nuclear family framework as the cause of failure.

So, contrary to Jay's claim that "you can't leave" (50), contemporary protagonists can leave if they do not enjoy their marital life, which is exactly what Jay did in the end. Whereas the older generations perceived the state of being married as a fixed and unchangeable circumstance, today marital vows are not perceived as cast in stone. Divorce is no longer a taboo, but a self-evident way out of an unsatisfactory situation. Thus, no longer feeling socially obliged to endure "until death do them part", more and more people, often too lightly, divorce their spouses in search for the ultimate rush, or ultimate "freedom". Olds and Schwartz testify to the light approach to divorce in their study on the effects of social exclusion entitled *The Lonely American. Drifting Apart in the Twenty-first Century*: "Many marriages that are simply experiencing the usual vicissitudes of warmth and coolness die premature deaths because when real life departs from the Hollywood scripts, people think 'the bells aren't ringing anymore' and start planning their exit strategies" (125). In "Strangers When We Meet" Kureishi provides an illustration of the new perception of divorce. The story's protagonist, Robert Miles, talks to his former lover, Florence, and after she admits she is not very happily married, he tells her jokingly of the joys of divorce:

> surely divorce is an underestimated pleasure. People speak of the violence of separation, but what of the delight? What could be more refreshing than never having to sleep in the same bed as that rebarbative body, and hear those familiar complaints? Such a moment of deliverance would be one to hug to yourself forever, like losing your virginity, or becoming a millionaire. (170)

In *How to Be Good* Hornby also shows just how easy it can be to give up on a marriage when the protagonist, Katie Carr, makes a rather impulsive decision to leave her husband: "I'm in a car park in Leeds when I tell my husband I don't want to be married to him anymore. David isn't even in the car park with me. He's at home, looking after the kids, and I have only called him to remind him that he should write a note for Molly's class teacher. The other bit just sort

of … [sic] slips out" (1). Her cavalier attitude toward her request for divorce is supported by her later detached comment on her marriage:

> If my thoughts about our marriage had been turned into a film, the critics would say that it was all paddling, no plot, and that it could be summarized thus: two people meet, fall in love, have kids, start arguing, get fat and grumpy (him) and bored, desperate and grumpy (her), and split up. I wouldn't argue with the synopsis. We're nothing special. (2)

By suggesting that she and her husband are "nothing special", Katie implies that all married people must become fat, grumpy and desperate because marriage is a boring, passionless affair. For this reason, married people ought to take any opportunity to satisfy the basic human desire for pleasure which is allegedly unavailable within the constraints of marriage. Sometimes, as with Harry Silver, this pleasure can be obtained by acquiring a new sports car which is an "inanimate object [that] somehow represents all those things you know you are never going to have. The places you are never going to see, the women you are never going to love, the things you are never going to do" (Parsons, *Man and Boy* 10). For Harry, marriage highlights all the things now "unavailable" to him. Even though Harry's wedding day was the happiest day of his life (11), he acknowledges that "nothing was ever really the same again after that day. Because after that there was no disguising the fact that we were grown-ups" (11). For Harry, growing up seems to mean becoming not only mature and responsible but also dull. Harry's frustration stems from this ingrained idea that, once married, "fun" somehow becomes unavailable, creating a false logic according to which staying single will undoubtedly be very fun and pleasurable. By that logic, everything that is outside of marriage seems better, including extramarital sex which, according to Harry, usually "means nothing" to the adulterer: "The reason that most men stray is opportunity, and the joy of meaningless sex should never be underestimated" (*Man and Boy* 43). Similarly, Jay, the chronic adulterer, claims that seducing

many women helps him keep his options open, as opposed to being imprisoned by marriage. His lovers are mere transitional objects that make him feel good about himself, a means to "somewhere else" (Kureishi, *Intimacy* 21). They protect him from seriousness and depth, from responsibility and true commitment which he claims to find unpleasant: "desiring other women kept me from the exposure and susceptibility of loving just the one" (*Intimacy* 21).

Although she took the same path trying to break her boredom, Katie soon discovers that taking on a lover will not bring a solution to her problems. Just like Harry, who has a one-night stand with his coworker, Siobhan, because opportunity presented itself, not because he is truly interested in her, Katie Carr also does not have passionate feelings for her lover. Her affair is somehow just as meaningless to her as Silver's is to him. There is no true romance in their brief affair and when she talks about her lover, she is not excited at all, but rather fatigued: "Oh, I suppose he should go into the film synopsis somewhere. They got married, he got fat and grumpy, she got desperate and grumpy, she took a lover" (*How to Be Good* 8). Her affair "with a man I don't really know very well called Stephen" (*How to Be Good* 8) is not a result of passion for the lover, but of the "bit of vanity" (*How to Be Good* 29) she begins to feel due to Stephen's courting. The fact that someone other than her husband is interested in her sexually makes her feel desirable again, even though Stephen is not as desirable to her:

> I have been monogamous for two decades. And it's not like I've become asexual, because I have had sex, but it's sex with David, and attraction and all the rest of it no longer seems to apply: we have sex with each other because we have agreed not to have sex with anyone else, not because we can't keep our hands to ourselves. (*How to Be Good* 29)

The fact that her marriage is no longer as passionate as in the beginning makes her ask for a divorce, rashly and without the real intention to go through with it, but with no real determination to try and make the marriage work either. According to Harrison, contemporary

people are "polluted by notions of romance, driven into adultery's indifferent arms by bad novels and worse movies" (86). In this, Katie seems to be a typical twenty-first century person, spoiled by the media into wanting the best result (a "perfect" life) with the minimum effort: "I'm neither brutalized nor degraded by my relationship with David; it's just that I don't really like it very much" (*How to Be Good* 27). There is nothing terribly wrong with their marriage, but Katie wants that magical feeling that one has with someone new, the rush of a new relationship and the feeling that there is a possibility to create a new, better life for oneself, similar to the one in the early stage of a relationship:

> what I really want, and what I'm getting with Stephen, is the opportunity to rebuild myself from scratch. David's picture of me is complete now, and I'm pretty sure neither of us likes it much; … I just want his rapt attention when I tell him that my favourite book is *Middlemarch*, and I just want that feeling, the feeling I get with him, of having not gone wrong yet. (*How to Be Good* 38-39)

The affair offers her a chance to feel desired and important, to be immature and frivolous, even if for a brief period of time. At the same time, it excludes all the daily hassle she has to put up with as a mother and a wife. Adultery serves the same purpose to Jay, too: "with each woman I could start afresh. There was no past. I could be a different person, if not a new one, for a time" (*Intimacy* 21).

Still, Katie Carr manages to overcome her midlife crisis and return to the safety of the marital home. This is mostly because her extramarital adventure was not caused by a genuine desire to leave her family, but also because her husband was one of the "old-fashioned" types, dedicated to the family no matter what. He loves Katie and suffers through her self-exploration with patience. However, Harry Silver's desire for some meaningless sex destroys his family because his wife Gina takes it as a proof of Harry's dissatisfaction with their marriage, and, what is more important, as a personal insult:

> you hurt me so much that I can never forgive you or trust you again. . . . We had a marriage that I thought was working, but you thought was becoming a routine. You're a typical romantic, Harry. A relationship doesn't measure up to your pathetic and unrealistic fantasy so you smash it up. You ruin everything. (*Man and Boy* 126, 127)

In effect, Harry's indiscretion is Gina's chance to regain her independence. Namely, when she accepted to become a stay-at-home mother, she felt that by giving up her career, she had given up on her life. She "cried when she told the bank that she wouldn't be going to Tokyo after all" (*Man and Boy* 20), but will be staying in London with her family. She felt this to be a sacrifice, but one she is willing to make for as long as both of them are partners working in the best interest of their family. Because of this, Harry's one-night stand is more than sexual infidelity to Gina; it is a betrayal: "I'm only thirty, Harry. Sometimes I feel like an old woman. You tricked me. … nobody is interested in a woman who stays at home with her child. Not even her husband. Especially not her husband. I'm so boring, he has to sleep around. … I want my life back" (*Man and Boy* 65-66). Forgiving Harry would mean making another sacrifice to keep the family together and it was one she was not willing to make.

An important facet in discussing contemporary families is communication as a means of achieving and keeping intimacy. In a high-tech world where communication and exchange of information seem to have become the ultimate goal, and where it is almost impossible *not* to communicate with others, voluntarily or involuntarily, and by all conceivable means, contemporary spouses seem to fail at it. Hornby illustrates the idea that married people have nothing to say to each other, mostly because they have lost interest in one another and marriage has made them empty and boring: "Jackie and Phil are the most boring people in the southeast of England, possibly because they've been married too long, and therefore have nothing to talk about, apart from how long they've been married" (*High Fidelity* 178). This is generally taken

to be the truth for all married couples, so, as Robert Miles eavesdrops on Florence O'Hara and her husband Archie, he is surprised to learn differently: "They certainly have plenty to say next door: a little unusual, surely, for a couple who have been married five years" (Kureishi, "Strangers When We Meet" 130). Christina Bieber Lake identifies the lack of serious conversation as a typically American problem, by claiming that "in America, consumer capitalism has largely turned neighbors into nodes of impersonal economic exchange" (290). However, this can easily be applied to the entire Western world which, thanks to globalization, is equally "infected" by the mores of consumer capitalism. In any case, Bieber Lake very succinctly put what the trouble is with contemporary interpersonal communication: "Words that could be used to connect people are reduced to either an exchange of pleasantries or information, nothing more" (291). The tragedy lies in the fact that conversations become abrupt and superficial not only among neighbors and customers, but among family members as well.

To illustrate: Katie Carr ventures into an affair that is an "opportunity to rebuild herself from scratch" (*How to Be Good* 38) through her conversations with her lover Stephen who gives her "his rapt attention" (39) unlike her husband David who, she suspects, already has a complete picture of her and unfavorable one at that (38). For her, the affair is not primarily of a sexual nature because she does not find Stephen irresistible and the two times she had sex with her lover were quite unsatisfactory. Moreover, her husband is still the man she feels most comfortable with sexually: "I've developed contours for his elbows and knees and bum, and nobody else quite fits into me in quite the same way, especially not Stephen" (*How to Be Good* 10). What was worthy about her relationship with Stephen is the opportunity to get to know each other, to reveal secrets about their lives to each other and, basically, to be interested in what they have to say. Much like Kureishi's Jay, it is the emotional intimacy that she most misses in her marriage and the moments of intimacy she exchanges with her husband are what ultimately makes her decide to stay with him: "But when David touches me in that way, with

tenderness, with love and concern, it all dribbles away to nothing, and I just want to be with him and my kids for the rest of my life" (*How to Be Good* 52).

In *Intimacy*, verbal communication between partners (or lack thereof) is given great importance. There is great danger in the disruption of communication between partners because silence perpetuates itself like some sort of a vicious circle; it both causes and is a result of their emotional unavailability to each other. Silence can hide, but also reveal, true feelings; often the cause of the problem is clear, yet one does not dare pronounce it: "I didn't want to love Susan, but for some reason didn't want the clarity of that fact to devastate us both" (Kureishi, *Intimacy* 75). According to Kureishi, "that which cannot be said is the most dangerous concealment" ("Strangers When We Meet" 166) because usually that which we refuse to verbalize is what bothers us most. Nevertheless, Jay and Susan are reluctant to open up to each other: "Why? Because words are actions and they make things happen. Once they are out you cannot put them back. Something irrevocable will have been done, and I am fearful and uncertain" (Kureishi, *Intimacy* 10). If one expresses one's true feelings, one becomes obliged to act upon them, and, more often than not, this demands making great changes in one's life, which is very hard to do. In his dysfunctional relationship with his wife Susan, Jay uses words to disguise the truth from her. He is afraid to be honest because he knows how hurtful words can be, so, in order not to be silent and thus provoke her anger, he makes sure to talk about insignificant topics:

> Usually, before seeing her, I prepare two or three likely subjects, as if our conversations are examinations. You see, she accuses me of being silent with her. If only she knew how I stammer within. Today, I have been too feverish to rehearse. … And silence, like darkness, can be kind; it, too, is a language. Couples have good reason for not speaking. (Kureishi 13)

The artificial conversations he prepares in advance are a result of her complaint that he never speaks. Because he is unable to talk about his feelings, he decides to "make conversation" as a

compensation. Susan perceives Jay's silence as a proof of his lack of love or interest in her because his silence forces her to make all the effort: "Imagine the strain of living with someone who doesn't speak for hours" (67). To him, however, silence is the only way to keep going, to keep things as they are. If he were to speak truthfully, the marriage would fall apart immediately. So he rehearses these artificial conversations with his wife in order to create the illusion of normalcy between them. Their only link, the only thing that still binds them, are their two sons: "I love her enthusiasm for them. When we really talk, it is about them. Something they have said or done, as if they are a passion no one else can share or understand" (Kureishi, *Intimacy* 12). Parenthood provides a sort of complicity between spouses because nobody else can love their children the way they do, or enjoy the endless discussions about the children's accomplishments. However, parenthood is not a good enough reason to make Jay stay at home: "At home I don't feel at home" (15), he concludes and decides he will not continue pretending that they are a perfect family.

Although Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* is usually viewed as a short story collection, Noelle Brada-Williams recognizes it as a short story cycle characterized by "the intricate use of pattern and motif to bind the stories together, including the recurring themes of the barriers to and opportunities for human communication; community, including marital, extra-marital, and parent-child relationships; and the dichotomy of care and neglect" (451). The very title of the cycle reveals communication as its focal point, and several stories deal specifically with communication within the family.

The eponymous short story "Interpreter of Maladies" describes a married couple and their three children on vacation in India. Mrs Mina Das, the young wife, seems to be frustrated and disinterested in her children and, as Brada-Williams points out, both her and her husband's careless attitude to their children reveal the dysfunctionality of their family (457). Upon finding out that their driver and tour guide, Mr. Kapasi, is an interpreter for a doctor, Mrs. Das becomes

very anxious to talk to him. He notices that she is not happy in her marriage, just as he is not in his: "He wondered if Mr. and Mrs. Das were a bad match, just as he and his wife were. … The signs he recognized from his own marriage were there – the bickering, the indifference, the protracted silences" ("Interpreter of Maladies" 53). And so, thrilled from the beginning with their "tanned, youthful faces" (44), Mr. Kapasi mistakes her interest in his profession for a genuine interest in him and is happy to listen to her. She, however, does not care about him at all, but hopes he will be able to help her with her frustration by "translating" the symptoms of her malady into something she can understand, and by suggesting some kind of a remedy:

> I have terrible urges, Mr. Kapasi, to throw things away. One day I had the urge to throw everything I own out the window, the television, the children, everything. Don't you think it's unhealthy? … I'm tired of feeling so terrible all the time. Eight years, Mr. Kapasi, I've been in pain eight years. … For eight years I haven't been able to express this to anybody, not to friends, certainly not to Raj. ("Interpreter of Maladies" 65)

According to Brada-Williams, both of them long for communication with others, but for different reasons. Mrs. Das lives a life of relative comfort and ease and yearns to be freed of the responsibilities of marriage and children. Mr. Kapasi, however, does not want freedom from his family life. In fact, he has given up his dreams in order to be able to support his family and his only desire is some recognition and interest in his life (458).

After Mrs. Das tells him her secret, that she had slept with her husband's friend and so ended up pregnant with her second child, he realizes that she is not interested in him, or anyone else. Moreover, he is deeply disappointed with her rejection of marital trust and fidelity, as well as her lack of enthusiasm for family life. Mr Kapasi realizes that she is "a woman not yet thirty, who loved neither her husband nor her children, who had already fallen out of love with life" (66). For this reason, he confronts her with the simple question: "Is it really pain you feel, Mrs.

Das, or is it guilt?" (66). Her guilt revealed as the real reason for her hysterical behavior, she leaves outraged and shocked never to talk to him again. The jadedness and hurt felt by Mrs. Das upon hearing the driver's diagnosis are only equaled by the hurt and insult felt by the driver after the realization that she does not care for him (or anyone else) at all. For her, communication is too painful because she cannot deal with her own feelings. She mistakenly believes that by keeping silent her problems will disappear, but her evasiveness only makes things worse. Her dissatisfaction and unwillingness to deal with the situation is in fact eroding her marriage and erasing the intimacy between her and her husband, and so she hoped that by opening up to the driver, she could relieve some of the pressure. The story ends with his air of complete disillusionment with the Das family, but for the reader it signifies a general disillusionment with family as an institution in which an individual cannot possibly be happy, just as Mr. Kapasi and Mrs. Das are not in theirs.

The issue of lost intimacy is crucial in Lahiri's "A Temporary Matter", as well. After a horrific parental trauma of having a stillborn baby, Shukumar and Shoba drift apart because of "the great neglect in which their own relationship as a couple has fallen since that tragedy" (Brada-Williams 456); namely, they fail to communicate and their shutdown is complete. It began by his decision to turn what would have been the baby's room into his study before even bringing Shoba home from the hospital, and without consulting her first. As Laura Anh Williams finds, "The story does not linger over this insensitivity and passive aggression toward the wife, but it does remain a clue to Shoba's eventual leaving" (71). They live next to each other, but their lives are void of any kind of intimate verbal or non verbal communication: "he and Shoba had become experts at avoiding each other in their three-bedroom house, spending as much time on separate floors as possible" ("A Temporary Matter" 4); "He thought of how long it had been since she looked into his eyes and smiled" ("A Temporary Matter" 5). Not only do they avoid communicating with each other, but stop seeing their friends, too, for fear they

would have to talk about the things they find too painful. She invited one hundred and twenty people to their house for Shukumar's last birthday, "all the friends and friends of friends they now systematically avoided … Since September their only guest had been Shoba's mother" ("A Temporary Matter" 9). For months they have been social recluses, "They had stopped attending parties, went nowhere together" ("A Temporary Matter" 15).

The strong need for isolation is a result of their inability to cope with the tragedy and look each other in the face. Only after their power is cut off due to some electrical works and they find themselves hidden by the literal darkness, do they begin to open up to each other: "Something happened when the house was dark. They were able to talk to each other again" ("A Temporary Matter" 19). As they eat dinner and trade secrets, Shukumar admits to minor misadventures that have no real bearing on Shoba. However, Shoba's secrets "consistently assert an alternative knowledge, subjectivity, and agency outside of his knowledge and his control" (Williams 72) and lead up to the final confession that she is leaving him. Hurt and disappointed, he decides to hurt her by revealing the one secret that she never wanted to know; he tells her that their baby was a boy. It was a secret she told him never to reveal to her because she knew it would make the stillborn baby even more real and their situation even more difficult. As Williams points out, he has exhausted and emptied his wife by assuming their marital problems were temporary and by not investing any care in restoring their relationship. She used his negligence as an opportunity to develop an independent self that Shukumar knows nothing about (72). The reenactment of intimacy through their confessing ritual was just a means to get closure before the end of their life together: "They wept together, for the things they now knew" ("A Temporary Matter" 22).

The married couple in Bobby Ann Mason's "Shiloh" went through a similar tragedy. While they were in a drive-in movie, their baby boy, Randy, died in the back seat of the car due to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). They suffered a tremendous shock which marked the

beginning of the end of their marriage: "Leroy remembers Norma Jean standing catatonically beside him in the hospital and himself thinking: Who is this strange girl? He had forgotten who she was" (Mason 472). The feeling of being married to a stranger becomes even more distinct with time. While Norma Jean suppresses everything and enjoys Leroy's absence from home (he is a truck driver and therefore often on the road) as the opportunity to forget about their tragedy, Leroy tries to have therapeutic conversations with strangers: "Leroy used to tell hitchhikers his whole life story – about his travels, his hometown, the baby. He would end with a question: 'Well, what do you think?'" (Mason 475), seeking from them a clarification of his own intimate situation, which he was unable to get from his emotionally distant wife.

His inability to express his feelings and worries to his wife is only further aggravated by her refusal to talk to him, which scares and confuses him: "His mind has gone blank. Then he says: 'I'll sell my rig and build us a house'. That wasn't what he wanted to say. He wanted to know what she thought – what she *really* thought – about them" (Mason 475). Instinctively, Leroy knows that he needs to make a connection to his wife again unless he wants to lose her: "Now Leroy has the sudden impulse to tell Norma Jean about himself, as if he had just met her. They have known each other so long they have forgotten a lot about each other. They could become reacquainted" (Mason 475). Still, he cannot find the strength or the right words to open up what he knows would be a painful conversation. They need to recreate intimacy in order to save their marriage, but, unlike Leroy, Norma Jean is not interested in bringing the marriage back to life. She takes up all sorts of activities for self-improvement – body building, music lessons, night school – which also provide her with a good excuse to avoid spending time with Leroy: "As he and Norma Jean work together at the kitchen table, Leroy has the hopeful thought that they are sharing something, but he knows he is a fool to think this. Norma Jean is miles away. He knows he is going to lose her. Like Mabel, he is just waiting for time to pass" (476). Their silence only prolongs the status quo, until the final decisive moment when one of them will have to do

something to end the anesthetized condition they have been living in ever since their baby had died.

"The Moffitt marriage is dead and empty" (Blythe and Sweet 116), and so are their conversations; there is no closeness between them: "He feels awkward, like a boy on a date with an older girl. They are still just making conversation" (Mason 478). As she informs Leroy that his name means "the king", he asks her if he was still the king around there (477). "I'm not fooling around with anybody, if that's what you mean" (477), Norma Jean answers, even though he clearly does not refer to her having an affair, but to her ignoring him as if he did not exist, as if he were not her husband. Symbolically, she is distant from him both in space and time: "He is trying to get her to go to Shiloh, and she is reading a book about another century" (477).

The fact that she finally voices her decision to leave him at the Shiloh battleground is also highly symbolical. This is not only a place of historical meaning, but a mythical family place, as well. Norma Jean's parents went there for their honeymoon, so Norma Jean's mother, Mabel, suggests to them to go there as a sort of a second honeymoon, to "rekindle the old fire" and save the marriage. Ironically, it is in Shiloh that after months of inner struggle and attempts to comprehend what was going on, Leroy finally realizes that he never offered her what she needed. He was never good at history: "History was always just names and dates to him. It occurs to him that building a house out of logs is similarly empty – too simple. And the real inner workings of a marriage, like most of history, have escaped him" (479). According to Harriet Pollack, Mason's constant allusion to history and Leroy's lack of historical knowledge does not refer to "History" as a chronicle of great deeds, battles, borders and territories, but to the lives of those who lived on the margins of official history and culture (96), that is lives of ordinary people. In this, Mason chronicles "the dissolution of a marriage" (Blythe and Sweet 114) caused by the spouses' initial lack of support for each other after a family tragedy. Consequently, Leroy and Norma Jean Moffitt show that a traditional family is, paradoxically,

a place of isolation instead of intimacy. A husband and wife, although bound by a promise and a wedding band turn out to be two strangers unable to communicate. Their breach in communication aggravates the situation and erodes the ties that used to bind them into a family. The tragedy of broken communication lies in the fact that things are rarely as bad as they seem, or as Freud put it, "Most of the unpleasure that we experience is *perceptual* unpleasure" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 9). This means that people's reactions to the events around them, regardless of how horrific they may be, and their attitudes about their own circumstances are crucial in coping with everyday life. Leroy and Norma Jean do not take the time to reflect on their problems, but react defensively and isolate each other, which in the long term proves detrimental to their relationship.

Contrary to this, in "A Small Good Thing", one of few Carver's stories with an optimistic ending, Ann and Howard Weiss, who have also suffered the tragedy of losing a child, manage to overcome the trauma precisely because they were able to talk to each other and do things together immediately after their son died. In the story, a boy named Scotty is fatally injured by a car on his birthday as he is on his way to school. Because of this, the mother never picks up the birthday cake she ordered for him. Not knowing why the cake has not been picked up, the baker keeps calling them, so Ann and Howard go there to confront him. Their decision to go together signals their support for one another and serves as a reaffirmation of them as both parents and spouses.

The meeting turns out to be a therapeutic session both for the baker and for the grieving parents. As they inform him that their son had died, he invites them in and offers them warm cinnamon rolls: "You have to eat and keep going. Eating is a small, good thing in a time like this" (83). They sit together at a table, eating, drinking coffee and talking. The grieving parents soak in every moment of the evening, craving human contact and giving in to the conversation

that seemed to have a sort of healing power which helped them think less about their terrible loss:

> They listened carefully. Although they were tired and in anguish, they listened to what the baker had to say. They nodded when the baker began to speak of loneliness, and of the sense of doubt and limitation that had come to him in his middle years. He told them what it was like to be childless all these years. … They talked on into the early morning, the high, pale cast of light in the windows, and they did not think of leaving. (83-84)

The act of sharing food with the baker and revealing the private, hurtful details from each others lives, restores the balance they lost after their son died. The commensal nature of the moment is a suggestion of the possibility that family can survive even the worst of tragedies, if only its members do not give up on each other. Unlike Lahiri's or Mason's protagonists, the Weiss couple stands by each other instead of isolating themselves and refusing to deal with the tragedy. Moreover, not only do they commiserate with each other, but they are ready to talk about their loss with a perfect stranger, too. Breaking open a fresh loaf of dark bread and inviting them to smell it, "'It's a heavy bread, but rich.' They smelled it, then he had them taste it" (84), the baker symbolically heals their wounds and helps them deal with their trauma by making them participate in the two most important intimacy-establishing rituals: sharing food and stories.[64]

Admittedly, trauma is not the only reason why contemporary protagonists seem to be unavailable to others, and why their conversations are being reduced to pleasantries. Often, they

[64] The first version of "A Small Good Thing" is entitled "The Bath", "published in 1981 as the product of severe editing on the part of Carver's editor Gordon Lish" ("Tess Gallagher" 1), and it represents an antithesis of everything that "A Small Good Thing" stands for. Although in "The Bath" the boy does not die, the story leaves both the readers and the protagonists in a kind of a limbo of uncertainties with its abrupt ending. There is no closure for anyone: the boy remains in the hospital, the baker never learns why the cake has not been picked up and there is no healing familial conversation either between the spouses or between them and the baker.

are emotionally isolated because of their selfishness, haughtiness or vanity, which seems to be a part of the "spirit of the age" and allows for only one kind of discourse: a cynical one. This can prove to be detrimental to a familial relationship because, by definition, it prevents inclusion. Namely, "Reaching out to one another as persons is, of course, central to love" (Bieber Lake 294). The cynicism to which contemporary protagonists resort is exclusive, and according to Sloterdijk, hollow and inhumane because it only refers to tactics, pragmatic maneuvering, ambiguity and deception (334), as, for example, in the case of double agents who have sold themselves (sometimes twice or three times over) for personal interests. However, Sloterdijk asks, "What is self-interest in someone who no longer knows where his 'self' is?" (114). In fact, the contemporary cynic's interests are of pure materialistic nature, just like those of the capitalist system that created it (315-325). According to Sloterdijk, contemporary cynicism has no real subversive power that it once had when it was used rebelliously to defeat the stronger, like David did against Goliath (103). Today it remains silent when it comes to social, altruistic goals connected with the "good life" (40) that the original Cynics were seeking. The perverted cynicism arose with the rise of the bourgeoisie (240-241), and only served "the particular interests of the ruling classes" (334), which is to maximize profit and avoid their death by any means available (346). Consequently, cynicism nowadays is merely used as a pose and in connection with trivial subjects, negating thus any possibility of intimate talk. Hornby tackles this issue in *How to Be Good* when David Carr, a highly cynical man, finds a spiritual adviser and transforms into an altruistic person. This transformation was not met with enthusiasm by his wife Katie who had gotten used to cynicism:

> I had become comfortable with his cynicism, and in any case, we're all cynical now, although it's only this evening that I recognize this properly. Cynicism is our shared common language, the Esperanto that actually caught on, and though I'm not fluent in it… I know enough to get by. And in any case it is not possible to avoid cynicism

> and the sneer completely. Any conversation about, say, the London mayoral contest, or Demi Moore, or Posh and Becks and Brooklyn, and you are obliged to be sour, simply to prove that you are a fully functioning and reflective metropolitan person. (163)

Being cynical seems to be very popular because it makes one appear intelligent, urban and "hip". Unfortunately, contemporary cynicism has a hollow and materialistic nature, which makes it the type of discourse that negates the closeness and intimacy expected within the framework of a family. Although many things are being said, the communication is, in fact, prevented because there is no exchange of intimate feelings and thoughts, just tactics. Contemporary discourse is often nothing but a display of snobbish arrogance and superiority over others, especially celebrities. Ironically, when David refuses to perpetuate this mode of conversation, it is he who becomes strange. His altruistic attitude makes conversation impossible: "'I no longer want to condemn people whose lives I know nothing about.' – 'But … that's the basis for all conversation!' says Andrew" (*How to Be Good* 164).

David's refusal to gossip and be rude about famous people reveals the superficial nature of Katie and David's conversation with their friends. There is no intimate sharing because everyone is afraid to open up for fear of being rejected or disagreed with, and unless they can be cynical about trivial topics, there is nothing left for them to say: "it clearly occurs to all of us simultaneously that there are very few subjects which offer that kind of harmony … In other words, it is impossible: we cannot function properly, and the evening ends in confusion and awkwardness" (*How to Be Good* 165). Hornby's humorous take on the situation is in the fact that his characters take it for granted that famous people exist so that we can talk badly about them. This idea is so prevalent in the minds of people that it forces Katie not to appreciate her husband's integrity, but to wonder whether she can stay married to someone who refuses to be as superficial as the rest: "Is it possible to want to divorce a man simply because he doesn't

want to be rude about Ginger Spice? I rather fear it might be" (*How to Be Good* 166). This kind of attitude to marriage shakes the basis of the traditional family because it transfers the purpose of marriage from being close, helpful, and emotionally connected to a person with morals and integrity to simply being able to converse in a light and cynical tone about the people we see on television or in the magazines. Contrary to this, Carver's "A Small, Good Thing" is an example of how familial relations can be preserved and strengthened even after a terrible loss if the spouses are able to resist cynicism. As Bieber Lake observes, this particular story suggests that "the primary tragedy of contemporary life is the fact that people who live in a technological society expect to exert so much control over their isolated 'domestic cocoons' that grace can be revealed only through radical contingency" (294), such as a death of a child. By opening up to the baker and accepting the baker's subsequent apology, as well as by listening to his life story, the Weiss couple accepts the grace that has been given them in the form of nocturnal confessions; they accept the heavy blow their family has sustained and decide to go on together because they know they can give each other support and love, as family members are supposed to. Within the totality of Carver's *oeuvre*, this story stands out as one where intimate conversation proves beneficial and is one of "the small, good things of life together" (Bieber Lake 289). Most of his other stories go to show that communication becomes a barrier, rather than a bridge; his are "stories in which language offers only the barest of connections with people and is continually seen as an inadequate vessel of the deepest of concepts" (Bieber Lake 294) for the contemporary man.

The paradigmatic shift from substance to hollowness, from altruistic to materialistic, and from revering the family as the basic cell of human society to the ironic dismissal of the family as an institution of no special value for the postmodern individual echoes not only Sloterdijk's claims, but also, to a certain extent, the postmodern theory which identifies a general "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard xxiv) as well as "the waning of affect"

(Jameson 11). Familial life is absurd and unnecessary as it represents the source of bondage and frustration for the very vain and self-oriented protagonist, who, ironically, never stops longing for intimacy and stability. In this, the reader can observe the protagonists' struggle with universal truths and myths, traditional family being one of them, and their attempts to create new ones, albeit smaller or less universal. Yet, the main point is that the hollowness which ensues because of the inability to express one's feelings or the fear to confide in someone cannot be filled just by choosing a different lifestyle for oneself. Familial relationship is based on the feeling of intimacy and closeness, which is jeopardized by the contemporary cynicism. The lack of sympathy for others and the rejection of human basic fragility and imperfection are in fact among major threats to the contemporary individual and his or her ability to enjoy committed family life, regardless of the particular type of family.

Blended families, such as the one described in Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise*, stand in contrast to the tensions that make traditional family life seem difficult or less desirable and provide a proof that the traditional nuclear family cannot become extinct. A blended family (a stepfamily, a patchwork family) is one in which one or both partners have children from a previous relationship. Jack Gladney, the protagonist of *White Noise*, explains who constitutes his blended family of six: "Babette and I and our children by previous marriages" (4). Such families are often perceived as "new" kinds of families, but they are not. In actuality, they are reconstituted nuclear families and as such do not represent a new form of family life but a simulation of the original nuclear family. They represent an attempt to recreate the traditional nuclear family model with another partner after the relationship with the first partner failed, proving that the spouses in a blended family have not lost faith in the traditional family model. As such, they serve to reaffirm the belief in the traditional family as the proper way to live, despite the tensions that surround family life and despite the failure to keep the original nuclear family (or several previous families) together.

DeLillo's *White Noise* is typically read as a story about death and consumerism[65], but these issues are treated within the context of the traditional family as the only refuge from inescapable death. According to Karen Weekes, "White noise is thus both the comforting sounds of human life at the same time as it is a more sinister undertow of death. The white noise of family, shopping, even television and advertising, is a distraction from the ugly undercurrent of mortality and fear" (297). One of the Gladney family rituals, the weekly television watching, shows that the time the whole family spends together is indeed comforting:

> That night, a Friday, we ordered Chinese food and watched television together, the six of us. Babette had made it a rule. She seemed to think that if kids watched television one night a week with parents or stepparents, the effect would be to de-glamorize the medium in their eyes, make it wholesome domestic sport. (DeLillo 16)

Although intended as an "educational" event which was "a subtle form of punishment for us all" (16), the weekly watching of television which became "the custom and the rule" (DeLillo 64) is in fact a ritual that reaffirms the unity of their family by making them spend some time together on a regular basis. In addition to this, unlike some spouses in traditional families, Babette and Jack are able to keep their intimacy because they take time to discuss things and are able to share things with each other. They

> tell each other everything. … It is a form of self-renewal and a gesture of custodial trust. Love helps us develop an identity secure enough to allow itself

[65] See, for example: Barrett, Laura. "'How the Dead Speak to the Living': Intertextuality and the Postmodern Sublime in White Noise." *Journal of Modern Literature* 25.2 (Winter 2001/2002). 97–113; Ferraro, Thomas J. "Whole Families Shopping at Night." *New Essays on White Noise*. Ed. Frank Lentricchia. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991. 15–38.; Frow, John. "The Last Things Before the Last: Notes on White Noise." *White Noise: Text and Criticism*. Ed. Mark Osteen. New York: Penguin, 1998. 417–431.; DuVall, John N. "The [Super]Marketplace of Images: Television as Unmediated Mediation in DeLillo's White Noise." *White Noise: Text and Criticism.* Ed. Mark Osteen. New York: Penguin, 1998. 432–455.; Max, D. T. "Final Destination." *The New Yorker*. 11–18 June 2007. 54–71.

> to be placed in another's care and protection. Babette and I have turned our lives for each other's thoughtful regard, … spoken deep into the night about fathers and mothers, childhood, friendships, awakenings, old loves, old fears (except fear of death). (DeLillo 29-30)

Jack reveals to the reader that he hides his fear of death from Babette, and we later learn that she does the same (she sleeps with another man in exchange for Dylar, an exprimental drug that relieves the fear of death). Nevertheless, even after Jack finds out about her infidelity, their closeness and their family structure are hardly jeopardized: "We held each other tightly for a long time, our bodies clenched in an embrace that included elements of love, grief, tenderness, sex and struggle. … 'I'm right here,' I said. 'Whatever you want or need, however difficult, tell me and it's done'" (DeLillo 199). Jack's supportive reaction to his wife's secretive exchange of sex for a drug proves how intent he is in keeping the family together.

Similarly, after a joint shopping spree, Jack remarks: "Babette and the kids … were my guides to endless well-being" (DeLillo 83). In this, Weekes recognizes that "the experience of purchasing … connects Jack with his family ... One could argue that an instrumental manifestation of love for his family is the locus of meaning in this event" (294). Moreover, it is safe to argue that Jack's love for his family is the locus of meaning of the entire novel because he views all the events through the prism of his family. Babette and the kids give his life meaning and depth; so much so that after the notorious airborne toxic event he takes almost religious comfort in watching the children sleep: "it makes me feel devout, part of a spiritual system. It is the closest I can come to God. If there is a secular equivalent of standing in a great spired cathedral with marble pillars and streams of mystical light slanting through two-tier Gothic windows, it would be watching children in their little bedrooms fast asleep" (DeLillo 147). In a postmodern world, where religion, history and other great stories are being set apart into small fragments, the Gladney family reconstructed itself from the fragments of previous

families, creating a blended family that aspires to be a great story that gives sense to their unsafe existence – a traditional family: "The most deeply precious things are those we feel secure about. A wife, a child" (DeLillo 285). Consequently, in a world threatened by a major chemical disaster the preservation and survival of the family becomes the only goal: "There was nothing to do but try to get the family to safety" (DeLillo 158). By making death seem even more real, the airborne toxic event gives Jack a new perspective and somehow reaffirms the value of the traditional family by bringing family members closer together. Families – the Gladney family being one of them – make regular trips to watch the sunset which was made exceptionally beautiful by the chemicals: "We go to the overpass all the time. Babette, Wilder and I. We take a thermos of iced tea, park the car, watch the setting sun" (DeLillo 324).

The crucial importance of the traditional family, as well as of other grand stories such as religion, is confirmed in Jack's conversation with German nuns: "It is our task in the world to believe things no one else takes seriously. To abandon such beliefs completely, the human race would die. … Someone must appear to believe. … As belief shrinks from the world, people find it more necessary than ever that *someone* believe" (DeLillo 318-319). The novel ends with the reaffirmation of the traditional family values as the only constant in the rapidly changing consumerist society. Namely, one day the supermarket shelves have been rearranged without warning and there is agitation, panic and dismay all over the supermarket. Significantly, only the generic products have remained where they used to be, plainly labeled (DeLillo 325-326), suggesting, as Weekes ventures to explain, that "the only reliable source of order or meaning is in the simple, predictable, and generally unexciting features of living: children, family, the quotidian" (299).

Tony Parsons' novel *Man and Wife* also supports the notion that a blended family is a substitute for the original nuclear family as the ideal family structure. The protagonist, Harry Silver, is desperate to reconstitute a traditional family after his marriage to his first wife Gina

has failed: "I want a family for him, too, as well as myself. A family for my boy. For both of us. … That's what I wanted. Not merely a new woman. Not just that. But a world made whole and a family restored" (7, 277), which by the end of the novel he manages to do. As his second wife Cyd becomes pregnant, they perceive their baby as their "connection to the great unspoilt future, and [their] bond, [their] unbreakable bond, to what it means to be alive in this world, and – above and beyond it all – to each other" (294). Characters like Jack Gladney and Harry Silver, who despite their failed marriages still make it their life's work to recreate a traditional nuclear family for themselves and their children from previous marriage(s), confirm both that the blended family functions as a substitute for the nuclear family, and that the traditional nuclear family is the most adequate or "natural" family mode.[66]

To conclude, despite the fact that single life, or any other form of familial living for that matter, is no guarantee for personal happiness, protagonists of contemporary family fiction have serious reservations against living in a traditional family because the idea of monogamy, as responsibility and obligation to another person, clashes with the postmodern individual's desire for freedom, independence and pleasure. Moreover, the emphasis on consumption, cynical worldview and self-centeredness jeopardizes the traditional family life in a paradoxical way. While true romance is being put forward as the ideal (by the movies, books, and even cartoons), there exists at the same time an incredulity toward the possibility of a "true romance". Thus, in order to avoid disappointment or feelings of inadequacy, literary protagonists choose to indulge in what they believe to be life's pleasures and create what Kureishi refers to as "original and flexible arrangements" (*Intimacy* 60). However, "An unrestricted satisfaction of every need presents itself as the most enticing method of conducting one's life, but it means putting

[66] This also applies to adoptive heterosexual parents, as well as for unmarried heterosexual parents who live together in the same household. Both those who adopt and those who have their own biological children, but for various reasons refuse to marry, in fact reenact the traditional nuclear family dynamics because they "pose no fundamental challenge to either procreative interpretations of kinship or the culturally standardized image of a family" (Weston 38).

enjoyment before caution, and soon brings its own punishment" (Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 26-27), which is almost always a feeling of constant dissatisfaction, of a hole that cannot be filled, or a haunting feeling that something important is missing, as Dizard and Gadlin have established (149). Functional traditional families, cohabitations with children and blended families prove that the model of the traditional nuclear family is not flawed in itself. On the contrary, traditional families are on the decline because the spouses, influenced by the media and the ideology of quick consumption, refuse to engage their resources in order to ensure a satisfying family life. For example, in Hornby's novel *How to Be Good*, where the marital crisis ends happily, the marriage and the traditional family framework are restored because the main protagonist matures and accepts both the advantages and disadvantages of being married: "My family, I think, just that. And then, I can do this. I can live this life. I can, I can. It's a spark I want to cherish, a splutter of life in the flat battery" (305). Hornby suggests that all it takes for a marriage to succeed and a family to survive is some selflessness on the part of the spouses. In the contemporary world, where individualism is the highest value, this seems to be a difficult task, but it is not an impossible one.

## 3. "Three's a Crowd": Single Parent Family and Childless Family – Deconstructing the Traditional Nuclear Family

The importance of individualism in the process of interpretation of contemporary literature is not insignificant. Most notably, it seems to be crucial when discussing the needs and motivations of literary characters who decide to live in families that lack one of the two family constituents: a parent or child(ren). Parents who are single on purpose have dispensed with the notion of romantic love as a prerequisite for family life and are free from the need to make compromise with his or her partner. Childless spouses have dispensed with the pressures and responsibilities of parenthood. In each of these cases, the family may formally seem incomplete or truncated because it challenges the form of the traditional nuclear family, but functionally and emotionally both of these appear in contemporary literature as valid family forms.

The very term "childless family" may seem controversial or contradictory in itself because the need or the desire to procreate is typically seen as the basic prerequisite of forming (starting) a family. For most people a marriage without the intention of or success in procreation represents a failure or a purposeless venture. The reason is to be found in the specific Western notion of normative sexuality, according to which sex must not only be heterosexual, but also reproductive to be considered "normal", that is good, positive, right, as opposed to deviant, negative, and wrong kind of sex. On the one hand, this notion is based on the idea that we think about the world in binary opposites, which consist of a positive part of the pair and the negative one (Derrida 27-29). The categories of right and wrong sexuality are socially constructed, and usually they are "linked to ideas about reproduction and family life" (Klages 115), as is, for example, expressed in Freud's idea that "normal" sex is "altruistic" (*Three Essays* 73), meaning reproductive. For this reason, couples who do not wish to have children may be perceived as wanton and immoral, since their unwillingness to reproduce renders their relationship selfish, hedonistic and undeserving of the status or the title of a "family."

The wide-spread belief that having children is a unanimously wonderful experience may be contributed to the fact that the Western civilization is predominantly Christian, "And according to the Bible, the point of marriage is to have children" (Picoult 369). To procreate and multiply is one of the most important human tasks, which explains why the reproductive heterosexual relationship is sanctified as "good" and "natural", whereas any other kind of sexuality is labeled as bad, sinful and unnatural:

> And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. (*King James Version*, Gen. 1.22)
>
> And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. (Gen. 9.1)
>
> And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein. (Gen. 9.7),

Despite the fact that actual lives prove otherwise, the dominant ideology insists on reducing human experience in such a way as to render it expressible by means of binary oppositions, and so promotes traditional families with children as "good", whereas childless lives, enjoyed far more by individuals or married couples, are perceived as "bad". Because of this people have come to believe that it is worthier to be unhappy in a marriage with children, and nobler to suffer the years of psychological and physiological pain while trying unsuccessfully to conceive, than live happily with one's spouse without ever having children.

The influence of this kind of discourse about sex and reproduction is easily seen in the results of psychological research on the degree of (un)happiness people feel after becoming parents.

Contemporary psychology explains that people cannot foresee the amount of frustration they will feel after becoming a parent. "When parents look back on parenthood, they remember feeling what those who are looking forward to it expect to feel" (Gilbert 242), that is they

"remember" living a life as it is usually depicted in commercials for baby food or diapers: having an ideal, romantic life with beautiful, healthy, clean and well-behaved toddlers. The interpellation of the ideology and our identification with it is so strong, that we both remember and expect what we are told is right, good and proper. However research has shown that married people are at their happiest before they have children and after their children leave home, as well as that women are happier doing almost anything else (eating, exercising, shopping, napping, etc.) than taking care of their children (Gilbert 243). Although the research results contradict the ideological dogmas on family life, they are consistent with the way literary authors represent childless lives.

Jay's mother, in Kureishi's *Intimacy*, is a case in point. After having two boys, she got depressed because she had no life of her own: "Mother was only partially there. Most of the day she sat, inert and obese, in her chair. She hardly spoke – except to dispute; she never touched anyone, and often wept, hating herself and all of us… She was aware of it, in some way. 'Selfish,' she called herself" (51). She was both unhappy for having children because "Children stop you living" (61), and at the same time for being so selfish – for not being a proper mother, just like other women are. With time, as she found a job, and even more so after her two sons left to live their own lives, she resumed the kind of life she once led with her husband: "when my brother and I left, our parents started going to art galleries, to the cinema, for walks, and on long holidays. They took a new interest in one another, and couldn't get enough of life. … my parents went through the darkness and discovered a new intimacy" (52).

The *experience* of having children, of being responsible for them is nothing like the ideology wants us to believe. Both Jay's mother and Olivia Jewell prove that parenting can be very frustrating because it requires constant and utter selflessness. The only thing a parent may expect and hope for is the emotional satisfaction of having an offspring, but the risks and frustrations seem to be much higher. Jay's mother struggles through the feeling that she has

given up on her life and ambitions for the sake of her children and manages to find happiness again once her sons have grown and become independent. However, Megan, Jessica and Cat's mother Olivia refuses to endure any kind of struggle on her daughters' behalf. Just before she leaves her three daughters and her husband to go and live with her lover, she is very blunt about her feelings: "'Your parents ruin the first half of your life', Cat's mother told her when she was eleven years old, 'and your children ruin the second half'" (*The Family Way* 3). Clearly, a child can hardly be blamed for marital problems, but the idea here is that sometimes people make programmed (ideologically instructed) decisions, without having considered their potential consequences because memes such as the family are by default believed in, not challenged, which often leaves us with nothing but hindsight on important issues.

Because of the fact that our memory is flawed and subjective, because human brain has the "tendency to fill in and leave out without telling us" (245), and because perception is a combination of our understanding and our senses (Kant 93), what we remember of the past is never an accurate photography, but rather a *portrait* of reality (Gilbert 94, my emphasis); it is a picture of the past into which each individual has incorporated his or her current mood, desires, and expectations. In other words, we often believe that things have occurred and felt in a way that they have not because our memory is imperfect and our thinking and remembering is colored by our current situation. To be sure, our current situation is influenced not only by our psychological or emotional status but also by outside input, such as, for example, pieces of information we hear from various sources on a daily basis, feelings and attitudes of the people around us, and dominant beliefs and values that are promoted in schools, churches and the media. Althusser refers to this phenomenon as ideological recognition: we "recognize that we are subjects and that we function in the practical rituals of the most elementary everyday life" (173). One of these taught rituals is the ritual of reproduction. This is also consistent with Lacan's idea of cultural subordination and it explains why certain beliefs and ideas continue to

be replicated even though they do not contribute to an individual's personal happiness. We cannot escape the drive to procreate because "Every culture tells its members that having children will make them happy … the belief that children are the source of happiness becomes a part of our cultural wisdom simply because the opposite belief unravels the fabric of any society that holds it" (Gilbert 242-244). In this, Gilbert echoes Dawkins's theory of memes as an explanation for dissemination of cultural patterns. Just like biological features are passed on by our genes, so the cultural ones are passed on by memes and both types of transmission are caused by the fact that memes, like genes, are replicators. "Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation" (Dawkins 192). Religious doctrines and political systems, for example, consist of groups of memes, meme-complexes (199) and replicate specific values, beliefs and behaviors which become so ingrained that, like all dogmas, they are no longer questioned. It is for this reason that, for example, Carver's families are considered dysfunctional and represented as unhappy; how could they be anything else when they stand in opposition to what is socially expected and accepted as normal and "functional," such as a family with children? Similarly, Jack Jewell, the father of three daughters, Cat, Jessica and Megan, believes that "grandchildren will put stabilizers on their little family, and ensure its survival" (*The Family Way* 115) because that is what (controlled) reproduction does for a society – it stabilizes it and ensures its survival.

The urge to survive, that is to ensure the survival of a family, society or the human race is biologically and socially (ideologically) imprinted into people's unconscious, so that even those who are not aware of it or concerned with it often act as if they were. The conflict between the individual desire for happiness (which may be a desire for anything at all) and the (un)conscious universal belief that only certain specific things – such as having children – will

make us happy, produces anxiety and dissatisfaction in those who refuse to be told what to do by others, or, more correctly, by the Other – a term Lacan uses to designate the Symbolic order, the social system we live in. Cat who is adamant in her desire to lead an "unencumbered, childfree" life falls prey to this meme about family matters: "Cat was starting to understand that children gave you a stake in the future, and they gave you a family. They gave you a new family just when your old family was starting to drift apart … Without children all you had was now, and reminders of the past" (*The Family Way* 108). Her "realization" reveals two stereotypical notions: first, that a person has no future if he or she has no children. The notion is absurd because children lead a life of their own, with names and accomplishments of their own; they do not continue the lives of their parents. On the contrary, more often than not, children will want to live a life completely different from their parents' life.[67] The romantic notion that you will be remembered by your children and so have a stake in the future is, clearly, simply an expression of our fear of death, which we hope to transcend by leaving progeny behind. This is why, for example, the death-fearing Jack Gladney and his wife Babette of *White Noise* value the traditional family as much as they do and why they procreated with all their previous partners/spouses. Moreover, this is why they take extreme comfort in their youngest child, Wilder: "Here are the two things I want most in the world. Jack not to die first. And Wilder to stay the way he is forever. … I'm spending more time with Wilder. Wilder helps me get by" (DeLillo 236, 263). He is the proof that there is yet a long time to go before they die. He even literally transcends death when he crosses the expressway on his tricycle "mystically charged" (322) and unharmed. However, that a child can be our stake at the future is a romantic misconception. Our genes become halved with every generation, and so the collection of genes

[67] The exception, of course, is hereditary monarchy, where a child (the successor) literally represents the dynasty's stake in the future as he or she takes over the parent's place and title, and continues in the predecessor's footsteps. This, however, is not a relevant topic in contemporary literature.

that makes any one of us disappears quite quickly, which is why we should not seek immortality in biological reproduction, but rather cultural creation (Dawkins 199).

Secondly, when Cat asserts that "children give you a family" (Parsons, *The Family Way* 108), she points to another stereotypical idea, namely, that married couples do not constitute a family because only those who procreate and ensure the survival of the species are worthy of the sacred family name. Of course, childless people have parents, cousins, and siblings, but none of this matters in the environment that puts the meme of the traditional nuclear family on the pedestal, ignores other lifestyles and refuses to think critically about dogmas. Even when two people are happy with each other and feel self-sufficient and satisfied as a family of two, the society frowns upon such a "frivolous" choice because they give nothing back to the society that created them: "society looks at a guy differently, if he doesn't have kids. … This may be the twenty-first century, but being a real man is still tied to being able to procreate" (Picoult 51). The ideology does not allow the individual to make his or her own choices, but wills them into recognizing its demands as their own wishes, implying one is not good enough, or "a real man", unless one cannot carry out what the ideology demands. Even though it might seem that family is a private, personal matter, there is nothing non-ideological about family: people are pressured by their friends and relatives into giving in to the expected pattern of getting married and having children. "[W]hat thus seems to take place outside ideology … in reality takes place in ideology. What really takes place in ideology seems therefore to take place outside it" (Althusser 175).

Parsons' novel *The Family Way* deals with these issues extensively, so, among many characters, each of which has a different idea of what a family should be, he portrays Paulo Baresi whose wife Jessica is desperate to have a baby, whereas he has reservations on the issue. Like the brothers Reid and Max Baxter in Picoult's novel, Paulo seems to be aware of our social and biological conditioning and is wondering whether Jessica's desperate need to have a baby

is justified and necessary. Although he has nothing against having children *per se* (he is very fond of his little niece), he is unsure whether parenting will be rewarding enough and whether this need to become a parent is not just a biological impulse which brings nothing good to the parent. Moreover, he loves Jessica and finds their family life satisfying as it is:

> But he wandered if he would really be any good at this fatherhood lark . . . . It was like you created this new life, but your life was over. Mother Nature has finished with you. And here was the funny thing. Paulo's sex life with Jessica had become bleak and desperate because they were trying for a baby. But Michael's sex life with Naoko was nonexistent because they had a baby. Once Michael had been crazy for Naoko. … But that was before they had a baby. Paulo still wanted a child with Jessica. But the most pressing reason he wanted it was because he knew it would make her happy. And was that a good reason to bring a baby into the world? (*The Family Way* 68-69)

What makes Paulo different from most characters is his awareness that he and his wife are already a family: "'So when are you two love birds going to start a family?' . . . 'We're a family already, Ma,' Paulo told his mother . . . 'A family of two.'" (Parsons, *The Family Way* 243). By pronouncing them a family, Paulo rejects procreation as the basic familial requirement and promotes love and loyalty to the partner as more important.

Esi Sekyi, the female protagonist of Aidoo's novel *Changes* is another in the line of literary characters who perceive both procreation and the traditional family life as direct threats to one's self. After having been educated within the framework of the Western educational system, she learns to love her independence and enjoy her work far more than family life. Being highly absorbed in her profession – she is a sociologist – marriage seems like a very undesirable prospect to her. However, despite her personal perception of marriage as undesirable, pressured by her mother, grandmother and the society in general, she finally agrees to marry Oko after

"Two solid years of courtship" (7). Her desire to live alone and dedicate her life to her career made her seem strange in the eyes of others and her acceptance of Oko's proposal is prompted by her "gratitude more than anything else. Gratitude that in spite of herself he had persisted in courting her and marrying her" (41) whereby he made her seem "normal" in the eyes of the world. Yet, despite her giving in to social expectations, it soon became clear that she is not the kind of woman Oko expected: "Esi definitely put her career well above any duties she owed as a wife" (8) and he began resenting her:

> six years of marriage. And what had he got out of it? Little. Nothing. No affection. Not even plain warmth. Nothing except one little daughter! Esi had never stated it categorically that she didn't want any more children. But she was on those dreadful birth control things: pills, loops or whatever. …no amount of reasoning and pleading had persuaded her to go off them. He wanted other children (8)

Esi's independence, signaled by the fact that she decides about the number of children they will have and the fact that she owns the house they live in, is not merely a symbol of her rejection of patriarchy, but of the changes in the minds of contemporary urban Africans brought about by the Western influence. While she believes people ought to marry someone they love or no one at all, her mother and grandmother assure her that "we all marry to have children … to help them grow up well … to increase the number of people with whom we can share the joys and the pains of this life. … Love is not safe, my lady Silk, love is dangerous" (42). Her subjection to the cultural expectations has pushed Esi into following the expected pattern of getting married and having children, even though she never envisaged such a lifestyle for herself. The conflict between Esi's individualistic orientation and the traditional concern for the common and communal interests is reflected in the different perceptions and expectations of the family life. The suppression of her individualism and her desire to dedicate herself to her work instead

of housework or child-rearing, created what is referred to as "irreconcilable differences" between her husband and herself, and rendered their family dysfunctional and unsustainable. Unsurprisingly, the conflict is resolved by Esi and Oko's divorce. While he perceives the traditional nuclear family to be the ideal they are supposed to replicate because "men are not really interested in a woman's independence or her intelligence. The few who claim they like intelligent and active women are also interested in having such women permanently in their beds and in their kitchens" (45), Esi wants "a man who is prepared to accept [her] lifestyle" (48) so that she does not have to live "in spite of herself" (41). Although her friend Opokuya warns her that "no man is totally going to accept your lifestyle. … we can't have it all. Not if you are a woman. Not yet. … no society on this earth allows that" (48, 49), Esi persists in her view of what her personal life should look like.

The very title of Aidoo's novel – *Changes*, suggests that urban African society is changing under the influence of the Western values, which is why her text fits into the context of this study which examines the depictions of contemporary Western families. Aidoo points to education as the source of change because through education young women and men are being instilled ideas about individuality, self-improvement and growth, characteristic of the Anglo-American late capitalist society. Esi realizes that her education has changed her forever and made her an alien because she no longer believes in nor lives by the myths and stories about the family:

> She could never be as close to her mother as her mother was to her grandmother. Never, never, never. And she knew why. ... Why had they sent her to school? What had they hoped to gain from it? What had they hoped she would gain from it? Who had designed the educational system that had produced her sort? What had that person or those people hoped to gain from it? For surely, taking a ten-year-old child away from her mother, and away from her first language – which

> is surely one of life's most powerful working tools . . . she was only equipped to go and roam in strange and foreign lands with no hope of ever meaningfully re-entering her mother's world. (114)

In Africa, Esi may stand out as a curiosity and her life a consequence of colonial influence, but in the context of contemporary English language fiction, her life simply follows the patterns of other Westerners who refuse to be subjected to the interests of the "family," but wish to exercise their own lifestyle. After having left her husband, she "lost the harassed feeling that had attacked her every late afternoon of every working day: that she had to hurry home or to the market or the shops to buy something, or to do something in connection with her role as a mother, a wife and a home-maker" (138). Being free from her roles of a mother, wife and home-maker finally gave her the opportunity to enjoy her life. The insistence on a particular model of family life made her life, but also her husband's and her daughter's lives, miserable, proving that the traditional nuclear family model is not the proper lifestyle for everyone. Although she "felt a little bad" (138) when she thought of her daughter, Ogyaanowa, whom she had left to live with the girl's grandmother, she never attempted to get custody or take care of Ogyaanowa full-time. Despite her motherly love, Ogyaanowa was a burden to Esi, more than her joy. In fact, her work was what made her feel happy and satisfied, and after the divorce "she virtually worked all the time. It was almost like before she had got married the first time and had had a child" (138).

The ultimate disintegration of the Sekyi family, where both the mother and the father start new lives with new partners, and their daughter is left with the grandmother, proves that forcing a specific familial model onto everyone does not work. Despite her reservation about having children and being a mother, Esi is not unable to feel love and attachment nor is she negatively disposed to living in a childless family. Therefore, once she feels in control of her life again, she does not remain single. Instead, she gets married to Ali, the man she loves, and

who accepts her lifestyle. Ali would never insist on having children, "Even if she had been keen on the idea – and God knows she was not" (139), because he is aware of her independence and accepts her as such: "you don't strike me as someone who'll miss anybody. … [you are] kind of relaxed. … as if you don't need anybody. … I want to marry you" (86).

The meme or the hard-core notion of how our private life should be arranged is being promoted in the media, in the church and passed on from parents to children because it has to be. Unless people reproduced, the society would cease to exist. Therefore it was necessary to make a childless family seem less of a family than, for example, a dysfunctional (!) traditional family with children. A dysfunctional family is still a "family" because it has performed the task of giving the society new members, but a childless family is more often than not reduced to the term "married couple." In fact, its otherness is such that both friends and relatives, as well as judges, who are representatives of law, perceive childless heterosexual couples the same way as they do gay lovers: "as an exceptional relationship in a procreative world" (Weston 208).

While the need to focus on the progeny instead of on the partner may have made sense centuries ago, when children rarely made it to their puberty and life expectancy was much shorter because of illnesses, malnutrition and wars, the absurdness of this idea in today's overcrowded world is self-evident. Max, for example, describes his idea of marital happiness as: "Zoe, before we'd started talking about family" (Picoult 57). He dreams of his wife, unburdened by the urge to have a baby, but relaxed and happy sharing her life with her husband.

Unburdened happiness seems to be the ultimate expression of selfishness according to Christian dogmas because we all not just have our cross to bear, but also have to bear our cross, as did Jesus. The only ones exempt from this rule are children, and they can be carefree until they grow up. Conveniently, the rite of passage for the Western young is the unquestioning acceptance of responsibilities, burdens and duties of adult life, one of which is to create children

of their own. And while most young people hope to be different from their parents, the culture demands of them to replicate familiar patterns in order to prove that they are mature. What is more, the fact that someone is childless makes them seem less worthy and even incapable of relating to the rest of humanity. This is precisely the argument Ali, Rory's ex-wife, uses to attempt to humiliate Cat, Rory's current partner:

> "My son has been under enormous pressure," Ali said, trembling with emotion. "But I wouldn't expect someone like you to understand."
>
> "Someone like me?"
>
> Ali smiled thinly. "Someone who has never had a family of her own."
>
> "I've got a family," Cat said trying to keep her voice calm. "I don't have children, it's true. But don't you ever tell me I haven't got a family." (Parsons, *The Family Way* 107)

Cat Jewell is a woman who does not feel she needs to have children in order to achieve self-actualization. When she was eleven years old, her mother Olivia had left her, her two younger sisters and their father to pursue her acting career. Cat was forced to take over the household, and she "had seen the reality of a woman's work. The hard slog, the thankless graft, the never-ending struggle to keep bellies fed and faces clean and bottoms wiped and eyes dried and washing done" (Parsons, *The Family Way* 6). This was probably the reason why she "lost herself in her studies and later in her work, in no rush to build a home and start a family and return to the tyranny of domesticity" (*The Family Way* 6). Her experience of being eleven years old and in charge of the household and her little sisters is a symbolic equivalent of the century-long domestic female experience of "having a family" which she now refuses to relive: "Never, thought Cat. Never ever" (*The Family Way* 7). Her partner, Rory, the divorced father of a teenage boy, is aware of what parenting does to a person: "you got tired. You made that journey – from the nights when your child stayed awake teething, to the nights when your child stayed

awake taking drugs – and it exhausted you. It just wore you out" (*The Family Way* 109), which is why he has a vasectomy in order not to repeat the experience. For Rory and Cat, his inability to have children seems like "one of the good things in [their] perfect life" (*The Family Way* 37). Their relationship was

> Unencumbered . . . She was free to lie around all Sunday in her dressing gown, reading the papers, or jump on a plane and go to Prague for the weekend, or stay over at Rory's place when the mood took her. Unencumbered – and that was just how she wanted it. Because after their mother had walked out, her childhood had been as encumbered as can be. She never wanted to be that tied down, that domesticated, again. (*The Family Way* 37-38)

She does not qualify her relationship to Rory as "childless", but "childfree," because she "didn't need a baby to make her life worthwhile, and her world whole" (*The Family Way* 38). What is more, "She refused to accept the fact that a relationship could only be serious if it included children" (159), challenging thus the notion of the traditional family and refusing to be allured into following the same pattern.

However, after finding out that her forty-year-old boss and somewhat of a role model, Brigitte, is left by her boyfriend for a girl of twenty-four, she is shocked and begins to doubt her choices. She becomes insecure and no longer has the strength or determination to swim against the current; instead, she succumbs to social pressure and begins questioning her lifestyle: "A person needed to be unencumbered but not cast adrift, free but not lost, and loved but not smothered. But how do you manage all that? … Cat thought, is this what happens? If you don't settle down when the world tells you to? Do you end up taking drugs in a club when you are forty?" (87-88). Despite her own common sense and her individual preferences, she is unable to ignore the outside pressure and the patterns she sees repeated in the lives of people that surround her. She is confused and unsure of what to do because what she wants and what

she feels compelled to do turn out to be two different things: "'You modern girls make me laugh,' … 'You don't know what you want, do you?' She couldn't argue with that" (138). Cat's inner conflict between her need for intimacy and her feeling of abhorrence with the way the traditional family life works is in the end resolved by her acceptance of herself and her family as they are, regardless of all sorts of definitions and social expectations:

> Cat had always thought that she wanted her freedom, but she saw now that what she had really wanted was for them to be a *real* family. And now as she stood with her sisters watching their father go off to his new life, she saw that they had been a real family all along. Maybe not a *perfect* family, with all members happy and present, or the kind of family you would put in commercials to sell breakfast cereal. But a *real* family all the same, who loved and supported each other, who even liked each other, capable of helping each other through anything, even the changes that came with the passing of the years. (*The Family Way* 368, emphasis added)

Despite the general perception of a childless relationship as a purposeless and futureless state which can never qualify as a family, Cat finally comes to terms with what she wants and understands that there are different kinds of families, and that all of them are "real". Moreover, she knows that a steady monogamous relationship is possible even without having children if both partners choose it as their way of life.

Contrary to this, Harry Silver's ex-wife Gina believes that children are what makes a family, perpetuating thus the usual belief according to which childless families are an impossibility: "I think a marriage needs children, Harry. It's hard enough to keep it together even if you have a kid. Without them – I don't know if it's possible" (Parsons, *Man and Wife* 225). What is problematic with this very common way of thinking is the mistake in the initial logic behind the idea that you need some sort of "ball and chain" to keep the marriage together.

Harry's mother explains that marriage must be kept strong from the inside by means of one's determination to stay together with that one particular person and willingness to work on the quality of the relationship: "'You have to keep falling in love,' she said. 'You just have to keep falling in love with the same person" (*Man and Wife* 260). Without a genuine commitment to the partner, a child will not be sufficient to keep the marriage together. While it is true that some parents will struggle to keep the family together for the sake of the children, this will not make either of them happy, proving thus the ideal of a traditional family unreachable if it is forced upon us merely by feelings of guilt or obligation.

More notably, the pressure to have children in order to be a proper family and the constant unsuccessful trying for a baby often puts such a strain on a marriage that spouses in the end often decide to get divorced in order to stop the agony. They either cannot handle the parental responsibilities, or they can no longer deal with the pain of another potential miscarriage or, more prosaically but not less important, they cannot afford another cycle of IVF (in vitro fertilization). In fact, this is exactly what happens to Max and Zoe Baxter in Picoult's novel *Sing You Home*, which, like most of her fiction, deals with the issues concerning the functions and dysfunctions of family and controversial social issues that do not yield themselves to easy solutions (Pfaff 1).

Zoe is a forty-year old music therapist obsessed by the desire to have a child. Her obsession is such that all her "friendships had dwindled as Max and I began to devote ourselves entirely to combating infertility" (Picoult 14). As the book begins, she is twenty-eight weeks pregnant, after she has had a history of "four unsuccessful cycles of IVF, two miscarriages, and enough infertility issues to bring down a civilization" (Picoult 9). However, at twenty-eight weeks she gives birth to a stillborn baby. The labor and delivery reveal that she also suffers from thrombophilia, a blood clotting disorder, which would put an additional strain on her body and even cause a stroke if she decided to try for a new pregnancy. Max thinks they should give

up, but Zoe insists, which ruptures their marital relationship and distances her and Max from one another: "Our sex life had become like Thanksgiving dinner with a dysfunctional family – something you have to show up for, even though you're not really having a good time" (Picoult 50). While Zoe completely loses focus from their relationship to each other and sees no other point in living than having a baby, Max is interested in being happy with his wife, whether they have children or not. Finally, once Zoe reveals that she wants to try again and have another cycle of IVF, although this would mean risking her own life, Max decides to leave her, proving that, for him, procreation is not the only function of marriage: "You want a relationship with my sperm. This … this baby thing… it's gotten so much bigger than the two of us. It's not even us, in it together anymore. It's you, and it's the baby we can't seem to have, and the harder it gets, the more air it sucks out of the room, Zoe. There's no space left for me" (45). With this he proves that he is able to resist the ideology's interpellation; he is not biologically, psychologically or culturally obsessed with the idea that he must procreate: "I wanted a baby, too. Not because I've spent my whole life dreaming of fatherhood, but for a reason much more simple than that. Because it's what Zoe wanted" (49). His desire to have children is rooted in the fact that he wanted to make his wife happy, but had she been differently disposed, they could have remained happy as a childless family.

Max's brother, Reid, is in a similar situation and has a similar view of marriage as Max does. Both he and his wife Liddy have medical issues, which makes it hard for her to get pregnant or carry the pregnancy to term. Once it seems that he and his wife have reached their final limit of endurance, Reid, a very religious man, puts emphasis on his marriage rather than on progeny, just as Max did. After Liddy miscarried for the fifth time, he is in doubt whether they should keep trying to have a baby because every miscarriage is making his wife a bit more desperate and unhappy than the one before. Furthermore, he questions the Christian idea that a child is what makes a marriage a family: "Is it a sin to say that, sure, I loved that baby, but I

love my wife more?" (Picoult 177). In other words, if it were not for the religious pressure, he would be willing to have a childless family with his wife because their relationship provides him with everything he needs to feel his family complete: love, commitment and security. In the same vein, Zoe's wife,[68] Vanessa, does not want Zoe to sacrifice her career in order for the two of them to have a baby. Although a baby would be welcome, still she makes it clear: "You and me, we're already a family. With or without children" (Picoult 453), proving that successful procreation is not a family-defining activity, as, for example, the Bible claims. What makes two people a family is their mutual feeling of belonging, commitment and love:

> "If it looks like a family, talks like a family, acts like a family, and functions like a family," she says, "then it's a family. The relationship between my client, Zoe Baxter, and Vanessa Shaw is not housemates or roommates but life partners. Spouses. They love each other, they are committed to each other, and they function as a unit, not just as individuals. The last time I checked, that was a valid definition of a family." (Picoult 349)

Similarly to the ideas expressed in Picoult's novel, Carver's short fiction also seems to be highly critical of the pressure to procreate in order to be considered successful, complete and "normal". He often depicts couples who become miserable only after they have succumbed to the desire to procreate. According to Lacan, this desire is inevitable since human beings cannot control their genital libido, the purpose of which is not pleasure, but ensuring the survival of

[68] After getting a divorce from Max, Zoe falls in love with a woman, Vanessa, and they get married. Again, Zoe insists on becoming a mother, only this time she wants to use the three embryos she and Max have left from their IVF procedures and have Vanessa carry the pregnancy to term. Max, angry at Zoe's remarriage refuses to give the embryos to them and decides to give them to his brother and Liddy. A high profile court process begins, with a lesbian married couple on the one side, and a traditional Christian family, supported by the Evangelical Church, on the other. In the end, Max wins the trial and decides to give the embryos to Vanessa and Zoe, who, he believes, will be excellent mothers. In the epilogue, Vanessa gives birth to a daughter, Sammy, who has two mothers and a father. Liddy and Reid get a divorce and Max and Liddy start dating. In effect, the novel deconstructs two unhappy traditional families (Max and Zoe's, and Reid and Liddy's) which were focused on procreation as the final goal, and constructs new types of families (Vanessa and Zoe's homosexual family and Max and Liddy's childless family) that, unlike the traditional one, enable its members to be happy and achieve self-actualization.

the species. Interestingly, he refers to this phenomenon not as a purely natural, biological occurrence, but as "man's cultural subordination" (96), which is in line with Foucault's assertion that the society defines specific codes of (sexual) behavior to which the individual establishes its relation, recognizing oneself as obliged to put the rule into practice. The ways in which an individual will obey the rule is referred to as *the mode of subjectivity* (*The Use of Pleasure* 26-27). Both Lacan and Foucault find the individual to be a subject defined by and dependent on the social rules and codes. In like manner, Lefebvre claims that family is linked to genitality and as such guarantees both the meaning and social practice. Namely, by means of generalized reproduction, the family unit serves as a means for reconstitution of the social unit which is shattered by a host of separations and segregations (232). In order to reconstitute itself as a whole, the society demands a single, uniform, controllable family form. More notably, next to violence and the accumulation of capital, the "principle of *unification*, which subordinates and totalizes the various aspects of social practice" (Lefebvre 281) is one of the hallmarks of the state.

The reason behind this politicizing of sexuality and reproduction is the desire of the state to control its subjects. As the capitalist, industrial society emerged in the nineteenth century, it started producing various discourses about it in order to formulate the "uniform truth of sex", as if sex was "harboring a fundamental secret" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 69). Under the assumption that knowledge is power, the society attempted to "know" sex, so the discourse of sex finally turned to what is moral and became an issue of who we are, transferring sex from a realm of activity into the realm of identity and subjecting it to Christian and juridical perceptions of "good" and "bad." This resulted in reproductive sex (sex with a purpose and a benefit for the society) being deemed as good, desirable and ordered, whereas sex practiced simply for pleasure – *jouissance*, was bad, immoral and uncontrollable, "Not, however, by reason of some natural property inherent in sex itself, but by virtue of the tactics of power

immanent in this discourse" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 70). However, it seems that this principle, to which humans are subordinated, often makes the contemporary literary protagonists miserable.[69] Because of the interpellation of the ideology which tries to make it obvious that reproduction is the normative function of a family, constituting only "proper" families as subjects (Althusser 170-171), people who live in families of two (that is, in families that do not include biological or adoptive children) mistakenly feel incomplete due to their disinclination or inability to procreate and the reluctance of the society/culture to acknowledge their relationship as a family. In fact, they are being denied the status that they already have: they have effectively become a family the moment they committed to one another.

Carver's short story "Feathers" is a case in point. It is a story about Jack and Fran, a working-class family of two who live happily on their own: "Why do we need other people? she seemed to be saying. We have each other" (2). They would often spend evenings wishing out loud for things they did not have: "We wished for a new car, that's one of the things we wished for. And we wished we could spend a couple of weeks in Canada. But one thing we didn't wish for was kids. The reason we didn't have kids was that we didn't want kids" (3).

One day, however, they are invited to dinner with friends, Bud and Olla, who have an eight-month old son Harold, the ugliest baby they have ever seen, and the visit changes their lives forever. Looking at the messy life of their friends unable to eat dinner in peace because they are constantly being interrupted either by the baby, or by their pet peacock, Joey, Jack realizes that he and Fran lead a wonderful life: "That evening I felt good about almost everything in my life" (22). Conversely, Fran was moved by Bud and Olla's ugly baby, who "stared at her with its pop eyes. Then it reached and got itself a baby handful of Fran's blond

[69] Richard Yates's novel the *Revolutionary Road* also deals with a similar topic, depicting a young married couple tortured by the wrong decisions they made (to get married to each other and, even more so, to have children), because they were unable to resist the process or the fact of their "cultural subordination" (See Matek par. 10).

hair" (21), and who served as an anthropomorphication of the ideology's interpellation to Fran. That evening, during their lovemaking Fran demands of Jack: "Honey, fill me up with your seed!" (22). Fran's reaction, provoked by their visit to Bud and Olla and her encounter with the baby, proves that human desire originates out of the interaction with the Other and is generated by the world of the Other (Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 174): "Fran would look back on that evening at Bud's place as the beginning of the change" (23). Once she gets insight into a way of life quite different from her own, but one that is considered to be the "usual" way, she is tempted to live that other kind of life as well and to enjoy the same things as others do.

After Jack and Fran get a baby of their own, their life changes dramatically for the worse: she quits her job, cuts her beautiful hair, gets fat and they drift apart, not talking to each other. The air of dissatisfaction pervades their home, and Fran continuously blames Bud and Olla for the way their life has turned out: "Goddamn those people and their ugly baby" (23). Literally, but also symbolically, the "curse" is cast on Jack and Fran's marriage that evening because as they are leaving home, Olla gives Fran some peacock feathers to take home, which, in some cultures, are believed to bring bad luck to those who have it. What the peacock feathers brought into their life was a child, who turned out to be the cause of a permanent and growing dissatisfaction for its parents: "The truth is, my kid has a conniving streak in him" (23). The irony is, of course, in the fact that once they have become parents, which was supposed to legitimize their status as a family, the feelings of intimacy, self-containment and satisfaction they once had suddenly disappear and they become less of a family than they had been as a childless married couple: "She and I talk less and less as it is. Mostly it's just the TV. But I remember that night. … In the car Fran sat close to me as we drove away. She kept her hand on my leg. We drove home like that from my friend's house" (24). Contrary to the common belief that intimacy and closeness are the natural consequences of starting a family, the moments before Jack and Fran came home and she conceived their child are remembered as the last

moments of complete intimacy and closeness between them; having a child made them distant and unhappy.

Similarly, in "The Compartment," the main protagonist, Myers, travels to meet with his son and, as he travels, he contemplates his feelings for his son and ex-wife. He believes that his marriage had failed because of "the boy's malign interference in their personal affairs" (Carver 43). Being a parent makes one vulnerable, not only because of everything one is responsible for, but also because of everything one might lose. The enormous responsibility and daily familial and household drudge drain the enthusiasm out of Carver's protagonists. Instead of becoming more open to people and life, parents in Carver's stories tend to crave isolation from everything as if the damage parenthood has done is irreparable; it has rendered them tired and almost misanthropic, like Myers who wishes a complete isolation from the world: "He thought this might be a good way to live – in an old house surrounded by a wall" (44). As he travels to meet with his son for the first time in eight years, he feels uncomfortable with the prospect to embrace him (45) and does not know what to talk about because the boy is a stranger to him. His thoughts, however, go to the boy's mother and the idea that she might even be dead is heartbreaking to him (46). In other words, what memories and feelings he has from his marriage are the ones that include his ex-wife, but not his child: "the fact was, he really had no desire to see this boy whose behavior had long ago isolated him from Myers's affections" (50). His inner monologue reveals his contempt for the child and his belief that, had they remained childless, he and his wife, the woman he loved, would have had a much better life together. Again, the child that should have been "a bond" of the family, turned out to be the disruptive factor:

> This boy had devoured Myers's youth, had turned the young girl he had courted and wed into a nervous, alcoholic woman whom the boy alternately pitied and bullied. Why on earth, Myers asked himself, would he come all this way to see

someone he disliked? He didn't want to shake the boy's hand, the hand of his enemy. (50)

A similar sentiment of rivalry with one's own child is expressed by Michael in Parsons' novel *The Family Way*. He explains to his brother Paulo that having a baby is not at all simple for a father: "But a baby doesn't complete your world. Not if you're a man. A baby is a *rival*. And you can't compete, you just can't compete" (102). Although he claims to love them, "I love Naoko. And I love Chloe" (Parsons, *The Family Way* 130), he still chooses to cheat on his wife, to have "Meaningless sex with a virtual stranger" (130) because he finds his marriage joyless since he has become a father: "But since she's been born, I just wonder – how can you have so much love in your life, and so little joy?" (130). Significantly, just like Carver's protagonists, he blames the child – not the wife – for the lack of joy. Usually, one would expect the husband to be put off by his wife's lack of interest in sex, or her flawed appearance after having a baby, but Michael seems to suggest that had they remained childless, he would still be faithful to Naoko because they would still be living the joyful life they had before they became parents.

Single parent families represent a proof of how deeply ingrained the desire for procreation is. The single parent family may occur in two different ways. Some single parents have their singleness thrust upon them, either when the partner does not want to take on the additional responsibility of parenting or when a spouse demands a divorce. These are not the kinds of families this study focuses on. Namely, as Dizard and Gadlin argue, in such cases the single parent family is not a "threat" to the ideal of the traditional family, because the partners simply have not been able to meet or sustain it. However, single parent families challenge this ideal when they represent a rejection of any long-term commitment as such; increasing numbers of people prefer staying single to the "hassle" of sustaining a relationship (142-143). They, in fact, set out to be single parents refuting thus effectively Parsons' claim that "Nobody ever sets out

to be a single parent" (*The Family Way* 5). In this instance, they represent a new kind of family where the function of procreation is accepted (and with it the role of a parent), but not the one of partnership which implies compromise, shared responsibility and, typically, love between two adults.

The reluctance to compromise and insistence on satisfying individual desires has a lot to do with the idea that every one of us is unique, special and in no need of improvement other than physical one.[70] Thus, every individual becomes the most important person in his or her life effectively negating the need (or desire) to put up with anyone else's demands. Such a worldview was influenced not only by the media and industry but also by ideas promoted by contemporary thinkers. Contemporary poststructuralist theory has exchanged the humanist model of the "self" as a conscious, independent being with universal human characteristics, for the concept of "subject" who is produced by language (or, as Lacan calls it, the Symbolic order) and operates as a vehicle of discourse. The logos can only be produced through the voice, which is "an order of the signifier by which the subject takes from itself into itself, does not borrow outside of itself the signifier that it emits and that affects it at the same time" (Derrida 98). Furthermore, the subject is stripped of its creative autonomy (which the self had), and exists as an artificial construct. Subjects occupy different positions marked for difference by their age, race, gender, class, educational level and so on. "While all 'selves,' in the humanist tradition, may be created equal, and considered as identical because all selves share the same essential characteristics, such as reason and free will, no two 'subjects' are alike" (Klages 90). The idea of uniqueness of every individual has been made extensive use of in the media, as it enticed

[70] This, of course, refers to the indoctrinations of the so called "beauty industry", which imply the need to constantly buy and use beauty products and services in order to be socially acceptable based on certain market-imposed aesthetic categories.

consumption of specific – mass produced – items that were, ironically, supposed to show one's individuality to the world.

Because of the century-long process of social conditioning, people are "almost expected to fall onto a track that leads to marriage and kids" (Picoult 273), but the need to be unique and different spilled over into human relationships as a desire for different lifestyles, unburdened by law, religious dogmas or social customs, so that they can better match our individuality. It becomes more and more obvious that the "strings" of familial life can be unacceptable for certain people who then seek intimacy outside the traditional family framework. Dizard and Gadlin explain that "While intense intimacy and love remain preoccupations, we increasingly experience these emotions and the relationships in which they occur as threatening" (97). In order to avoid being taken at face value, hurt or have their trust broken, certain literary protagonists have become wary of relationships that imply dependency, so they tend to question their romantic impulses and devalue the need to depend on someone. Moreover, as "the pursuit of self-fulfillment has become the organizing principle of life" (Dizard and Gadlin 97), a restrictive step such as getting married loses the attraction it once had.

Consequently, more and more individuals seem to have trouble establishing relationships with other individuals because one tends to put oneself first instead of make compromise with the other, which inevitably influences the dynamics of family life. For example, women who become pregnant with men who are unable to commit or who do not seem likely to be adequate husbands decide to start out as single mothers, keeping the baby but not the baby's father. Sally, a minor character in Parsons' novel *Man and Wife*, explains why single-parenting represents a better option for her: "'I'd rather be on my own than with some useless bastard of a man,' said Sally, rocking Precious in her arms. 'Like her fat-arsed father. No arguments. No bitching about who does what. Just me and my girl. The single parent answers to no one. … It's uncomplicated" (192).

In *The Family Way* Parsons deals with the issue of single parenthood in more detail. Among the characters he depicts is Megan Jewell, a young doctor who has just recently broken up with her long-term boyfriend after she found out he had been unfaithful. Two weeks after the break-up, she goes "to a party for the first time in ages" (33) and meets Kirk, a young Australian who is soon to return home to Sydney. Uninterested in having a relationship and sure that she will never see him again, Megan has a one night stand with him, and, ironically, gets pregnant: "she had no regrets – apart from the fact that a doctor who spent her days lecturing to teenage mums about contraception should probably never leave her own family planning to the fates" (74). At first she considers having an abortion, "I'm not keeping it, Jess. How can I? I hardly know the father. And even if I did, I still wouldn't keep it. I'm not in love with him, Jess. And this is the wrong time. … I've just started work. I just did six years at medical school – six years! – and another year as a house officer in hospitals" (80). However, realizing that she could not live with herself otherwise, she decides to keep the baby: "I didn't go through with it, Mum. I'm keeping the baby" (103).

Her mother, Olivia, tries to warn her against it, by stating that at twenty-eight she is too young to become a mother and that being a single parent is extremely difficult, psychologically, physically and, not less important, economically:

> Megan, do you have any idea what you're taking on? The sleepless nights, the exhaustion, the screaming and the shitting and hysterical fits? . . . You have no idea. It's hard enough if you've got a husband and a nanny and a few bob in the bank. Try doing it alone on whatever pin money the NHS is chucking your way. (Parsons, *The Family Way* 103-104)

Single parent families must endure reduced standards of living, which includes struggles with the welfare, employers and schools. In fact, "there is little that is positive in this situation,", and yet more and more men and especially women avoid marriage or remarriage (Dizard and Gadlin

143).[71] Despite being well aware of the difficulties that single parents have to face, Megan feels responsibility towards the unborn baby: "She couldn't explain that having this baby was hard, but not having it would be infinitely harder. … although the doubts and the dark stuff did not disappear, someone or something seemed to whisper, *the right thing, the right thing, you are doing the right thing*" (103, 105). At the same time, while she is ready to take up any responsibility arising from becoming a mother, she has not the least bit of interest in including the father into her or the baby's life: "She didn't want a family with this man" (77). However, six months later, Kirk, the baby's father, bumps into Megan and seeing her pregnant realizes that she must be carrying his child. He becomes determined to stand by Megan: "I just want to be a part of this" (200). Although she is still resolute in her decision not to have a relationship with Kirk, his determination softens Megan and she allows him to be with her as their daughter is born, but not to give the baby his last name. Kirk's involvement is a continuous cause of frustration for Megan, despite the fact that he is honest in his desire to help and very kind both to her and the baby. Seeing him waiting outside her apartment on the day they are released from hospital infuriates Megan, proving that she is not genuinely interested in having a partner of any kind: "'What's he doing here? Megan said. 'Is it going to be like this every day? This guy just turning up unannounced and uninvited?' 'Megan,' Jessica said. 'He *is* her father'" (233). Giving in to Kirk's insistence and her family's expectations, she decides to try and live with Kirk for a while in order to give Poppy a "proper" home. However, she does not attempt to be a "proper" wife, and as she discovers that Kirk has an affair, she uses this as an excuse to end their relationship forever so that she could be alone with her daughter. Her determination is

[71] Research has shown that single mothers value their independence and sense of self so much that despite all difficulties they would hardly risk losing their autonomy in order to get married or remarried (Arendell 142-147). In other words, after having felt this kind of freedom and self-reliance, "it is hard to return to a situation that requires more or less constant alertness to the needs of a spouse" (Dizard and Gadlin 144).

such that she does not even feel the need to discuss things with Kirk, who, although desperate to make things work, was simply "surplus luggage" in her life:

> "You can't support yourself and our baby," he said. "On the peanuts the NHS pays you?" … We'll survive, she thought. I'm qualified and I've got my family and we will survive. … It was all going to be different, living on her own. But she didn't feel the need to explain any of this to Kirk. There was an aching sadness in leaving, but this was a good thing. She didn't feel the need to explain anything any more. … once she had accepted that she no longer had to carry all this surplus luggage, the sensation was actually quite liberating. (348)

Challenging the notion of the traditional family form, she tells Kirk that living together as a couple only makes sense if people love each other, whether they have a child or not. In fact, for Megan, a single parent seems a much better option for a child than two parents who do not love each other: "I just think we should have loved each other,' she said. 'You're basically a good guy, and you've been a good friend … But that was what was wrong, and it was wrong all along. If two people are going to have a child together, then they should love each other" (348). The fact that Kirk is well-meaning and honest gives even more weight to Megan's decision. Even her sisters viewed Kirk's persistence favorably because they all believed a traditional family environment will make everyone happy: "Jessica smiled at him with sympathy. This was a good guy, wasn't it? Wasn't this how we wanted a man to be? Attentive, concerned, there by your side? Why was her sister so hard on him?" (208). Luckily, Megan realized that traditional model cannot function without feelings of mutual love. What is more, continuing that life would have only made them – and by extension the daughter, too – more and more miserable.

Both Megan, who rejects marriage as a possibility for a happy life, and Sally, who perceives marriage as a complicated relationship which necessarily must include "bitching" and

arguing, reflect a much deeper concern: namely, that there is no possibility of a lifelong (romantic) love. Self-absorption prevents genuine commitment to a person and by extension the development of a truly intimate relationship other than that between a parent and a child. The distrust of the myth of true (or eternal) love as one of the old, grand narratives has thus contributed to the increased number of single-parent families. In such familial arrangements the single parent transfers all his or her love and expectations onto the child. The progeny, the "flesh of one's flesh", will always be a part of the parent's life because the child is dependent on the parent, whereas the partner is not. Whereas the mutual love between a parent and his or her child may survive all kinds of trials, romantic love between spouses or partners is fragile and perishable: "We say we love our husbands, we stand up in church saying as how we'll love them forever and ever, till death do we part, but it's our own blood and sinew we really love" (Shields 10). Moreover, one much rarely regrets having children or being a parent than having spent a certain amount of time on a partner.

A case in point is Annie, the protagonist of Hornby's novel *Juliet, Naked*, who is desperate because of her futile and passionless relationship with Duncan in which she feels "less like a girlfriend than a school chum" (7). Even in the early days, their relationship lacked passion because they were never in love: "They had both moved to the same English seaside town at around the same time … and they had been introduced by mutual friends who could see that, if nothing else, they could talk about books and music, go to films, travel to London occasionally to see exhibitions and gigs. …they fell upon each other with relief" (7). They had no plans for the future as they were "stuck in a perpetual postgraduate world where gigs and books and films mattered more to them than they did to other people of their age. The decision not to have children had never been taken, and nor had there been any discussion resulting in a postponement of the decision" (7). If Duncan had not met Gina, a woman he felt instantly attracted to, "I was just very attracted to her immediately. … It's been a long time, in fact, since

I've been as, as drawn to somebody as I am to her" (78-79), their futile relationship might have lasted even longer. Annie is hurt and angry not because Duncan found somebody else, but because "I should have got out ages ago. It was just inertia. And now I've been sh … dumped on" (83). Determined to continue with her life as soon as possible, she wants Duncan to move out of the house immediately: "I have just wasted half my life with you. What was left of my youth, in fact. I'm not going to waste another day" (80). Moreover,

Annie feels she should be entitled to some sort of compensation for the fifteen years she had wasted on Duncan: "She wanted the time back, to spend on something else. She wanted to be twenty-five again. … The fifteen years were gone, anyway. And what had gone with them? Children, almost certainly, and if she ever did take Duncan to court, that's what she would sue him for" (123, 124).

Annie's feeling of loss does not result from the fact that her romantic relationship has ended because she now sees the fifteen years with her boyfriend Duncan as "a waste of time" (Hornby 21). It results from her fear that, at forty, it may be too late for her to become a mother. She seems to be conditioned into believing that unless we bear children of our own, we are "failures," incomplete, and immature. Procreation seems to be human most important purpose, regardless of one's marital status, and having a child will somehow make Annie's life better and more complete:

> And now, with an irritating predictability, she was going through what everyone had told her she would go through: she was aching for a child. Her aches were brought on by all the usual mournful-happy life events: Christmas, the pregnancy of a friend, the pregnancy of a complete stranger she saw in the street. And she wanted a child for all the usual reasons, as far as she could tell. She wanted to feel unconditional love, … she wanted to be held by someone who would never question the embrace, the why, or the who, or the how long. (Hornby 7)

Her sense of wasted time is aggravated by the fact that, unlike other childless friends, they never had any real fun: they went to the same vacation places, wearing the same clothes, doing the same things and never meeting new people (Hornby 20-21). After their break-up, she is determined to change her life and takes on a platonic long-distance relationship with Duncan's favorite musician, Tucker Crowe. As Tucker arrives in England, they have a one night stand and she pretends "to fit a contraceptive device in an attempt to get pregnant" (Hornby 243).

According to Mary Duenwald, Annie is on an "earnest quest for some belated emotional maturity" (1) which she believes can be achieved through parenthood. Her desire is undoubtedly motivated by the symbolical ticking of the mythical or mythological biological clock: "she needed to know that she could have one [a child], that there was life in her" (Hornby, *Juliet, Naked* 7), but not by a desire to find a perfect partner because she has already wasted too many years of her life on Duncan. The abstract image of time running out is what "forces" women into the process of reproduction out of fear that they will die old and alone unless they fulfill their most important biological and social function. Beaten down by the life in a small English town, Anne wonders how other people can stand living in such a dull place and finds an answer: "They had children, these people. That was how they stood it" (Hornby, *Juliet, Naked* 136). Of course, having children will in no way prevent anyone from dying old and/or alone, and it does not guarantee personal happiness. Still, single people decide to take on the parenting task pressured by the misconception that having a child will fill one's life with a sense of purpose or completeness.

Raymond Carver's short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" aptly captures the contemporary belief that there is no such a thing as true love. One of the story's protagonists, Mel McGinnis, a divorced cardiologist who "thought real love was nothing less than spiritual love" (452), tells the story of two of his patients, a married couple in their mid-seventies who got severely injured in a traffic accident. During their stay at the hospital, despite

the fact that they were both making recovery and were no longer in a life-threatening situation, the husband got depressed because in his immobilized state he was unable to see his wife. The idea that the old man loved his wife that much even after they had been married for half a century left a deep impression on Mel. He fears that neither he nor any of his friends has ever known true love, and wonders if they are even able to connect with another person in such a way as to make sincere, deep feelings possible. Mel cannot stand his ex-wife; his current wife Terri suffered domestic violence in her previous relationship, and the couple they are having dinner with are not each other's first partner either. All this makes him believe that they "ought to be ashamed when we talk like we know what we're talking about when we talk about love" (456). He is disillusioned and depressed by the fact that there are no more great loves, and that the sanctity of the family has been lost by the fact that no one is irreplaceable:

> And the terrible thing, the terrible thing is, but the good thing too, the saving grace, you might say, is that if something happened to one of us – excuse me for saying this – but if something happened to one of us tomorrow I think the other one, the other person, would grieve for a while, you know, but then the surviving party would go out and love again, have someone else soon enough. All this, all of this love we're talking about, it would just be a memory. Maybe not even a memory. (456)

The old couple belongs to a different era and serves as a foil to the young. Their imminent death symbolizes the death of the traditional family values, the end of an era in which we were able to talk about great, lifelong loves. The severe traffic accident which left them almost fatally injured was, not less symbolically, caused by a drunken teenager – a member of the new, irreverent generation who has neither patience nor respect for the old values. The story, like Carver's fiction in general, has a depressing, pessimistic atmosphere and an unsettling, open ending: "Terri said, 'Now what?'. I could hear my heart beating. I could hear everyone's

heart. I could hear the human noise we sat there making, not one of us moving, not even when the room went dark" (460). They are left in the "dark" because they are unsure of what they are supposed to do in a world where love and marriage are no longer what they used to be. Moreover, as Bieber Lake notes, they are limited by language which is inadequate to express deepest human concerns (294), and so their unspoken questions remain unanswered. Is marriage really such an unpleasant state as their previous marriages were, or is it made such by their self-centeredness and unwillingness to commit? Can there ever be a true family if they begin their relationships by telling themselves that they can always "get out" and find someone else, or rather, continue on their own? The belief that family life suppresses our individuality and independence appears to be a kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Carver's protagonists focus on the "individual freedom" and interpret it as "un-attachment". In this, they reject the possibility of a "true" or lifelong love, making thus the notion of a happily married couple, or a happy family, a matter of the past as symbolized by the injured old couple. According to Paul Skenazy, the nostalgia for what might have been lost or unrealized is quite characteristic of most Carver's stories that feature "the presence of some lost, almost forgotten, not-really-expected possibility" (79) which arises predominantly from the existential bafflement of his characters which is that we can never know what to want (Cornwell 344). Quite similarly, Kureishi's Jay claims that "life without love is a long boredom" (*Intimacy* 17), even though he is the first one to assert that there is no love in marriage.

The Western cultural narrative of romance has been insisting for centuries that the "proper" way of life – or even the purpose in life – is to find the One: an ideal partner with whom we can start a family and live happily ever after. Paradoxically, the belief that there is no true love did not contribute to a decline in the human obsession with it. On the contrary, the reluctance to get married may result from the fact that "our generation" now "knows" that our desire for permanent romance cannot be satisfied because marriage offers only a "low-watt

glow" (Hornby, *High Fidelity* 179), so we give up before trying. In many ways, the insistence on individuality is based on our desire for constant pleasure, and the desire to be consumed by passionate romantic love seems pleasurable. At the same time, under the assumption that great loves are no longer possible, the contemporary individual rejects marriage (and thus the confines of a traditional two-parent family) by falsely linking romance with marriage. Of course, as Harrison noted, "To confuse romance with marriage, to take the mask for the face, is to betray not an inner richness but an infantile wish for total immersion into the other, for escape from adulthood" (84). In fact, "Marriage is a far more complex collaboration than that of romance; a great portion of the burden of marriage is a forward-looking consciousness, the contemplation of death and of its partner, existential aloneness" (Harrison 84). Several authors suggested that self-oriented individuals lack maturity[72] which is precisely the trait needed to make the marriage work.[73] However, contemporary protagonists seem to be proudly immature and selfish. For example, when John and Christine ask Will, the main protagonist of Hornby's novel *About a Boy,* to be the godfather of their week-old daughter Imogen, he refuses it:

> "Godfather? Church and things? Birthday presents? Adoption if you're killed in an air crash?"
>
> "Yeah."
>
> "You're kidding."
>
> "We've always thought you have hidden depths," said John.
>
> "Ah, but you see I haven't. I am this shallow." (11)

[72]Cf. Freud's "Civilization and Its Discontents" as well as Dizard and Gadlin's "The Minimal Family" and their claims that life of continuous and immediate gratification does not make self-oriented individuals happy, but rather provokes a haunting feeling that something is missing.

[73] In Picoult's *Sing You Home*, the main protagonist Zoe remembers her best childhood friend, Ellie, and says: "Her mother was single, like mine, although by choice, not by fate" (121). Although Zoe's mention of Ellie's mother is brief, we learn that she liked to go out "to a dance club on weekends" (121), which points to the conclusion that her choice to be a single parent had a lot to do with her desire to remain uncommitted and keep pursuing the life she liked, even though it meant she had to raise two girls on her own.

Will's inconsiderateness is both funny and shocking, and it illustrates his absolute rejection of any form of responsibility. The fact that he is willing to risk his friendship proves that Will is only interested in himself. What is more, he feels privileged by his detachment from others because he does not have to worry about anyone's feelings or needs but his own.

The actual desire to start a single-parent family as a preference to a traditional nuclear one seems in many ways to be a construct of our late capitalist and consumerist society. Our actions, namely, are never undertaken under circumstances chosen by ourselves, but under given circumstances that have been transmitted from the past (Marx 15). For contemporary individuals, these circumstances, both material and immaterial, are inevitably marked by the postindustrial, consumerist age. Capitalism does not consolidate itself merely by taking hold of all material possessions, such as land, but it uses all available abstractions, even those that do not seem to be accessible to privative appropriation such as nature, the earth, life energies, desires and needs (Lefebvre 350). More precisely, the "capitalist … searches for all possible ways of stimulating them to consume, by making his commodities more attractive, by filling their ears with babble about new needs" (Marx qtd. in Nicolaus 56). Thus we are being told from the outside about things we (should) desire intimately. For instance, we "learn" from magazines about how we are supposed to look and dress, or how to practice our sexuality. We are told that it is important to put a lot of effort into our career and good looks, that is into the "presentation of self,"[74] which plays a much more important role for the capitalist market than does investing energy into close relationships. As Harrison suggested, through books and films people are being "fed" a romanticist version of life (86), according to which we "deserve" to be continually swept off our feet by intense emotions. This, of course, soon becomes impossible in a long-term relationship, especially in one burdened with the pressures of everyday life, work

[74] See Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1959.

and the constant need to make compromise: "Falling in love was simple; one had only to yield. Digesting another person, however, and sustaining a love, was bloody work, and not a soft job" (Kureishi, "Girl" 218). In other words, consumption is easy but digestion takes time and energy.

The refusal to do the hard work of "digesting" your partner and to accept mild contentment instead of intense passions as proposed by "Hollywood scripts" (Olds and Schwartz 125) makes people give up on getting married at all in order to never have to sacrifice their illusory freedom. While they are free from a long-term relationship, they are by no means free from the market. The quick consumption of passion and partners on the free market of intimate relationships (Kureishi 58) makes it hard to believe in the old fashioned notion of life-long love, which is why some tend to renounce it completely. Those who keep insisting on true love, like, for instance, Megan Jewell's sister Jessica, are perceived as deluded, out of touch with the "real" world, and the "last of the great romantics" (*The Family Way* 48). In fact, Jessica's relationship with her husband Paulo epitomizes the idea of true love to her sisters: "It was never one of the great love matches. Not like you and Paulo" (48) and she is genuinely distressed with the fact that some people break up: "Still – it's sad when people break up. I hate it. Why can't things just stay the same?" (48). Her appreciation of loyalty and the sense of need to be more dedicated to our partners and immaterial values, such as love, is often interpreted as naïveté.

Moreover, Jessica is also desperate to have a traditional family, which additionally sets her apart from others. She is very happily married, but the fact that she has not been able to conceive is making her both depressed, "I feel defective … That I don't work the way I should work" (49) and jealous of those who are pregnant "'Well – congratulations,' she said … through a thin film of tears" (80). Her need to believe in true love and her desire to have a traditional family separates her from the rest as old-fashioned and romantic. She seems to believe in the idea of women as machines destined to perform the "work" of procreation and mothering. If

not, they are "defective", as she is. Her point of view makes her seem fragile and childish in the eyes of others who feel the need to reassure her that she will eventually realize her dream of the ideal family: "You and Paulo are going to have a beautiful baby, and you're going to be the best mother in the world" (49). Parsons reiterates the idea that the value system of contemporary individuals has changed through the voice of another romantic, Harry Silver, whose dream of the perfect family has been shattered after his divorce: "Was it really impossible for two people to stay together forever in the lousy modern world?" (Parsons, *Man and Boy* 107). In addition to a general loss of faith in long-lasting love, the vigorous exercise of the right to organize one's private life the way one best sees fit also supports highly individual arrangements as it implies having no regard for the partner's expectations or needs. Living together requires many compromises and it seems that among fictional characters there are less and less of those who are ready to make them because they value their individuality too much. Because of the general belief that marriage is doomed to fail, those who opt for a traditional family life seem like the remnants of a conservative past. Instead, contemporary characters often opt for a family unit which is free of the risk of unhappy love: one in which they are the only adult.[75]

[75] Significantly, this does not seem to be merely a literary trend, but a sociological one as well, as research shows that at least twenty-five percent of all families today are in fact single parent families. The number of single-parent families increases constantly: "Globally, one-quarter to one-third of all families are headed by single mothers, calling into question the normativeness of couple headed families. Developed countries, in particular, are experiencing an increase in single-parent families as divorce becomes more common. The United States has the highest percentage of single-parent families (34% in 1998) among developed countries, followed by Canada (22%), Australia (20%), and Denmark (19%)" ("Single-Parent Families" 1). The number might even be somewhat greater, due to the fact that the data quoted here refers to families headed by a single mother, whereas there are also those headed by single fathers.
It may also be argued that, at least partly, single-parent families flourish because they are socially accepted as more legitimate than, for example, childless families for two reasons. First, they fulfill the society's pressing demand for procreation, and secondly, there is always an implied possibility that the single parent will, given the chance, attempt to recreate the traditional family unit. For example, in *How Far Can You Go?* Dennis has an affair with Lynn, his secretary, who is a single mother. Although his friends want to blame Lynn for the affair just as much as they blame Dennis, they tend to be less judgmental of her because they "prided themselves on their compassion for one-parent families, especially young women who had refused the easy option of abortion or adoption and were struggling to bring up their babies alone" (Lodge 224-225). In fact, they assumed that her interest in the affair was not to find a lover for herself, but rather a surrogate father to her child, which would then make it possible for her to recreate a proper family, like the one he already had with his wife and children (225). The irony is, of course, in the fact that she was shown compassion despite the fact that she would have to destroy one "perfect" nuclear family, such as Dennis and Angela's was, in order to complete her own.

Kureishi also seems to be very much aware of the difficulties of marital life because, as James Campbell noted, he "tells tales from the land of domestic dysfunction. Family life stands in the foreground of most of his work, though the families he describes are usually about to crumble, if they have not already done so, personal loyalties having been found to conflict with self-interest" (1). His characters constantly attempt to free themselves of the bondages of married life and assume again the status of a free individual. For this reason "Adulterous sex is a constant in Kureishi" (Campbell 1). It symbolizes both the breach of marital bond and the search for personal (illicit) pleasure. In "Midnight All Day" Kureishi describes a love relationship between a married man, Ian, and his lover Marina who got pregnant during their affair. However, neither of them is especially interested in starting a new family together. Although pregnant, Marina does not require Ian to take over the role of the father or support her and the baby because she finds more satisfaction in being a single mother: "In the past few days she had talked of returning to London, finding a small flat, getting a job, and bringing up the child alone. Many women did that now; it seemed almost a matter of pride. He would be redundant. It was important for her to feel she could get by without him, he saw that" (279). Despite the fact that Ian had left his wife and daughter in order to be with Marina, they were not considering a life together or starting a family together: "At the beginning they had talked of abortion; but neither of them could have lived with such a crude negation of hope. They loved one another, but could they live together?" (281). Both of them are reluctant to consider traditional family life, since they both value their independence too much. Ian proved this when he left his wife and daughter, whereas Marina proves it by refusing to raise a child with him.

Women seem to undertake single-parenthood as their chosen lifestyle more often than men because they seem to identify more benefits to raising a child on their own. Namely, marriage is in many ways still predominantly a patriarchal institution in which even "smart women got obliterated by their men" (Hornby, *Juliet, Naked* 9). So, for instance, when Tucker

Crowe, the aged musician in Hornby's novel *Juliet, Naked*, thinks about his wife Cat, he realizes that she was the one who gave the most to their marriage and their son Jackson. In line with the contemporary obsession with image and surface, he recognizes the consequences of her dedication and years of selfless work in her flawed appearance: "he and Jackson had ruined her! She'd misspent her youth on them, and they'd repaid her by making her look worried and old" (*Juliet, Naked* 58). Aidoo's novel *Changes* reiterates the idea that getting married improves the social and physical status of a man, whereas it diminishes that of a woman. In order to be acknowledged as a good wife and mother, the woman must sacrifice her whole self for the benefit of the husband and children. Once married, her previous identity is no longer important because she is expected to define herself through her role of a wife and mother of someone else. Unlike Parsons' Jessica who is one of the few to romanticize the role of a mother as the most important, Aidoo's female protagonists perceive motherhood as reductive to the female personality. Namely, the husband and the children may have a separate identity based on their (professional, educational or personal) accomplishments, but the wife's identity becomes insignificant; she is the role she is playing and she must lose herself in the role completely:

> a man always gained in stature through any way he chose to associate with a woman. And that included adultery. Especially adultery. Esi, a woman has always been diminished in her association with a man. A good woman was she who quickened the pace of her own destruction. To refuse, as a woman, to be destroyed, was a crime that society spotted very quickly and punished swiftly and severely. (109-110)

In addition, through the voice of Esi's grandmother Nana, Aidoo uses the example of the wedding ceremony as a proof of this ritual sacrifice that any bride is willingly making by deciding to get married: "a young woman on her wedding day was something like that. She was made much of, because that whole ceremony was a funeral of the self that could have been" (110). Even in societies that are not repressively patriarchal, but promote gender equality, the

woman is expected to give up all her interests that collide with the duties of a mother and a wife. It is primarily the woman who must give up on her "self that could have been," pouring her vital energy and investing her time into the family.

Family life, according to Hornby's and Kureishi's characters, suppresses the individuality[76] both because one cannot focus one's attention to one's own individual needs and desires, and because all married people have similar experiences. Jay, the protagonist of *Intimacy*, protests against marriage as an institution that is only interested in perpetuating itself, regardless of specific needs or desires of the individuals comprising it: "I can think of few more selfish institutions than the family" (106). Namely, in order to make it work, people need to put the communal interests and needs of the family, as a collective unit, in the foreground, and more often than not make compromise when it comes to their individual interests and desires. Taking care of others – your spouse and your children – requires people to be more selfless and to redefine who they are.

However, Jay is not alone in thinking this; Katie Carr's ironic comment on her decision to save her marriage confirms Jay's statements: "I will sacrifice everything that I have come to think of me for the sake of my marriage and family unity. Maybe that's what marriage is anyhow, *the death of the personality*" (Hornby, *How to Be Good* 264, my emphasis). In other words, one loses one's personality because one becomes defined solely by the relationship to one's family members:

[76] Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and "The Story of an Hour" (1894) are probably among most relevant literary texts tackling the issue of marriage as the threat to the independent "I" of a woman (or any individual, for that matter), but they are out of the time scope of this dissertation. However, contemporary protagonists struggling to maintain their individuality certainly echo the struggles of Chopin's characters. Edna Pontellier, the protagonist of *The Awakening*, realizes that neither her role as a wife and mother of two sons, nor the possible romantic affair with Robert Lebrun would ultimately satisfy her desires and dreams. Similarly, after being informed that her husband was killed in a train accident, Louise Mallard, the protagonist of "The Story of an Hour", instead of grieving after the husband relishes in the feeling of freedom and independence. Her enthusiasm about spending the rest of her life alone is so great, that upon seeing her husband alive and well she screams and dies of a heart attack.

> I wanted to be a Luke Skywalker, off somewhere on my own learning to be a Jedi. I wanted a break from the war. I wanted someone wise to teach me how to do the things I needed to know to survive the rest of my life. And I know it's pathetic that it should have been a children's science-fiction film telling me this – it should have been George Eliot, or Wordsworth, or Virgina Woolf. But then, that's precisely the point, isn't it? There is no time or energy for Virgina Woolf, which means that I am forced to look for meaning and comfort in my son's Star Wars videos. I have to be Luke Skywalker because I don't know who else to be. (*How to Be Good* 208-209)

Instead of feeling enriched by the new, intimate relationship she must forge with her spouse and children, Katie feels diminished, reduced to the role she is now performing and unable to find the time and energy to be her "old" self, too. She remembers with nostalgia who and how she was before – free, young and the center of her own world. This only heightens the frustration created by the need for selflessness essential in family life where there is no privacy for the individual. A strong desire for solitude and privacy is a logical consequence, and it makes the contemporary protagonists idealize solitude and independence, believing that being on one's own is close to perfect. Katie, for example, enjoys the new living arrangement she had thought for herself: she moved out, but without telling her kids that she has done so. Namely, she only spends the nights on her own in a bedsit around the corner and relishes in those "family-free" moments:

> In theory, I get an hour's less sleep, but this is no hardship, because in practice it feels like I have slept for an hour longer, such is the revivifying effect of being on my own for the night. … I could hear the emptiness, and taste the silence, and smell the solitude, and I wanted it more than I have ever wanted anything before. (*How to Be Good* 210)

She sees this time alone as an opportunity to discontinue the process of losing her pre-family identity: "I'm disappearing … Every day I wake up and there's a little bit less of me" (*How to Be Good* 211).

The youthful, carefree self she once was is no longer available to her, as it was changed by familial life. It may be said that this is a part of the natural process of becoming mature and changing priorities, but it is often also seen as a result of social oppression because most of the goals and desires people have are a result of the social and cultural evolution, rather than natural impulse. Apart from the urge to procreate and take care of the offspring until they are old enough to take care of themselves, what humans are desiring and doing is learned by social interaction.[77] Moreover, the restrictions and regulations regarding our sexual and familial behavior are quite arbitrary; they differ from culture to culture and perform a function of social control. Therefore, the desire to rid oneself from the restrictive environment of the family results in the wish to return to a state of innocence and freedom. In many cases, this means a symbolic return to our childhood and youth, the age of unrestricted play and few responsibilities. To illustrate, we may consider Katie's desire to symbolically return to her parental home and the way she was when she was young:

> Getting married and having a family is like emigrating. I used to live in the same country as my brother; I used to share his values and his tastes and his attitudes, and then I moved away. And even though I did not notice it happening, I started to speak with a different accent, and think differently, and even though I remembered my native land fondly all traces of it had gone from me. Now, though, I want to go home. (*How to Be Good* 243-244)

[77] According to Lacan, even the desire to procreate is a result of cultural subordination (96). This may explain why single-parent families are often seen as more acceptable (or more deserving of the term "family") than childless families whose members are perceived as selfish and self-indulgent as they refuse to subject themselves to the procreative obligation.

The most difficult task, it seems, is to reconcile the desire to be an independent "I" and the desire to be loved and needed by others. The parental duty is typically perceived as the most important, so the children have precedence over anything else. Moreover, the increasingly important dedication to one's career takes up a lot of time and energy, especially because it is often fuelled by economic reasons and not simply by the desire to excel in what one does. Consequently, people tend to neglect their partners in order to find some space and time for themselves. So, for example, when Katie decides to go away to a friend's apartment every evening, she is sacrificing the time she would normally spend with her husband. Because her job pays the bills, and because she both loves and feels responsible for her children, the time with her husband seems as the least significant sacrifice: "the time I get on my own is the time I would have spent being a wife, rather than being a mother or a doctor. (And God, how frightening, that those are the only options available. The only times when I am not performing one of those three roles is when I am in the bathroom.)" (*How to Be Good* 211).

One of the reasons why marriage, unlike job or parenthood, is so easily dispensable is the fact that marriage seems to be full of clichés: the predictable hard work, boredom and decline in passion are all unattractive to the contemporary individual who prefers to live by the pleasure principle. Freud asserts that what people demand of life and wish to achieve in it is happiness. In other words, the purpose and intention of human lives is "to become happy and remain so" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 25). However, as he further explains, the problem is that happiness "in the strictest sense comes from the (preferably sudden) satisfaction of needs which have been dammed up to a high degree, and it is from its nature only possible as an episodic phenomenon" (25); if the desired situation is prolonged, it only produces a feeling of mild contentment. For this reason, the process of maturing – which takes time, sometimes a life-time – can never be as pleasurable to a human being as bouts of unexpected happiness derived from instantaneous satisfaction of our sudden urges. The drawback is, of course, the

fact that the hedonistic lifestyle does not bring long-term or lasting satisfaction, but represents moments of intense pleasure followed by periods of boredom or even unhappiness. Katie Carr's single brother Mark is a case in point: "Mark takes drugs, goes to see bands, swears a lot, hates Conservatives, has periods of promiscuity. … He's a very unhappy man, maybe even suicidal, and I didn't have a clue" (Hornby, *How to Be Good* 240-241). So, while the pursuit of happiness may be a natural goal of human life, the contemporary pleasure-oriented lifestyle which strives toward more and more of "the good" paradoxically seems to prevent people from actually achieving happiness. Edward, a medical doctor in Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?*, reports that "Half the patients he saw nowadays seemed to be suffering from mental or psychosomatic illnesses … 'I can't prescribe happiness, which is what most of my patients want', he said, 'so I prescribe Valium instead'" (189). What he perceives as a cause of this state in which the humanity seems to be is the fact that there might have been

> a quantum leap, lately, in the average human being's expectation of happiness. I mean, in times past, your average chap was content if he could fill his belly once a day and avoid disease. But now everybody expects to be happy as well as healthy. They want to be successful and admired and loved all the time. Naturally they're disappointed, and so they go round the bend. (Lodge 190)

Unrealistic expectations of life, fostered undoubtedly by the media, ensure that the contemporary individual becomes easily dissatisfied or frustrated and, as Edward confirms, even neurotic, which is why he or she finds it hard to sustain a long-term relationship with anyone. Consequently, even if they succumb to the desire or urge to procreate, they choose to do so as single individuals rather than within the constraints of a traditional family. The traditional nuclear family may be seen as the ideal because it encompasses both the function of procreation and the one of affective companionship. Still, contemporary fiction suggests that new family forms appear because the traditional model is no longer the best practical solution

for all. The formal deconstruction of the traditional family as it appears in literature results in family forms that are functional and desirable to contemporary protagonists: the single parent family, which places emphasis on procreation and disregards affective adult partnership, and the childless family, which is beyond the constraints of procreation and focuses on the spousal relationship.

## 4. The Voices of "Others": The Homosexual Family and the Metaphorical Family

The liberalization of social practices supported by the idea that "families should not be confounded with genealogically defined relationships" (Weston 2) has enabled the appearance of families that challenge the notion of the traditional nuclear family to the extreme. According to Kath Weston,

> In the Western context, the notion of biology as precultural substratum is ingrained in such a way that people cannot perceive biology as symbol rather than substance for describing and evaluating relationships. As a symbol, biology would have to be approached as a cultural construct or a linguistic category, not a natural fact which determines kinship. Rather, it would have to be claimed that kinship is determined by practice – emotional ties, shared history and experience. (34-36)

Contemporary fiction represents two kinds of families based on emotional rather than biological or legal ties: the homosexual and the metaphorical family. For the purpose of this thesis, a homosexual family is one where the partners, that is spouses (or parents) are of homosexual orientation, and therefore, of the same sex. Metaphorical families are those in which (some) family members are neither kin nor bound by religious or legal contracts. Rather, they are a group of people who are committed to each other and who prove their commitment by permanent help, understanding and sharing of experiences. As contemporary fiction shows, the acknowledgment of these families does not aim to "oppose genealogical modes of reckoning kinship. Instead, they undercut procreation's status as a master term imagined to provide the template for all possible kinship relations" (Weston 213), the template being, of course, the traditional nuclear family. Nevertheless, starting families that are anything other than a traditional nuclear family is perceived as the beginning of "The destruction of family values"

(Picoult 314), which makes one wonder what "family values" are. To illustrate, a dysfunctional nuclear family in which parents are unfaithful to each other, or a family with abusive members cannot be said to promote family values simply because it consists of two heterosexual parents and their biological child(ren). If, however, family values include love, commitment, safety, security, and integrity, then these values do not depend on the form of the familial unit.

The tension between the public and the private is caused by the politics of sexuality which sanctifies certain practices that are favorable to a society and ostracizes those that are not, creating a gap between what is normative or "normal" and what is "other", that is abnormal: "Variations on kinship that depart from normative, dyadic heterosexually based family forms secured through the marriage vow are figured not only as dangerous for the child but also perilous to the putative natural and cultural laws said to sustain human intelligibility" (Butler 16). This political discourse, as Butler notes, requires one to take a stand for or against gay marriage whereby the discursively instituted binary forcibly constricts the sexual field within those terms even though the binary relation does not exhaust the field in question (19). Most notably, as Butler observes, the appeal to the state to allow for the recognition of homosexual marriage only results in excessive regulation regarding kinship (17), that is matters of human dependency such as procreation, illness, death, dying, inheritance, and so on (15). However, because the society requires people for its growth and survival, it becomes necessary to direct our energy into "constructive" efforts. Allowing for the "middle zones and hybrid formations" (Butler 19) would reveal that sexuality is not practiced solely for procreation, but rather for pleasure, which turns out to be the society's greatest concern. Namely, the energy "wasted" on pleasure is lost for the society and thus unacceptable: "the economic structure of the society also influences the amount of sexual freedom that remains. … civilization is obeying the laws of economic necessity, since a large amount of the psychical energy which it uses for its own purposes has to be withdrawn from sexuality" (Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 59). So,

in order to channel human energy toward its own purposes, the society constructed the ideal of sexual virtue which was constituted by "safeguarding of purity and virginity, and faithfulness to commitments and vows" and illustrated by the image of a woman or a girl "who defended herself from the assaults of a man who had every advantage over her" (Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* 82). In other words, "civilization", that is society, has constructed the idea of how we should use our sexuality in a "proper" way, making it explicit that anything other than consensual adult monogamous heterosexual sex legitimized by "commitments and vows", that is marriage, is forbidden as perversion. Marriage and familial life as defined thus far seem indeed to be restrictive institutions based primarily on the limitations imposed upon the sexual life of an individual:

> But heterosexual genital love, which has remained exempt from outlawry, is itself restricted by further limitations, in the shape of insistence upon legitimacy and monogamy. Present-day civilization makes it plain that it will only permit sexual relationships on the basis of a solitary, indissoluble bond between one man and one woman, and that it does not like sexuality as a source of pleasure in its own right and is only prepared to tolerate it because there is so far no substitute for it as a means of propagating the human race. (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 60)

Thus *heterosexual* marriage and family life become the only legitimate way for the individual to satisfy his or her sexual needs and desires with the obligatory pretence that sexual union has the sole purpose of procreation. Having sex for pleasure, without the intention to create offspring, is deemed sinful and wanton, which is one of the reasons why, in the eyes of many, "a gay marriage isn't a *real* one" (Picoult 218). Although, as Stacey claims, "gay and lesbian families are undeniably here" (*In the Name of the Family* 107), the legitimization of a homosexual family has been controversial because "Familial ties between persons of the same

sex that … are not grounded in biology or procreation do not fit any tidy division of kinship into relations of blood and marriage" (Weston 3).

This explains why for many it still seems that the blood connection is not simply the crucial, but the *only* constitutive factor when it comes to families. Since the Middle Ages power has spoken through blood, claims Foucault, and the blood relation is an important element in the mechanisms of power. In the order of signs it functions as a proof of lineage and a symbol of life; it is a "reality with a symbolic function" (*The History of Sexuality*, 147). However, while blood ties undoubtedly signify the belonging to a family, they are no longer the sole proof of kinship.[78] In fact, it is the feeling of enduring solidarity which arises from shared experience that constitutes a contemporary family psychologically and emotionally and ensures its survival. The familial relationship arising from the permanent feeling of solidarity is merely symbolized by blood connection, not caused by it. Moreover, it may well be argued that people who have to invest more resources into having a child will also provide a more loving environment for the child, as a result of the difficult process they had to endure in order to become parents. This is typically believed of heterosexual parents who need to resort to IVF or adoption in order to obtain a child. However, they are in the exact same situation as homosexual parents, who are denied the acknowledgement that they may provide loving environment for a child: "a gay couple has to make a serious, expensive, invested effort to have a baby. Lesbians need a sperm donor, gays need a surrogate mother, or else we have to forge into the rough waters of adoption, where same-sex couples are often turned away" (Picoult 273).

The fact that more and more homosexual people struggle to become a part of the mainstream society, rather than be pushed to its margin contributes to the appearance of more

[78] In fact, parents in certain traditional families sometimes disowned their homosexual sons and daughters because they perceived their orientation as perversion and insult to themselves, ejecting them thus from the family unit and proving that "the shared substance symbolized by blood might prove insufficient to guarantee kinship" (Weston 80).

diverse depictions of homosexual people in most recent fiction. This especially refers to novels such as Picoult's 2011 novel *Sing You Home* which describes the ultimately successful attempts of two women to constitute their life in the form of a legitimate family with children. This represents a stark contrast to the stereotypical notion of gay people as loners interested only in promiscuous sex and night life, and disinclined to and incapable of any kind of commitment. What separates these families from a traditional nuclear one is the fact that the spouses are of the same sex, which presented (and in many countries still presents) the main obstacle for homosexual couples to be perceived as legitimate spouses, and even more so as legitimate parents. By describing the issues of childless and homosexual families, Picoult reveals the prejudice against "others" and shows how difficult it is to find a balance between one's private life and public expectations. After getting a divorce from her husband Max, Zoe, one of the novel's protagonists, meets Vanessa and they fall in love. Unlike heterosexual couples, Zoe has to find an alternative route to starting a family with the woman she loves, which makes her feel like "a second-class citizen":

> But to get married, we had to cross the Rhode Island border. We had to find a minister who was supportive of gay marriage. Eventually we would have to hire a lawyer to draw up papers to give each other power of attorney for medical decisions, to become beneficiaries on each other's life insurance policies. I wasn't ashamed of wanting a lifetime with Vanessa. But I *was* ashamed that the steps I had to take in order to do it made me feel like a second-class citizen. (Picoult 218)

This demand for uniformity is easily perceived in the attempt to apply the hegemonic heterosexual patriarchal paradigm onto homosexual couples by pointing to the fact that homosexual couples replicate the paradigm of gender roles based on the man/woman symbolic opposite (Weston 149). However, as Evelyn Hooker concluded, most gay male couples could

not be sorted into active/passive and masculine/feminine partners (83-107), proving that "nature does not dictate *one* course of desire; desire is, rather, multifaceted" (Bredbeck 179), which is why both heterosexual and homosexual people practice their sexuality in various ways. The dominant discourse on family reduces familial possibilities into a binary opposition of either being "properly" married, which implies a legalized heterosexual relationship the primary aim of which is to procreate, or choosing to live outside the family, not because this is "natural," but because it promotes the predominant heterosexual patriarchy as the preferred structure. This dichotomy cancels out the possibility of existence of any other type of family but the traditional nuclear one. The consequences of such reduction are especially visible with gay couples, who are unable to exercise some of the basic human rights, such as to marry the person one loves. Angered at the attempt of two members of the evangelical Eternal Glory Church to "set her straight", Vanessa points to the unequal treatment of religious affiliation and sexual orientation whereby there is no legal protection of the latter:

> How dare you suggest that I shouldn't be allowed to get married to someone I love, or adopt a child, or that gay rights don't qualify as civil rights because, unlike skin color or disabilities, you think that sexual orientation can be changed? But you know what? Even *that* argument doesn't hold water, because you can change your religion, and religious affiliation is still protected by law. (Picoult 198)

Picoult is aware that sexuality is highly political, but, together with her characters, is optimistic in the expectation that the society will evolve into a more tolerant one: "The optimist in me wants to believe sexuality will eventually become like handwriting: there's no right way and wrong way to do it. We're all just wired differently. … I also believe that you fall in love with a *person*; it stands to reason sometimes that could be a guy, and sometimes that could be a girl" (95, 111). Consistently with this, Picoult insists on a happy ending where the two

mothers, Vanessa and Zoe, finally have their daughter, and Max and Liddy are on the verge of getting married, completely in love and at peace with the fact that they will not have children.

Literary texts featuring homosexual protagonists most typically depict their struggle for acceptance: both the inner struggle to come to terms with oneself as a homosexual individual, and the struggle to be accepted by others. Whether we consider, for example, Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* (2004), Annie Proulx's "Brokeback Mountain" (1997) or Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are not the Only Fruit* (1985), what dominates is the story of the protagonists' sexual initiation, their awareness of the contradiction in the psychological need to express their homosexual identity and the socially determined need to hide it (at least from some, if not from most people) in order to be accepted.[79] Up until very recently, literary authors hardly attempted to tackle the issue of homosexual families as it was generally presumed that gay people were uninterested in family life. Homosexual identity is still organized primarily in terms of gender and sexuality, rather than production, work or other traits. This creates a falsely homogeneous picture of homosexual people (that is, a stereotype) which suggests that claiming lesbian or gay identity implies subscribing to a particular way of life. Thus, all homosexual people are rendered the same: overly determined by their sexuality, promiscuous, isolated from kinship, ego-centered and, because they have no dependants, financially better off than the average American (Weston 156-157). The reality, however, is quite distinctive from this generalized picture of a homosexual person; as Stacey puts it, homosexual people "come in

[79] The emphasis on the process of how people deal with their homosexuality and on their specific lifestyle, which is portrayed not simply as isolated, "other", and different, but also as oversexed, promiscuous and drug-abusing, is quite typical for most gay fiction (see, for example, Larry Kramer's *Faggots*, Edmund White's *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*, and Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance*). Although in the late 1970s gay fiction entered mainstream publishing (until then it was only being published and sold in specialized publishing houses and bookstores), for a while it was somewhat limited in its topics and settings. Most texts were "set in a predominantly white, cosmopolitan social milieu … concern the lives of … gay men who live in an exclusively gay neighborhood, have exclusively gay associates, spend their afternoons at the gym and their nights either at the bath houses or dance bars, and who manage somehow through marginal jobs, trust funds, or the kindness of strangers to live lives of drugs, dancing, physical beauty, and sex" (Bergman 2).

different sizes, shapes, ethnicities, races, religions, resources, creeds, and quirks, and even engage in diverse sexual practices" (*In the Name of the Family* 107) as do heterosexual people. Nevertheless, the society still perceives homosexuality as proof of otherness and marks homosexual people as "different", a deviation from the heterosexual standard. Following this logic, literary representations of gay populace are marked by a negative perception of gay people as evil, parasitic, and not entirely human. Their otherness is proven by their alternative sexual orientation because: "A person or group must first be outside and other in order to invade, endanger, and threaten" (Weston 23). They are alienated from the institution of family, both because they represent an embarrassment to their parents and siblings, and because they cannot procreate. In this, they are "set apart from the rest of humanity" (Weston 23). Consequently, the feeling of otherness caused by the society's rejection causes tensions not only between the homosexual person and his or her environment, but also within the individual himself/herself.

The alienation of homosexual people from the society they live in is convincibly and quite movingly depicted in Christopher Isherwood's novel *A Single Man*.[80] The novel depicts the last day of George Falconer's life through the voice of an omniscient narrator. George is a homosexual and a college professor of literature, obliged not only to hide his sexual orientation, but also to pretend to live a single life, although he had been living with his partner Jim for almost twenty years. The reader is allowed access into George's house and mind, and learns about his habits, friends, students and neighbors, about his past, his twenty-year-long relationship with Jim, and Jim's fatal traffic accident. Most of all, however, the reader comes to understand that despite his terrible grief over Jim's death and his forced alienation from the society caused by his sexual orientation, George still loves being alive. Before he falls asleep

[80] Although the novel, published in 1964, falls out of the scope of the designated corpus of texts (those published after 1980), it is significant for our study of gay families. Namely, Isherwood's novel is one of the first to depict the circumstances of homosexual life and the homosexual people's alienation from the institution of the family in more realistic terms, as well as with an air of intimate insight into the situation.

that night, he realizes that he should no longer dwell on the past or worry about the future, but continue with his life: "It is Now that he must find another Jim. Now that he must love. Now that he must live" (149). Sadly, rather than ironically, George has a heart attack and dies in his sleep. His death effectively ends his dream of a happy and fulfilled life, and, even more so, symbolically puts an end to the hope of open and inclusive life for all homosexual men.

Isherwood shows how the dominant heterosexual ideology perceives homosexuality as a trait that renders one ineligible for familial life. Same-sex marriage is an absolute taboo, a possibility that does not exist even across the border of George's state, as it does for Zoe Baxter, the protagonist of Picoult's novel written and published more than fifty years later. Moreover, even George's closest friend, Charlotte, believes he is not able to understand the dynamics of familial relationship: "Anyhow, in a family, that's not really what matters … That's hard to explain to you, Geo, because you never had any family, did you, after you were quite young?" (Isherwood 112). The irony, of course, is in the fact that Charlotte, who assumes the position of the "dominant order" and patronizes George from her position of a heterosexual woman and mother, is abandoned by her husband for a younger woman, and has a dysfunctional relationship with her son. Simultaneously, although he is "accused" of not understanding the mechanics of a family life by a woman whose family life has fallen apart, George has lived in an intimate monogamous relationship with his partner, Jim, literally until "death did them part":

> two people, living together day after day, year after year, in this small space, standing elbow to elbow cooking at the same small stove, squeezing past each other on the narrow stairs, shaving in front of the same small bathroom mirror, constantly jogging, jostling, bumping against each other's bodies by mistake or on purpose, sensually, aggressively, awkwardly, impatiently, in rage or in love. (Isherwood 3-4)

Isherwood points to the fact that heterosexuality is not a guarantee for a happy marriage or a functional family. On the contrary, he depicts two examples that prove the opposite, bringing into question the normativeness of a heterosexual relationship. Despite the fact that George and Jim's relationship was in fact a perfectly functioning childless marriage, it had no public (social or political) legitimacy because it was neither heterosexual nor reproductive – which are the two basic assumptions for a family life. Consequently, it had to be hidden from most people and exist outside the borders of the dominant culture which perceives gay people as lacking both true social relationships and kinship ties (Weston 19). Thus, George and Jim were forced to reduce their physical and emotional intimacy into a merely spatial one by claiming to be nothing more than room-mates. To make the situation even more absurd, it is an uncle whom George has never met and who played an insignificant part in Jim's life that notifies George of Jim's death "admitting George's right to a small honorary share in the sacred family grief" (Isherwood 101). The uncle's blood connection to Jim triumphs over the decades-long dedicated emotional relationship between George and Jim. What is more, the uncle is completely unaware that "this much talked-of room-mate" (101) is, or was, the most important person in Jim's life. Their mutual love, commitment and closeness is deemed insignificant because there is no blood-connection or legal bond that would give their relationship the necessary public legitimacy. George barely has the right to take part in the after-death rituals, and despite the fact that he was Jim's life partner, he is denied the right to grieve publicly, since grieving is reserved for blood relatives only; "And if you've actually lost the lover who was never recognized to be your lover, then did you really lose that person? Is this a loss, and can it be publicly grieved?" (Butler 25-26). Both Butler and Isherwood challenge the idea of family as a unit defined simply by its public status, rituals and signs, and propose the issue of feelings and emotional relationships as crucial in determining a family bond because of their universal

quality for all human beings. In explaining why the legitimization of (gay) marriage is so important, Butler says that

> marriage compels, at least logically, universal recognition: everyone must let you into the door of the hospital; everyone must honor your claim to grief; everyone will assume your natural rights to a child; everyone will regard your relationship as elevated into eternity. And in this way, the desire for universal recognition is a desire to become universal, to become interchangeable in one's universality, to vacate the lonely particularity of the nonratified relation and, perhaps above all, to gain both place and sanctification in that imagined relation to the state. (23)

A case in point happened in the United States in August 2011, when, according to *Huffington Post*, Anthony John Makk, a native Australian who had lived legally in the United States for more than twenty years, owned a San Francisco business, had no criminal history, and was the primary caregiver to his husband Bradford Wells, an AIDS patient,[81] was denied immigration rights. Makk applied for permanent residency as a spouse of a U.S. citizen when his visa expired, but he was denied, as his same-sex marriage was not federally recognized. The couple has lived together for nineteen years and legally married in Massachusetts in 2004. The only option for the spouses to be together, until Wells's death, is for Wells to go to Australia, which, ironically, would mean he would have to give up his medical insurance (Wilkey 1). In cases such as this one, or the one that Isherwood depicted in his novel, it becomes clear that homosexual people are in essence single to the society around them. Their desire to have a

[81] A deadly illness such as AIDS echoes epidemic deaths of Native Americans upon the arrival of the English. Just as for the English the deaths of the Indians were a moral phenomenon (Greenblatt 25), so is the death of the homosexual for the heterosexual. Those who conspire against the dominant culture must be killed off by God in order to protect His chosen people, and so "with the wonderful self-validating circularity that characterizes virtually all powerful constructions of reality" (Greenblatt 25-26), the deaths of the homosexual provide evidence that they are in fact subversive of the order and, as such, deserve punishment in the form of lonely death.

familial relationship is constantly undermined or made impossible by law and/or customs, or rather, the families they form have no value or legitimacy. Even in the face of death, they are not allowed to stand by their loved ones, as this would subvert the "natural" state of things, and pose a threat to the dominant culture.

In their book *The Minimal Family*, Dizard and Gadlin mention a real life story of two brothers (one twenty-two months and the other three and a half years old) who were placed in a foster family of a homosexual couple and then removed from the family two weeks later, not because they were unhappy there, but because the "public" was outraged at the prospect of two gay men raising two little boys. Promptly "the Massachusetts Department of Human Services announced a new policy guiding foster care placements" (4). According to the new guidelines, the children had to be placed "only in traditional family settings" (5), which caused further controversy and raised the crucial question "of what constitutes a family" (5). Most notably, not even all heterosexuals share "a single coherent form of family" (Weston 27) despite the general misperception that it is so. However, the Massachusetts guidelines clearly show preference for one specific familial form: the traditional nuclear one, as if the mere form (instead of, for example, economic situation of the family, love, tenderness, willingness to accept a foster child, and so on) guarantees adequate care for foster children. In *Sing You Home*, Picoult ironically uses the voices of the homophobic members of the evangelical Eternal Glory Church to expose the ridiculousness of the idea of homosexual people being either "parasitic" or corrupting. The members of this minor church, who typically have to recruit new members in order for the church to grow, depict homosexual people as if they were members of a sect, mirroring thus themselves in their accusations: "You know how gays reproduce, don't you? Since they can't very well do it the biblical way, they recruit" (Picoult 246). Apart from the fact that they cannot procreate, homosexual people are also made to seem as unfit parents because of the fear of "homosexual recruitment" and the idea that homosexual surroundings will

somehow corrupt children placed at their care turning them homosexual, too: "It's why the Eternal Glory Church fights so hard against allowing gay teachers in schools – those poor kids don't have a snowball's chance in Hell at not being corrupted" (Picoult 246).

The strong preference for one specific type of family ignores the diversity of both actual and literary families. The dominance of the nuclear family as the "proper" family is based on the "code of sexual prescriptions enjoining the two marital partners to practice a strict and symmetrical conjugal fidelity, always with a view to procreation" (Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* 26). If they choose not to adhere to the code, they are transgressing, and their otherness is perceived as deliberately perverted and punishable as such. The punishment is ideological, rather than corporeal, transmitted from the body to the mind (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 101-105), and so, for example, homosexual people are denied familial rights that are given freely to heterosexual people. [82] More than that, contemporary literature represents all their attempts, either to fit into existing families or to create their own, as futile. In fact, the inability to start a family (or at least fit into one) seems to be the most notable "fault" of homosexual people, as well as the most solid proof of their perversity.

The mechanics of heterosexual relationships supports the idea that the purpose of sexuality is to procreate and makes it easier to mask the fact that heterosexual desire is simply desire for sexual pleasure, not for conceiving offspring. Thus, heterosexuality is sanctified and promoted as "normal" and expected. Because the mechanics of homosexual desire cannot be said to include the impulse to procreate, homosexual protagonists are often portrayed as typically uninterested in family matters. Moreover, they often seem to resort to priesthood,

[82] At the moment of writing this thesis, some countries have legalized same-sex marriages (e.g. Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden. In the United States same-sex couples can marry in six states and one district. In Mexico, same-sex marriages are only performed in Mexico City, but are recognized by all Mexican states and by the Mexican federal government.), or recognize same-sex marriages performed in foreign jurisdictions, despite the fact that they do not recognize those performed on its territory (e.g. Israel). However, few countries allow homosexual parents to adopt children (e.g. South Africa).

science or art, sublimating thus their deviant sexual desire for the same sex into the acceptable desire for spiritual growth and alienation from worldly things.[83] For example, in reference to Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*, Andrew Eastham asserts that "a peculiar kind of ironic aesthetic sensibility … is central to the novel" (509). Nick Guest, the novel's protagonist, is a student of literature and lover of classical music and art in general. He functions as a detached aesthete in the world of the Thacherite rich because he is removed from the mainstream heterosexual society and linked with the world of art as the only realm acceptable for the homosexual. Moreover, his last name, Guest, stands for the fact that he can never belong to a(ny) family, but will forever be a guest – someone whose presence is temporary, and often not even welcome. In fact, he is also literally a guest in the Fedden household where he is invited to stay for the duration of his studies by his wealthy college friend, Toby Fedden. The Feddens have enough room, and, more importantly, both Toby and his mentally unstable[84] sister, Catherine, could use some company. The members of the Fedden family never mention the fact that Nick is gay because that is the only way they can deal with the "unpleasant" fact. Their continuous silence and Nick's detachment signaled by his class (he is a middle-class man temporary residing with an upper-class family), knowledge, his unexpected sophistication and appreciation of art, as well as his sexual orientation widen the gap between Nick and "normal" life. Nick's homosexuality is connected with "the drive for the autonomy of art, the desire for both a free space and a space of distinction" (Eastham 510), proving the stereotypical notion that the homosexual person cannot function within the mainstream society.[85] Nick, much like

[83] This is a literary topos used by Hollinghurst, Lodge and Isherwood, among others. They all connect their homosexual protagonists with literature, art or religion. This implies that, whether by choice or out of necessity, homosexual men prefer isolated existence and invest their energy into scholarly work, unlike heterosexual men who would invest it into their families – not necessarily by being devoted fathers, but certainly by performing the necessary function of procreation.

[84] She suffers from what is now known as bipolar affective disorder (it used to be termed a manic-depressive disorder) and engages in self-injury.

[85] Quite similarly to this, but with a much lighter tone, in *How Far Can You Go?* Lodge depicts Miles as a stereotypical homosexual aesthete and intellectual, detached from the mechanics of the everyday world due to his

Oscar Wilde once was, is a well-educated aesthete with excellent taste for art and cannot fit into the hypocritical world of the British upper class. His sophistication seems inappropriate because it reveals how unrefined the Feddens' rich friends are and because it reveals Nick's desire for an upward movement on the social ladder. They are threatened both by Nick's presence and by what he stands for, and are therefore quite explicit in their homophobia: "They hate us, you know, they can't breed themselves, they're parasites on generous fools who can" (Hollinghurst 416). The fact that Nick is actually a guest implies that homosexuals somehow live off of heterosexual people, infiltrating into their lives in order to get what they themselves cannot create because they are perverse and monstrous, parasitic creatures who cannot lead a self-sustainable life: "You can't have a real family, so you attach yourself to someone else's" (Hollinghurst 420).

Unsurprisingly, Nick Guest is forcefully expelled from the Feddens' house and life. After their mentally unstable daughter reveals details from the personal life of the Fedden family to the press, they blame Nick for the scandal that might cost Gerald Fedden his political career and throw him out. Nick's infatuation with Toby and loyalty to the family are not enough to have him accepted; he is simply "other" and cannot be trusted. What is more, his "otherness" is interpreted as both corrupt and corruptive, not only in the sexual way, but in general and serves as a perfect excuse to use Nick as a scapegoat: "I'm not remotely surprised he led your poor lovely daughter astray like this, exploited her, there's no other word for it. A typical homo trick, of course" (Hollinghurst 416).

In Winterson's *Oranges Are not the Only Fruit*, the isolating "otherness" of homosexuals is illustrated not through their dedication to literature and art, but through the

sensitive nature. He wears "beautifully laundered white shirts and silk underwear" (18), considers if "he should renounce sex altogether and try his vocation as a priest" (26) and finds "the ordinary world of domesticity, children, simple living and honest toil" (84) unenviable because it makes it impossible for the spirit to develop. Family life depresses Miles and visiting his friend Michael, who is married and has children, only makes him "restless to return to the cool, quiet spaces of Cambridge" (84).

religious concept of evil. Winterson implies that the Bible, as the normative book of the Western world, is often a source of prejudice and restriction, as well as a cover for worse infractions than same-sex love (she gives the example of corruption in Christian charity organizations). The Western world is predominantly Christian and Christian stories, myths and doctrines helped shape and construct our reality. Christianity originated laws and ideas that we perceive as natural because they have been presented to us as such, when in fact they have been constructed for political purposes. Restrictions that imply one idea or way of behavior as proper and all the others as improper simplify the process of control over human lives, their beliefs and practices, because uniformity is easier to handle than a diversity of beliefs and behaviors. Consequently, those who are "different" tend to be ostracized and isolated by the very institution that promotes tolerance, love and acceptance.

The novel's protagonist is a teenage girl, Jeanette, who narrates the story of her life. The novel is divided into chapters which have Biblical titles and additionally stress the relationship between religion and Jeanette's life. She is adopted by a domineering overly religious mother and a passive father. Because her mother never taught her anything apart from the Bible, Jeanette is naïve and considered an outcast in school. Growing up, she begins to question some of the teachings of their congregation, but this only alienates her further from the only community she had. Despite her mother's wish to keep Jeanette pure and interested in missionary work, she begins to think about love and romance, and soon she finds herself attracted to Melanie, a girl working at a fish stall. They become friends, Jeanette brings Melanie to their church and they end up having a love affair. Once they are found out, their behavior is interpreted as evil by the pastor and the congregation. He claims their behavior is a consequence of "Satan's spell" (Winterson 104), to which they have become susceptible because they lack faith. Most notably, the pastor sees them as "full of demons" (104), and asserts that they have "fallen foul of their lusts" (104), not because they have engaged in sexual relations, but because

their relationship challenges heterosexuality as the only proper way to practice physical, sexual love; in other words, they *abuse* love: "Do you deny you love this woman with a love *reserved* for man and wife?" (Winterson 105, my emphasis). Again, homosexual orientation is deemed perverse, not as a biological trait, which would imply it being natural, but as a result of corruptive environmental influence: "Homosexuality – it's a perversion. Something to be punished for" (Picoult 256) which is why gay people remain outside the approved order of the family. Melanie succumbs to the pressure and renounces Jeanette completely, both as a lover and a friend, leaving her to struggle with her feelings and beliefs on her own.

Eventually, Jeanette's isolation becomes literal as she leaves her family and church because they cannot accept her for who she is. Like Isherwood, Lodge and Hollinghurst, Winterson also implies that a solitary life is the destiny of the homosexual. Because of her otherness – she is homosexual in a heterosexual society, evangelically raised in a secular society, and an adopted child who has never met her biological parents – Jeanette has no means to start or have a "real" family. Financially and emotionally unable to continue the life of isolation, she finally returns to her mother's: "Families, real ones, are chairs and tables and the right number of cups, but I had no means of joining one, and no means of dismissing my own" (Winterson 176). Her adoptive parents, a zealously religious mother and a depressively passive and quiet father who "was never quite good enough" (11) were never able to create the feeling and atmosphere of acceptance and safety typical for a "real" family. Without them, however, she is destined to be alone as the society prevents her from establishing a family of her own. Her return home and her mother's waning zealotry prove both that compromise is essential in familial living and that the sense of belonging to a(ny) kind of family is a basic human need.

Similarly to this, Annie Proulx's well-known 1997 short story "Brokeback Mountain" also depicts the existential loneliness of the homosexual who are unable to create their own families, or even come to terms with their homosexual identity, because a public homosexual

relationship was impossible in conservative rural Wyoming of 1960s. By choosing the very specific, all-American cowboy characters as main protagonists in a same-sex love story, Proulx challenges the fixed notions of rugged manhood, sexuality, family and love. The challenge for the two cowboys is not the mythical Frontier, but their personal lifestyle and feelings. However, the challenge turns out to be even more perilous than conquering the Wild West, since being gay in rural North America was dangerous: "We do that in the wrong place we'll be dead" (269). Because of the ideological pressures which made coming out literally a life-threatening act, Proulx's cowboy protagonists have trouble accepting and voicing their gay identity even to each other, despite the fact that they are practicing it continuously. Their struggle with emotions and fear for their life prevents them from being honest to each other and themselves; Ennis del Mar and Jack Twist "never talked about the sex … except once Ennis said 'I'm not no queer,' and Jack jumped in with 'Me neither. A one-shot thing. Nobody's business but ours'" (262).

However, of the two, Jack Twist seems to be more at peace with his "twisted" identity, as signified by his last name. He was not as secretive about his feelings as Ennis was nor did he hide his desire for a proper life with Ennis. Unlike Ennis, who believed that the traditional family is the only proper way of life, Jack never considered having children and a "proper" family: "'I used a want a boy for a kid,' said Ennis undoing buttons, 'but just got little girls.' 'I didn't want none a either kind,' said Jack. 'But fuck-all has worked the way I wanted. Nothin never come to my hand the right way'" ("Brokeback Mountain" 276). Jack's impulse to make their relationship at least partially public was so strong that he even mentioned this possibility to his father under the pretence that Ennis was a close friend and would be excellent work help: "He had some half-baked idea the two a you was goin a move up here, build a log cabin and help me run this ranch and bring it up" (282).

The need to confess, or to come out was stronger than his fear of being punished. While Ennis chose to live a life in which the reality of his life was unconfirmed by the reality around

him (Macdonald and Rich 4), Jack wished to annihilate the split between interior knowledge and the superficial appearance as seen by others (Weston 49). Jack's desire to build a house with Ennis, introduce him to his parents and continue working on the family ranch corresponds completely to the mechanics of starting a traditional nuclear family. Moreover, their living together would help Jack establish a sense of wholeness through congruence between interior experience and external circumstances (Weston 50). Sadly, the dream of a happy life with Ennis never comes true, and after years of Ennis's fear and indecisiveness, Jack finds a new lover with whom he is about to start living. Through the voice of Jack's father, Ennis learns that Jack was about to leave his wife and come to his ranch with this new friend, but before any of this could happen he was beaten to death with a tire iron, proving that "Confession frees, but power reduces one to silence" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 60).

Contrary to Jack, Ennis is "incapable of imagining a life different than the one he had chosen" (Ossana 144) and never comes to terms with his homosexuality: "I was sittin up here all that time tryin to figure out if I was--? I know I ain't. I mean here we both got wives and kids, right?" (268).[86] Careful not to voice his feelings and desires, he is nevertheless unable to resist admitting to Jack how passionate he is about him: "I like doin it with women, yeah, but Jesus H., ain't nothing like this. I never had no thoughts a doin it with another guy except I sure wrang it out a hunderd [sic] times thinkin about you" (268). His repressed desire to spend his life with Jack finds a way to come to expression through his lifestyle; namely, despite having a "proper" family, Ennis is unable to lead a "proper," steady life and unwilling to hold a permanent job. He behaves as if he is constantly waiting for something and keeping his options open. He is reluctant to live anywhere else but on "lonesome ranches" (264) which remind him of his time with Ennis, and feels burdened with his wife's pleas to "get a place here in town"

[86] Ennis had two daughters, Alma Jr. and Francine, in his marriage with Alma. Jack had a son with his wife Lureen.

(264). His life with Alma seems to be a temporary thing, and he does not want to ground it by having a permanent job or buying a house. Everything he did was a testimony that he was just waiting for the time to pass: "his disinclination to step out and have any fun, his yearning for low-paid, long-houred ranch work, his propensity to roll to the wall and sleep as soon as he hit the bed, his failure to look for a decent permanent job with the county or the power company" (271-272). When parting with Jack, he "felt like someone was pulling his guts out . . . He felt about as bad as he ever had and it took a long time for the feeling to wear off" (264). Although a confession would set him free in the Foucauldian sense – by making it possible for him to answer the demand of a power that "compels individuals to articulate their sexual peculiarity" (*The History of Sexuality* 61), Ennis continuously avoids this ritual that exonerates and liberates, but also enables judgment and punishment (61-62) which Jack had to endure. Even though life without Jack clearly made no sense to Ennis, his fear and unwillingness to come out – to himself, more than to the public – have doomed their twenty-year long affair to nothing more than occasional outdoor sex. This prompts Jack to leave Ennis and look for love elsewhere: "we could a had a good life together, a fuckin real good life. You wouldn't do it, Ennis" (277). However, Ennis's repressed behavior also saved his life because, by being discreet, he never gave those who possessed the power of righteousness the reason to have him "corrected," that is murdered. Like most other homosexual protagonists, Ennis ends up living a solitary life in a trailer, constantly on the road, his only joy an occasional dream about the man he loved: "yet he is suffused with a sense of pleasure because Jack Twist was in his dream" (255).

Proulx's story is not simply a criticism of the intolerant and bigoted society ready to punish otherness by death. It is also a story that testifies to the need to base families on affection, not sex, gender or form. Proulx herself testifies that the basis for the story was a "small but tight idea of a couple of home-grown country kids, opinions and self-knowledge shaped by the world around them, finding themselves in emotional waters of increasing depth" ("Getting Movied"

130), suggesting the conflict between nature and culture, that is between what we feel and what we have been taught to believe, as the basis for the story. According to Alex J. Tuss, both Jack's and Ennis's lives are tragedies, since they are torn between "the externally acceptable marital life of the north plains and an anguished internal love for another man that finds expression only on idyllic Brokeback Mountain" (244). Thus, both Ennis's and Jack's traditional families end up as failures because they have been formed under the pressure to conform and based on the false belief of what is "normal". The families suffer from lack of love and affection and ultimately fail: Ennis gets divorced, whereas Jack's Texan wife orders his murder after finding out about his plans to leave her for a man. Jack's desire to start a family with a person of his own choosing (which is, in fact, exactly what heterosexual people in Western societies do without having to fear for their life because of their choice) is hardly perverse. Rather, it represents a universal impulse to be intimate with someone; their love is symbolized with a "silent embrace satisfying some shared and sexless hunger . . . the single moment of artless, charmed happiness in their separate and difficult lives" (Proulx 278, 279). Their desire for intimacy, closeness and love is common to all human beings, and this "shared and sexless hunger" for intimacy is what makes people want to live with other people, that is start families. What causes the trauma, shame and feelings of inadequacy so strongly expressed in Ennis's character is the intolerance of the dominant heterosexual ideology and its preference for binary oppositions which result in the need to proclaim certain ways (of living, loving, procreating, eating, exercising, and so on) as "right" and the others as wrong. "In a society where heterosexuality was the presumption and procreation the most accessible framework for configuring family relations, homosexuality appeared as a shift in identity, as movement from a heterosexual norm" (Weston 79) which caused it to be perceived as unnatural and presented homosexual people as unable to participate within a family framework. In fact, the variety of notions about families represented in contemporary fiction points to the conclusion that the

definition of a family should no longer be exclusive, especially not on the basis of sexual preferences, but rather inclusive of people we choose to share our intimacy with.

Shared history which causes enduring solidarity need not be (and in reality it is not) restricted to people we share blood cells with, but to people with whom we share common (intimate) experiences, and this provides the basis for creating non-biological, chosen familial relationships (Weston 36), as well as explains why people feel the need to form families that are different from the prescribed traditional kind. For example, Leavitt's short story "Territory," describes Neil, a young gay man who wishes to have a family of his own with his partner Wayne: "'I want to get a dog,' . . . 'I want to stay with you a long time,' Neil says. 'I know.' Imperceptibly, Wayne takes his hand" (26). And although "For a moment, Neil wonders what the stewardess or the old woman on the way to the bathroom will think" (26-27), soon he relaxes because he realizes that they are the only ones that count: "two men hold hands, eyes closed, and breathe in unison" (27). The ending implies that the two of them have become both engaged and married to each other during an airplane flight, since such an open expression of commitment, of two people breathing in unison, symbolizes the forming of a family unit, "refuting impressions about [homosexuals] living a tragic or lonely life" (Weston 67). Leavitt's optimistic ending suggests that coming out is crucial for growing up, establishing family ties and securing recognition for the chosen family through disclosure and integration (Weston 69). In addition, the fact that their coming out as a couple happens in mid-air suggests that we all have to rise above all kinds of prejudice and societal restrictions concerning familial life and allow for the existence of "other kinds" of families. Picoult's happy ending is also enabled by openness and inclusion: "'How are you going to explain to your child why she has two moms, and no dad?' Felicity asks. I was expecting this question. 'I'd start by telling her that there are lots of different kinds of families, and that one isn't any better than another'" (Picoult 330).

While kinship usually relies on the order of nature, which implies the shared (biological) substance of blood, and the order of law based on a customary code for conduct (Schneider 26-37), metaphorical family does not rely on the symbolism of these two orders, but challenges all traditional notions of kinship. The term metaphorical family refers to communities or unions of people who share the kind of intimacy that is normally considered to be a part of familial life, but without actually being members of a family in a traditional sense: they are not bound by a legal or religious contract, they are not kin, and often, they do not share the same living space, as traditional nuclear families normally do. Metaphorical families are constituted as "'a group of people who love and care for each other' (quite a postmodern definition)" (Stacey, *In the Name of the Family* 9), defying thus "the legalistic definition of 'a group of people related by blood, marriage, or adoption'" (Stacey, *In the Name of the Family* 9). This is consistent with Butler's observation that "In recent sociology, conceptions of kinship have become disjoined from the marriage assumption" (15). The defining feature of a metaphorical family is not relation (by blood or law), but emotion, more precisely the feelings of love, care and commitment to people we *choose* as family. The possibility of "choice assigned kinship to the realm of free will and inclination" (Weston 110), placing thus emphasis on emotion and decision, rather than biology and law. The emotional nature of family ties is not a new invention, of course. For instance, in her analysis of homosexual families Weston argues that unconditional love and enduring solidarity commonly characterize blood ties in the United States (44), whereby it is safe to say that this refers to blood ties in the entire Western world. What is new in the concept of the metaphorical family is that these emotional components become a decisive or primary factor in determining who is a part of one's family, whereas the blood ties bear only secondary importance. For example, in American urban ghettos populated predominantly by lower-class African-Americans, friends and distant relatives helped in fulfilling each other's basic family needs through a "domestic network" which tended to replace

the nuclear family as the fundamental unit of social organization (Mintz and Kellogg 213).[87] Despite the fact that Mintz and Kellogg use different terminology, this is undoubtedly a case of a metaphorical family in practice.

All literary texts considered in this study reiterate, implicitly or explicitly, the idea that a family is formed when people feel like a family: "I finally saw that it was up to us if we felt like a real family or not. Nobody else mattered. The labels they stuck on us meant nothing at all" (Parsons, *Man and Wife* 297). Despite the fact that emotional relationship takes precedence over the formal one, the labels are, in fact, of crucial significance because "what troubles the distinction between legitimacy and illegitimacy are social practices, specifically sexual practices, that do not appear immediately as coherent within the available lexicon of legitimation. These are sites of uncertain ontology, difficult nomination" (Butler 20). In cases where there is no member of the metaphorical family "related by blood or marriage" (Weston 5) to one another, there appear many issues that become problematic since metaphorical families have not been granted legitimacy.[88] The need to recognize other types of families is "far more than a cultural nostalgia for more customary ways of symbolically constituting relationships" (Weston 5) because everyday practice demands that someone be authorized to communicate with the state apparatus and make important decisions when members of metaphorical (or gay, for that matter) families are hospitalized or pass away. Questions such as can members of metaphorical families be granted visiting rights at nursing homes, prisons and hospitals?; can they inherit property of family members?; do they have the right to apply for insurance coverage, tax or child custody?; and so on. While these political issues greatly surpass the scope of this thesis, which only aims at identifying the different types of families as they

[87] See also Carol Stack's study of urban African-American kinship entitled *All Our Kin* (New York: Basic Books, 1997) where she shows how kinship functions through a network of biologically related and non-related women who *de facto* form what we refer to as a metaphorical family.
[88] For the most part, this also refers to gay families who did not receive universal legitimization.

appear in contemporary literature, it would be an omission not to acknowledge their existence and relevance since "meanings are inseparable from practice" and in the practice of the Western world "the nuclear family clearly represents a privileged construct, rather than one among a number of family forms accorded equivalent status" (Weston 5, 6).

Despite the fact that metaphorical families have not yet been legalized, contemporary fiction writers recognize the fact that people connect with one another in various ways. Hornby's *About a Boy* describes the constitution of a large metaphorical family consisting of people who feel the need to connect and be close to people that they are not related to by blood or law. Will Freeman, the main protagonist, is an immature thirty-six years old man who lives off of the royalties for one of his father's Christmas songs. Being able to live comfortably without having to work, he indulges in shopping, listening to music, watching TV, and having a series of meaningless (sexual) relationships, rejecting any kind of commitment. After realizing that women who are single-parents also have trouble committing, he comes up with the idea of attending a single parents group as a new way to pick up women suitable for short-term relationships. At one of the single parents meetings he meets the twelve-year-old Marcus whose mother is depressed, suicidal and overprotective. Because of the fact that he mostly interacts with his mother and has no idea what teenagers do and like, Marcus becomes the target of bullies and has a hard time at school. Their meeting is crucial for both Marcus and Will, since they begin to help each other in their mutual struggle to achieve maturity. Will is able to show Marcus how to be "cool" and less afraid of life, and at the same time begins to appreciate the value of a familial relationship and thus deal with his fear of commitment. As the story progresses, both of them meet different people who all become a part of their metaphorical family. It includes Ellie, a tough fifteen year old girl who is constantly in trouble at school and who "adopts" Marcus as her protégé and friend, Marcus's mother, his father, his father's new girlfriend, his girlfriend's mother, and finally Rachel, a single mother who has a son named Ali

about the same age as Marcus, and with whom Will falls in love. By the end of the novel, they all function as a large family; they meet for holidays and important events, and provide support and love to one another. The novel is a "coming of age" story on several levels. Not only do both Will and Marcus mature thanks to the help of their family members, but the institution of family seems to mature as well, through the ability to overcome and function without the unreliable formal demands of blood and law.

Thinking about his life, the boy protagonist, Marcus, realizes that his "first sort of life", which implies the time before his parents got divorced, has ended forever, indicating symbolically thus also the end of the traditional family in general: "The first sort of life had ended four years ago, when he was eight and his mum and dad had split up; that was the normal, boring kind, with school and holidays and homework and weekend visits to grandparents" (3). The second sort of life includes more people, more places; nothing is steady; there is no security of a home or a steady relationship with adults who take care of him: "The second sort was messier, and there were more people and places in it: his mother's boyfriends and his dad's girlfriends; flats and houses; Cambridge and London. You wouldn't believe that so much could change just because a relationship ended" (3). The breakdown of his nuclear family has left a hole in his life because his suicidal mother was incapable of creating a feeling of safety and belonging that a family typically provides. Her suicide attempts make Marcus painfully aware of the fact that at any time he could be left alone in the world. This prompts him to the conclusion (or, rather, realization) that the most important function of the family is taking care of each other and making sure one is not alone in the world. He also realizes that this function needs to be of a permanent nature and that it is not important *who* your family is, but simply that there actually *is* someone you can count on: "Two wasn't enough, that was the trouble. He'd always thought that two was a good number, and that he'd hate to live in a family of three

or four or five. But he could see the point of it now: if someone dropped off the edge, you weren't left on your own" (*About a Boy* 75).

For Marcus it makes no difference whether he is actually related to the people who will take care of him or not. They do not have to be kin or bound by some kind of contract. What connects people into his/any metaphorical family is the emotional component of a relationship. Because the circumstances of his life have taught him very early on that a legal contract does not prevent the family from falling apart, Marcus very maturely realizes that people need to want to be together. From that moment on, He works hard at creating relationships that would alleviate his loneliness and fear, until, by the end of the novel, he becomes a part of a large family. Will, who is neither romantically nor legally connected to Marcus and his mother Fiona, comes to realize that he is becoming a part of a new kind of family consisting of kin, ex-spouses and friends as he arrives for Christmas lunch at Marcus's house:

> There was Marcus's dad, Clive, and his girlfriend, Lindsey, and his girlfriend's mum, six of them altogether . . . Will didn't know that the world was like this. As the product of a 1960s' second marriage he was labouring under the misapprehension that when families broke up some of the constituent parts stopped speaking to each other, but the setup here was different. (*About a Boy* 177)

Although Marcus' parents are divorced, they still care for Marcus's and each other's benefit, which allows them to be a part of a metaphorical family even though their original traditional family had collapsed. Family, whoever its constituent parts may be, gives Marcus a sense of security, a sense of belonging and an inner strength one needs to cope with everyday events:

> I can't explain it, but I feel safer than before, because I know more people. I was really scared because I didn't think two was enough, and now there aren't two anymore. There are loads. And you're better off that way … But, see, I didn't

> know before that anyone else could do that job, and they can. You can find people. … It doesn't really matter who they are, does it, as long as they're there. … Because you can't stand on top of your mum and dad if they're going to mess around and wander off and get depressed. (*About a Boy* 298-299)

The appearance of metaphorical families confirms the fact that people are social beings and that they cannot properly function in isolation. At the same time, metaphorical families suggest that communal living and intimacy can be achieved with people who are not related to us by blood or marriage. Although sanguine relationships tend to be romanticized as ideal and everlasting bonds between people (consider for example the concept of blood brothers or other rituals that include mixing of blood as a symbol of permanent connection of two people), it is clear that a blood tie does not guarantee a lifelong understanding or feelings of benevolence to your blood siblings, as do not religious or legal contracts made for the same purpose of rendering a relationship permanent. In fact, there is no lifelong guarantee for a relationship unless it is based on (mutual) voluntary and selfless commitment to another person: "it's not gender that makes a family; it's love. You don't need a mother and a father; you don't necessarily even need two parents. You just need someone who's got your back" (Picoult 319). Consequently, Marcus is happy to learn that his father's girlfriend is having a baby and that Will started a relationship with Rachel, because "he knew the value of extra people around him" (300).

Communal life that the contemporary protagonists strive toward is emotional rather than spatial or formal. This idea appears in Hornby's first novel, *High Fidelity* (1995), as well, where he accentuates the importance of having many people in one's life since communal living gives a person the feeling of purpose and safety:

> You need as much ballast as possible to stop you from floating away; you need people around you, things going on, otherwise life is like some film where the money ran out, and there are no sets, or locations, or supporting actors, and it's

just one bloke on his own staring into the camera with nothing to do and nobody to speak to. (74)

Clearly, the focus is on sharing experiences and creating emotional bonds, rather than living together or sharing the same last name. More importantly, the "people around you" may also be members of one's nuclear family, but the point is that they need not be. Voluntary mutual commitment produces positive feelings,[89] regardless of whether people are related or not. For example, Will inadvertently becomes a male role model to Marcus, that is a father figure or even a substitute for an older brother, but even so he finds the relationship surprisingly rewarding. Taking care of Marcus, a boy he met by pure chance, gives him a new kind of importance and sheds a different light on his superficial life: "he could see he was serving some purpose in the kid's life at the moment" (*About a Boy* 117). The selflessness of the act of taking care of a child even when he has nothing to expect in return is a refreshing experience for Will: "Will walked back beaming at his own munificence. So this was what people meant by a natural high! … He had made an unhappy boy temporarily happy, and there hadn't been anything in it for him at all. He didn't even want to sleep with the boy's mother" (About a Boy 126).

Will's behavior echoes, to a certain extent, Maslow's theory of human motivation which proposes the idea that there is such a thing as a hierarchy of human needs. The most pressing ones are, obviously, the physiological needs which ensure our survival (the need for food, water, fresh air, excretion, sleep, and so on). Maslow argues that people will want to satisfy the basic

[89] Not to mention the fact that for a long time in Western countries voluntary mutual commitment has been the basis, or more precisely, a prerequisite, upon which traditional nuclear families were formed. People usually decide for themselves that they wish to be married to someone, verbalizing thus their emotional commitment (usually this is termed an act of engagement) prior to legalizing it. Symbolically, the mere decision, or verbalization of commitment is often considered to be an act of "marriage" per se, because the couple "promised" themselves to one another. Since 1660s in England the promise of engagement was binding by the law and breach of promise had actual legal consequences. The party that was injured by the breach could sue for damages (loss of benefit that would have come from the contract had it been honored). In fact, the English parliament passed the Act abolishing the action for breach of promise only in 1970 (!). For details, see: Frost, G. S. *Promises Broken: Courtship, Class, and Gender in Victorian England*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia Press, 1996.

level of needs, before they begin to strongly desire the next, higher level of needs: the need for safety, then love, the need for esteem and finally, the need for self-actualization; "Thus man is a perpetually wanting animal" (Maslow 396).[90] Moreover, the innate desire to satisfy all our needs may explain why people in the individualistic, Anglo-American society may perceive marriage, a collectivist unit, to be a threat to their individual growth and self-fulfillment. It can also explain the preference toward closeness without the feeling of obligation, of being forced (by law or social custom) to be loyal to someone as opposed to being loyal to whomever you choose and having the freedom to change your loyalties (even if one may never choose to exercise this freedom). Filling in as a metaphorical father or an older brother to Marcus helped Will satisfy his need for esteem, which, according to Maslow, "leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world" (383).

Before he found this kind of fulfillment, Will was ironic and even cynical about his life of pleasure. Although he enjoyed his life of pleasure, he felt useless for not having done anything to earn all the things he had. Consequently, he came to hate the song that brought him money because it served as a constant reminder of his lack of success: "the song he hated more than any song in the world … he still felt he needed a stiff drink, or counseling, or a good cry when he heard it" (Hornby, *About a Boy* 138, 140). Because of his unproductive lifestyle he came to feel inferior and weak. He refused to make any of his relationships serious because he felt undeserving of a proper partner and worried that, once she got to truly know him, every

[90] Maslow's theory suffered some criticism, both because of the possibility that human needs are not at all hierarchical but ontological, universal and unchangeable, and because Maslow, although he granted that "culture itself is an adaptive tool" (375), based his analysis on Americans who are a highly individualistic nation, thereby disregarding the fact that people from collectivist societies may have different priorities and attitudes to life (Hofstede 389-398). To his defense, Maslow himself did conclude that "It cannot possibly be denied that such things are true but their generality can be denied" (375). However, Maslow's theory may provide an adequate framework for understanding not only Will's motivation, who, conveniently, is an Englishman, a Westerner, brought up in an individualistic society, but also the motivation of many other literary protagonists in the selected texts.

woman would leave him. So, instead of allowing himself to be "dumped" for real, he insists on shallow, sexual encounters. After he falls in love with Rachel, a beautiful and smart single mother, he is not thrilled with the new feeling but completely scared of failure "mostly because he couldn't see anything he might have that could possibly interest her" (*About a Boy* 191). However, after becoming a part of his metaphorical family he suddenly sees his purpose in life, which immediately changes his reaction to his father's Christmas hit. As he now hears the song, he first thinks of his father and then of Marcus, understanding that a family-like connection between him and Marcus had been made (140) and that he probably would no longer seem like a failure to his father. This makes it all the more probable that he will remain a stabile factor in Marcus' life – much more stabile than either Marcus' father (who does not live in London) or his psychologically unstable mother could ever be. The dynamics of their familial relationship was a "messy, sprawling, chaotic web" (*About a* Boy 292), much in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome which implies multiple and non-hierarchical relationships, in which it no longer matters where or how the relationship originated, but toward what conclusion it leads, that is what point it has. In other words, the forms of the family or its constituents are not important, but what matters is how family members make each other feel. The traditional nuclear family, which is highly hierarchic and has a definitive, strict form, follows binary logic as its root principle, much like the classical books or ways of thinking. The metaphorical family, however, represents an indefinite multiplicity of secondary roots that graft onto the basic root, that is structure, whereby the family undergoes a flourishing development. While the basic family form is changed by "natural reality," still the root's, that is the family's unity subsists (5). Like Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, the form of the metaphorical family seems a radical innovation, but it in fact simply signifies an adaptation to the contemporary reality, which favors multiplicity and equality over binary dichotomy and hierarchy.

Consequently, thanks to its focus on the feeling and meaning, rather than form, this metaphorical family gave Will "a glimpse of what it was like to be human. It wasn't too bad, really; he wouldn't even mind being human on a full-time basis" (292). Isolated, cynical life is unfulfilling and people have both the desire and the need to make intimate relationships with other people. What Hornby proposes in *About a Boy* is that this intimate relationship, typically considered to be epitomized in the form of a traditional nuclear family, need not be realized within this traditional framework. All one needs are people who are willing to commit and participate in each other's lives, regardless of their blood or legal ties. Marcus's relationship to Will echoes Judith Stacey's proposal that in a postmodern society people should foster a collective, rhizomatic, responsibility for children by drawing on our communitarian sentiments. She asserts that many childless and childfree adults are assuming pseudoparenting roles or, para-parenting, to use her term, by forming nurturing, long-term relationships with children of overburdened parents (*In the Name of the Family* 80), which in fact signifies and speaks for a more frequent forming of metaphorical families.

The new circumstances in Marcus' life, caused not only by the fact that his parents got divorced but also by his realization that you can get love from people other than your biological family, made him aware of the fact that there are no guarantees in traditional relationships and that a traditional family is not a place of safety or security at all. Getting married is not "the right way", says Marcus and proposes a new way of organizing human life:

> You know when they do those human pyramids? That's the sort of model for living I am looking at now. … You're safer as a kid if everyone's friends. … If your mum and Will get together, you think you're safe, but you're not, because they'll split up, or Will will go mad or something. … I just don't think couples are the future. (Hornby, *About a Boy* 304)

Marcus's idea of a human pyramid as an ideal model for living does not rely on the symbolic interpretation of this geometric form which implies a hierarchy with the person on top given the most power or importance. On the contrary, Marcus refers to the fact that in a human pyramid everyone depends on one another, so everyone is equal and equally important. Everyone's limbs are mutually connected or touching in order to hold on to each other and sustain each other's weight, and in effect, they strongly resemble the multiple roots of a rhizome. One has to be able to rely on others in order not to fall to the ground, but the people who form the pyramid and whom you trust your life with are not necessarily your kin. The pyramid works as long as everyone has the same goal and has the well-being of all at heart. Unlike the traditional family, which can formally – through a legal or religious contract – still exist even after the emotional components of loyalty and love have long been gone, the pyramid will collapse the minute any one of its members decides not to hold the other(s) any longer. What is crucial here is the feeling of commitment which, as it seems, does not have to arise in the form of a written (marital) contract that says one is bound to his partner for life because both the contract and the wedding band are just symbols of a person's dedication to someone. If the feelings disappear, the contract and the ring have no value at all: "And I knew it wasn't the wedding band that made her my wife, or the certificate they gave us in that sacred place, or even the promises that we had made. It was the fact that she was on my side, that her love and support were there for me, and would always be there" (Parsons, *Man and Wife* 28).

This points to the conclusion that a metaphorical family, even if it lacks blood ties, genealogical hierarchy and marital paraphernalia, can be equally strong and valid as the traditional one. Although Gilbert's claim that "we are more likely to look for and find a positive view of the things we're *stuck with* than of the things we're not" (201) seems quite logical and suggests that we tolerate people we are related to more than we do those who are not our kin, it does not always hold true. "Being stuck" often provokes the desire to "break free", which is

why a lack of a formal contract or a blood relationship may prove to be beneficial for the feeling of mutual intimacy because of the freedom of choice it implies. The idea of marriage as "possessing" someone, or claiming the right on someone frightens certain people and the sense of obligation deters them from the relationship. Furthermore, it can cause people to take their family members for granted and become less attentive to their needs. Carrs' unorthodox tenant, the alternative new age healer called DJ GoodNews, confirms this by explaining why he finds the traditional family arrangements unsatisfying: "This is why I don't want to play the game. The possessions game. Because I think people become lazy and spoiled and uncaring" (Hornby, *How to Be Good* 127). The niche that exists between the human desire for intimacy and respect and the refusal to either feel possessed or taken for granted are the points of origin of the metaphorical family.

## Conclusion

> "There's no such thing as a normal family" (Parsons, *Man and Wife* 171).

> "There are, as we have said, many paths which *may* lead to such happiness as is attainable by men, but there is none which does so for certain" (Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 36).

The aim of this dissertation has been to explore representations of family in contemporary English fiction and to demonstrate possible changes that have occurred in the ways family is treated and represented in late twentieth and early twenty-first century fiction. The scope of this project has included texts dating from 1980 to 2008, but in certain instances the thesis refers to significant literary texts written and published before this period because they relevantly represent various modes of family life. The research tackles an extensive body of literary texts dealing with form, functions and dysfunctions of family in order to provide a relevant insight into the literary tendencies concerning fictional representations of families.

The general assumption of the project was that the traditional nuclear family, as depicted in contemporary fiction, has been (and is being) transformed under the pressures and demands of postmodern, individualistic and consumerist society. However, it was found that contemporary writers still represent the traditional nuclear family as it always was: a triad consisting of mother, father and child(ren). Moreover, protagonists depicted by authors such as Tony Parsons, Nick Hornby and Don DeLillo, maintain that the traditional family life is the

best organizational form for family life, regardless of the fact that it has been difficult to uphold due to different social or economic pressures. What this research has found as new is that literary representations now include other types of families next to the traditional nuclear one, expanding thus the paradigm of the family in such a way as to include several family forms, instead of transforming it form one model into another.

The diachronic study of the dominant ideologies that informed family and familial relations points to a tendency toward liberalization of family life. The study of contemporary literary texts also points to an increasingly liberal practice of family life. However, the difficulties that the literary protagonists have in organizing and sustaining their familial life prove that liberalizing family life is still a controversial issue that does not yield itself to a straightforward solution. Rather, contemporary family fiction attempts to dismantle the traditional notions of family by representing an extended paradigm of familial life; it offers multiple solutions in the forms of different types of families. Next to the traditional nuclear family, there is also the single parent family, the childless family, the homosexual family and the metaphorical family.

The development of new family forms was enabled and fostered by the postmodern life which negates hierarchies, distrusts grand stories and supports the emergence of individual voices with different tastes and preferences. Consequently, the body of analyzed texts shows that the triad of the traditional nuclear family coexists with families that, although they challenge its form, do not attempt to stand as a substitute for it. On the contrary, even though multiple new family forms have emerged, their members seem to construct their family identity in comparison with or in contrast to the framework of the traditional nuclear family as the "ideal" model, if such exists. Moreover, the choice of primary texts was determined by the fact that their protagonists for the most part tend to define themselves in terms of their familial

relations rather than exploring other aspects of their identities such as class, religion or nationality

Authors such as Don DeLillo and Tony Parsons continue to represent the traditional nuclear family as the model that should be emulated regardless of the difficulties that the spouses have in sustaining it. In the postmodern world, where religion, history and other great stories are being set apart into small fragments, these authors insist on reconstructing the traditional family from the fragments of previous families. Thus, they create a blended family that aspires to be a great story that gives sense to the unsafe existence of their protagonists – a traditional family. Functional traditional families, cohabitations with children and blended families, prove that the model of the traditional nuclear family is not flawed in itself. What is flawed is the basic presumption on which this model rests, namely, that ideal romantic love is both a prerequisite and the only important ingredient of family life. Consequently, traditional families are on the decline because the spouses, influenced by the media and the ideology of quick consumption, expect a continuous love affair and refuse to engage all their resources needed in order to ensure a satisfying family life. Familial love, of course, has little to do with romance, as family typically comes into being after the passion of romance has subsided and turned into a more moderate, but long-term feeling.

What appears as problematic is the fact that the Western cultural narrative of romance has been insisting for centuries that the "proper" way of life – or even the purpose in life – is to find the One - an ideal partner with whom we can start a family and live happily ever after. More notably, it contributed to a specific cultural pattern according to which "romance" must be heterosexual, life-long, monogamous and reproductive. What is more, this pattern falsely links romance with (heterosexual) marriage. Desire for romance is, in fact, an expression of our infantile wish to become one with the other, to escape the responsibilities of adulthood and have our desires taken care of by that perfect someone. Yet, marriage must have a much more

realistic basis. It is a joint venture which requires hard work and compromise of two mature and selfless individuals. The meme of "true love" has become so ingrained in the universal subconscious and so stubbornly linked with marriage that human lives can hardly be imagined outside this narrative – true romance is being put forward as the ideal and because it has been perpetuated for centuries as a myth, dogma or meme, its validity has rarely been brought into question. Rather, it has become a "truth" we live by. Contrary to this, contemporary fiction reveals that there is nothing non-ideological about family; people are pressured by their friends and relatives into giving in to the expected pattern of getting married and having children.

Paradoxically, the consumption-prone, cynical and self-centered individual becomes incredulous toward the possibility of a "true romance", but at the same time continues to desire it. In other words, the belief that there is no true love did not contribute to a decline in the human obsession with it. Intense intimacy and love are the fictional characters' major preoccupations, but the relationships in which such emotions are supposed to occur seem threatening. The strings of traditional family life seem like a burden to them and they have become cynical and wary of relationships that imply dependency. This represents a challenge for those who wish to pursue the traditional nuclear family model. In addition to this, other factors emerged as relevant for the literary representations of families.

The postmodern society makes extensive use of the idea of uniqueness of every individual because this fosters consumption and supports the mechanisms needed to keep the late capitalist market going. The media, as the consumerist ideology's most effective tool, promote the idea of how special and unique one is, and so one becomes the most important person in one's life. This negates the need (or desire) to put up with anyone else's demands and pushes one into the life of consumption and self-indulgence. Literary protagonists thus consume people and relationships like commodities, quickly moving on to someone else, not taking the time to digest, that is, reflect on their relationships. Consequently, the rejection of intimacy, or

in some cases, the inability to create intimate relationships, causes long-term dissatisfaction which pushes one into consuming more and more goods or partners. The most difficult task, it seems, is to reconcile the desire to be an independent "I" and the desire to be loved and needed by others.

One of the crucial insights into the human life is the understanding that most forms and practices are arbitrary and culturally determined instead of natural. Humans are subjects defined by and dependent on the social rules and codes. The family unit serves as a means for reconstitution of the heterogeneous social unit into a unified whole, that is the society, which demands a single, uniform, controllable family form. The reduction of various aspects of social practice into a single, unified aspect enables the state to control its subjects. It is because of this that issues closely related to family life, such as sexuality and reproduction, are highly political. The tension between the public and the private is caused by the politics of sexuality which sanctifies certain practices that are favorable to a society and ostracizes those that are not. Thus it creates a gap between what is normative or "normal", that is heterosexuality, and what is "other", that is abnormal, that is homosexuality.

Writers such as Christopher Isherwood, David Leavitt, Jodi Picoult and Annie Proulx are working towards deconstructing prejudices against homosexual people as loners interested only in promiscuous sex and night life, disinclined to and incapable of any kind of commitment. By humanizing the "other", contemporary authors show that homosexuality does not imply a specific way of life, particularly not the one that is detrimental to the society. What is more, they point to the fact that heterosexuality is not in any way a guarantee for a happy marriage or a functional family, bringing into question the normativeness of both a heterosexual relationship and the traditional nuclear family.

Yet, it is not only fiction about homosexual families that brings into question the function of reproduction as being crucial to families. Raymond Carver, for example, is among

authors who decidedly point to the fact that many families were ruined precisely because the spouses felt pressured into procreation. The danger of the inflexible and exclusive family paradigm lies in the fact that both those who fail to obey the demand of the social order by refusing to procreate and those who comply with it despite their personal desires end up dissatisfied with and anxious about the circumstances of their private life.

The traditional nuclear family may be seen as the ideal because it encompasses both the function of procreation and the one of affective companionship, but what the traditional family excludes is far more important. The dominant discourse on family reduces familial possibilities into a binary opposition of either being "properly" married, which implies a legalized heterosexual relationship the primary aim of which is to procreate, or choosing to live outside the family, not because this is "natural," but because it promotes the predominant heterosexual patriarchy as the preferred structure. This dichotomy cancels out the possibility of existence of any other type of family but the traditional nuclear one. To be more precise, the traditional model prevents single parents, childless people, people who are not connected by blood or law, and homosexual people to ever constitute a familial unit. This, of course, is highly prejudicial if we consider that the desire for intimacy, closeness and love is common to all human beings and that a familial relationship satisfies these desires and needs.

Finally, metaphorical families question all traditional presumptions of form concerning the family life. A metaphorical family is a group of people who permanently love and care for each other without being bound by law, religion, blood or space. It makes peace between the contradictory desire to belong and to be free. It also points to the conclusion that concepts such as monogamy, heterosexuality and the desire to procreate are neither universal nor natural. What is universal to all human beings is the need for commitment, acceptance and love, regardless of the form in which they will receive it. The niche that exists between the human

desire for intimacy and respect and the refusal to either feel possessed or taken for granted are the points of origin of the metaphorical family.

The dynamics of a familial relationship resembles a rhizome which implies multiple and non-hierarchical relationships, in which it no longer matters where or how the relationship originated, but what benefit it brings to those who sustain it. In other words, the forms of the family or its constituents are not important, but what matters is how family members make each other feel. On the contrary, the traditional nuclear family, which is highly hierarchic and has a definitive, strict form, follows binary logic as its root principle. On the other hand, the metaphorical family represents an indefinite multiplicity of secondary roots that graft onto the basic root, whereby the family undergoes a flourishing development. The form of the metaphorical family seems a radical innovation, but it in fact simply signifies a stage on the family continuum. Along with other familial forms, it represents an adaptation to the contemporary reality, which favors multiplicity and equality over binary dichotomy and hierarchy.

Despite the fact that the representations of family in contemporary fiction are heterogeneous in the sense that they speak for the need to include other family forms into the family paradigm, they are all based on common ground. All literary texts considered in this study reiterate, implicitly or explicitly, the idea that a family is formed when people feel like a family. In other words, paradoxically as it may seem, all authors advocate a plurality of forms while simultaneously recognizing that form is the least important category. They challenge the idea of family as a unit defined simply by its public status, rituals and signs, and propose the issue of feelings and emotional relationships as crucial in determining a family bond because of their universal quality for all human beings. Family values include love, commitment, safety, security, and integrity, none of which depends on the form of the familial unit. In other words, communal life that the protagonists strive toward is emotional rather than spatial or formal.

Shared history, which causes enduring solidarity, need not be, and in reality it is not, restricted to people we share blood cells with, but to people with whom we share common (intimate) experiences, and this provides the basis for creating non-biological, chosen familial relationships.

Although the thesis focuses on Anglophone literary texts and thus represents a literary and cultural study of the contemporary Western family, its findings are relevant to the Croatian context, as well. Namely, stories about families seem to be the main theme of all literature(s), which points to the conclusion that scholars and students of different literatures may be interested in the results of this study. The thesis offers insight into the diversity of structure of contemporary families enabled by the cultural and economic situation in the Anglophone world; yet, it would be inaccurate to say that literatures (and families) from other contexts are exempt from the pervading influence of contemporary consumerist lifestyle fostered by the process of globalization. In fact, this thesis may represent a starting point for an analysis or a comparative study of literary representations of families in Croatian language fiction, too. It may also contribute both to the scientific discourse within the field of literature(s) and to the scholarly exchange between literature and other disciplines such as sociology, philosophy and anthropology.

To conclude, the variety of literary responses to family is not surprising in the context of contemporary West that was awakened to new freedoms after centuries of social conditioning, resulting in the creation of the "(proper) family"/no family binary. The dominant ideological discourse on family as the basic organizational cell of human life promoted a traditional nuclear family as the single proper way to live. The analyzed literary texts question the dominant ideology, and allow and speak for both a plurality of familial forms and a more tolerant society. They are a comment on and a reaction to life's everyday issues. For contemporary literary protagonists the traditional nuclear family no longer represents the only

acceptable mode of familial life. The need for intimacy, support and the impulse for procreation seem to be constants in human life, but the forms in which people decide to satisfy these needs have changed. This allows for other types of familial relationships to coexist with the traditional nuclear family, because they are able to perform the same functions. The common feature of contemporary families is a strong emphasis on love and emotional support between its members as the most important function, one that used to be secondary to issues such as procreation, inheritance, blood line and family name. The new concept of family as a place of emotional rather than blood or legal connection is inclusive and thus allows more people to feel safe and loved. Even if contemporary protagonists renounce the traditional form and rules of the nuclear family, they are hardly ever considering a life without some kind of a close emotional, that is familial, connection. It is probable that the ways in which people fulfill their need for intimacy will change further, as more and more time is spent living in the virtual worlds enabled by social networks and different electronic devices, and this also represents a topic worthy of further research.

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**Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to examine representations of family in contemporary English-language fiction and explain what impact the social, economic and ideological changes have on the family. So far, the term "family" has implied a very specific type of family: the traditional nuclear family. However, the analysis of the selected literary texts written in the period from 1980 to 2008 has shown that literary families are varied which points to the need to redefine the concept of family. The thesis identifies five types of families as they appear in contemporary fiction: 1) the traditional nuclear family, 2) the single parent family, 3) the childless family, 4) the homosexual family, and 5) the metaphorical family. Each of the "new" families challenges at least one of the defining notions of the traditional nuclear family, for example the importance of blood ties, heterosexuality, patriarchal hierarchy, or even procreation. Through the voices of their protagonists, contemporary authors remind us that actual – psychological and emotional – family ties are created when there is mutual love and the feelings of permanent trust and safety among the family members. Consequently, matters of sex, gender and blood ties turn out to be of secondary importance. While no single formal arrangement can guarantee the protagonists' family happiness, the feelings of commitment and acceptance always do. In other words, contemporary authors insist on representations of different kinds of families, not because the form is important, but to show that family is not a locus of residence, but of meaning and relationships.

Keywords: contemporary English literature, family, nuclear, metaphorical, childless, homosexual, single-parent.

**Sažetak**

Disertacija istražuje književne prikaze obitelji u odabranim tekstovima suvremene proze engleskog govornog područja od 1980. do 2008. s naglaskom na utjecaj koji društvene, ekonomske i ideološke promjene imaju na obitelj i njezin tradicionalni oblik. Namjera autorice je doprinijeti osuvremenjenju književnog koncepta obitelji kroz otkriće da se, usuprot dosadašnjoj definiciji koja je pod pojmom „obitelj“ podrazumijevala samo tradicionalnu nuklearnu obitelj (heteroseksualne roditelje i njihovu djecu), u suvremenoj prozi pojavljuje više vrsta obitelji. Autorica disertacije utvrdila je supostojanje pet vrsta obitelji u suvremenoj prozi engleskog govornog područja. To su: 1) tradicionalna nuklearna obitelj, 2) obitelj sa samohranim roditeljem, 3) obitelj bez djece, 4) homoseksualna obitelj (obitelj s istospolnim partnerima) i 5) metaforička obitelj. Svaka od „novih“ vrsta obitelji dovodi u pitanje pojmove na kojima se temeljila ideja tradicionalne nuklearne obitelji kao jedine „prave“ obitelji, a to su krvne veze, heteroseksualnost, patrijarhalni poredak, i nagon (obveza) razmnožavanja u svrhu opstanka vrste. Protagonisti suvremene proze ukazuju na to da stvarne – psihološke i emocionalne – obiteljske veze nastaju kada među članovima obitelji postoje osjećaji uzajamne ljubavi, trajnog povjerenja i sigurnosti, pri čemu rod, spol i krvne veze gube na značaju. Formalno uređenje obitelji samo po sebi ne jamči obiteljsku sreću protagonista, nego to čine osjećaji međusobne odanosti i prihvaćanja. Drugim riječima, suvremeni autori insistiraju na prikazima različitih obitelji ne zato što je forma bitna, nego upravo kako bi pokazali da forma ne čini obitelj, nego se obitelj ostvaruje kroz emocionalna značenja i odnos njezinih članova.

Ključne riječi: suvremena proza na engleskom jeziku, nuklearna obitelj, metaforička obitelj, obitelj bez djece, istospolni, samohrani.