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## God Only Knows: Family in the films of Paul Thomas Anderson

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GOD ONLY KNOWS:  
FAMILY IN THE FILMS OF PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
Of  
The Lee Honors College at Western Michigan University

By  
Jordan Rossio  
December 2013

Gamblers, pornographers, motivational speakers, oilmen, cult leaders, and the dark side of Adam Sandler's comic persona. These are the topics that are explored by one of the greatest of the modern day American filmmakers, Paul Thomas Anderson. Through each of these unique and interesting film subjects, Anderson is able to explore the theme of family and the importance of the ones that we create for ourselves. From Sydney's diner conversation with John in *Hard Eight* up to the final goodbye between Lancaster Dodd and Freddie Quell in his most recent work *The Master*, Anderson's films have delved deep into this theme of family and how those surrogate families that people create can be more meaningful than the biological ones. This theme of families both biological and surrogate dominate Anderson's first three motion pictures. These three films (*Hard Eight*, *Boogie Nights*, and *Magnolia*) are by far Anderson's most intimate and personal and they set the groundwork for a theme which would show up in the films that followed. Through many character interactions in these films, Anderson shows how the families that we make can often be more important than the ones we are born into.

### Life in the Valley

A good place to start exploring Anderson's interest in the theme of family is his own childhood. In an interview Anderson was quoted as saying that the first three movies he directed "reflected his life in small and intimate ways...there's a lot of my dad in these movies"<sup>1</sup> Anderson's father was Ernie Anderson, a local television personality (he created a late night horror TV host named Ghoulardi) and voice over artist. Anderson was the product of his father's second marriage; born on June 26, 1970, he was the second oldest of his siblings with

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas, George. "Success Blossoms for Magnolia Director." *Akron Beacon Journal* [Akron OH], January 7, 2000.

three sisters. Anderson's childhood in the San Fernando Valley would have a major impact on the films he would go on to make.

Like so many of the filmmakers who sprang up around the same time, PT Anderson was a cinephile from a young age. In an interview with Charlie Rose from 1997, Anderson expresses how he wanted to make films ever since he was a young boy. According to Anderson, the only other job he ever wanted was to be a boxer, the result of seeing *Rocky* as a child. Thankfully, he was talked out of this notion by his father. This would not be the only major moment of cinematic adoration from Anderson's childhood. In 1982 when *E.T.* came out, Anderson was inspired to dress like the main character Eliot. This wasn't the only Spielberg film that left an impact on Anderson; he admitted to the *Los Angeles Times* that "Every time [he] eat[s] mashed potatoes, [he] still think[s] of *Close Encounters*".<sup>2</sup>

Anderson, like many of his contemporaries, was influenced by many of the directors who came before him. One can see the work of a director like Robert Altman in the sprawling cast of interconnected characters in his film *Magnolia*. Anderson even stepped in and worked as a stand-in director for the ailing Altman on the director's final film, *A Prairie Home Companion*.<sup>3</sup> One can also see the influence of Martin Scorsese, especially in the film *Boogie Nights*, with the use of pop music and the energetic filmmaking. In *Boogie Nights*, the final scene works as an homage to the ending of *Raging Bull*. It wasn't just classic American cinema that influenced the young filmmaker. Another major influence on PT Anderson was the great French director Max Ophuls, one of the grandfathers of the elaborate tracking shot. One can see the influence in the

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<sup>2</sup> Goldstein, Patrick. "The New New Wave." *Los Angeles Times* [Los Angeles CA], December 12, 1999 <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/dec/12/entertainment/ca-42968>.

<sup>3</sup> Modell, Josh. "Interview: Paul Thomas Anderson." *The AV Club*, January 2, 2008. <http://www.avclub.com/article/paul-thomas-anderson-2120>.

tracking shots that Anderson employs in his own films. One of the most notable tracking shots in Anderson's work is the opening scene of *Boogie Nights*, which introduces the cast by having the camera glide through a crowded night club. Anderson also provided a video introduction to the DVD release of Ophuls' 1953 classic *The Earrings of Madame de....*

Film was not the only major influence on the young Anderson; his childhood growing up in the San Fernando Valley was also an influence on the films he would make. The Valley is often thought of as the capital of pornography production due to how much is produced in the area. Like many young men, he stumbled upon his father's stash of pornography at a young age. Anderson recalls how his family was one of the first to own a VHS player and at the age of nine, he found his father's copy of *The Opening of Misty Beethoven*. In an interview with Total Film Magazine, Anderson admits that the film confused and scared him at the time. He also talks about how well made the film seemed to be. He describes how growing up in the San Fernando Valley was a big influence on why he decided to tackle the world of 1970's pornography for his second film.<sup>4</sup> It was not just finding his father's secret stash of pornography that would leave an impact, during the 70's and 80's the San Fernando Valley was the capital of porn production. Anderson recalled how filming at neighboring houses was a typical event. He describes how most kids would understand that if they saw a white van pull up to a house that meant porn was being shot at that location.<sup>5</sup>

Despite having a father who worked as a successful voiceover artist, of the four siblings only Anderson would follow his father into show business. After spending only two days at the NYU Film School, Paul got his start working in television. In television, Anderson started out as

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<sup>4</sup> Winstanley, Cam. "Do the Hustle." *Total Film Magazine UK*, February 1998.  
<http://cigsandredvines.blogspot.com/1998/02/interview-do-hustle.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Sharon Waxman, *Rebels on the Backlot*, (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2005),85.

a production assistant working on quiz shows (a location Anderson would return to in *Magnolia*), and eventually worked on local PBS productions. It was on one such production where Anderson met Philip Baker Hall, a character actor whom Anderson had been a huge fan of after seeing him in Robert Altman's *Secret Honor*, a filmed version of a one-man show in which Hall played Richard Nixon. Hall recalled how Anderson walked up to him on the set of the PBS production and told the veteran actor that he would like to make him a star.<sup>6</sup> The result of this meeting was Anderson's short film *Cigarettes and Coffee*, a film which Anderson would expand into his first feature *Hard Eight*. It was with this first film that Anderson would begin to translate his life experiences and relationships into the theme of family.

### O Captain My Captain

*Hard Eight* opens outside a diner, where a dejected young man sits brooding outside the entrance. An older gentleman walks up and offers to buy him coffee. Thus begins the first surrogate father/son relationship in P.T. Anderson's films. The older gentleman is Sydney, an aging criminal with a secret past. The young man is John, a lonely man who lost the money he was going to gamble with in order to give his mother a proper burial. Already the theme of family is being explored: John is a man without any family left, leaving a void for Sydney to help fill.

An expanded version of Anderson's short film *Cigarettes and Coffee*, *Hard Eight* had a troubled production. It was a typical battle between the producers and a director with a singular vision. On the DVD commentary track, Anderson said that he used to think of the film as a

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<sup>6</sup> Hall, Philip Baker, "Hard Eight Audio Commentary," DVD.

"bastard child" but that he has grown to like it over the ensuing years.<sup>7</sup> Anderson's first cut of *Sydney* (the film's original title and the one Anderson prefers) came in at around two and a half hours. This led to some friction between the young director and the film's producer Robert Jones. It got to the point where Jones had Anderson locked out of the editing room, and there were two separate prints sent to the Sundance Film Festival. After Anderson's cut was shown at Cannes, the film struggled to find a distributor; this was when Anderson re-cut the film into the version that is now available. This experience was a life lesson for Anderson in retaining control over his films.<sup>8</sup>

As the first of the films to "[reflect] his life in small and intimate ways"<sup>9</sup>, *Hard Eight* deals mainly with the father/son dynamic that occurs between Sydney and John. According to Anderson's audio commentary on the DVD, the idea of the diner scene in *Cigarettes and Coffee* was inspired by similar conversations Anderson had had with his father, whom he lived with at the time.<sup>10</sup> This scene was expanded into the opening of *Hard Eight*, where Sydney sits down with John and advises him on how he is going to get the money. This leads to Sydney acting as a mentor teaching his protégé John how to scam the casino. Sydney tells John what to do, and like many a father he throws John into the pool to help him learn to swim. Thus begins a friendship that acts as a surrogate father/son relationship.

The film jumps ahead two years to show how well-formed the relationship has become between the two men. The audience is introduced to the third character in this surrogate family, Clementine, the cocktail waitress who prostitutes herself on the side. She not only acts as a love

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<sup>7</sup> Anderson, Paul Thomas, "Hard Eight Audio Commentary," DVD.

<sup>8</sup> Sharon Waxman, *Rebels on the Backlot*, (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2005),87-90.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas, George. "Success Blossoms for Magnolia Director." *Akron Beacon Journal* [Akron OH] , January 7, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Anderson, Paul Thomas, "Hard Eight Audio Commentary," DVD.

interest for John, she also becomes another character who needs the father figure provided by Sydney. Her nickname for Sydney, Captain, is meant to show how she sees him as a figure who can guide her in the right direction. As a tentative romance begins to bloom between John and Clementine, the audience is introduced to the fourth major character in the film, Jimmy.

In his introductory scene, Jimmy is shown to be a bit crass and misogynistic. Immediately Sydney takes a dislike to the man. The family theme shows itself in the interaction between the two characters. It often feels like Sydney is playing the role of father and Jimmy is the friend who acts as a negative influence on his "son". Throughout the rest of the movie, Jimmy will act as an outside force infringing on this family that Sydney has created. Eventually Jimmy attempts to blackmail Sydney with information that threatens to tear the major father/son relationship apart. Jimmy is an important character because he brings out the protective fatherly instincts within Sydney.

Sydney's paternal instincts also come out in the motel scene, where he comes to the aid of John and Clementine who are caught up in a kidnapping scheme. The scheme starts when a client refuses to pay Clementine for her services and starts to hit her; she calls John to come over, whereupon they proceeded to beat him up and tie him to the bed. They come up with the plan to procure a ransom from the man's wife. Realizing they are in over their heads, they call Sydney, who begins playing the part of the shocked and disappointed father who has caught his kids doing something illegal. Throughout the scene, Sydney keeps his composure and tries to figure out a way to keep his "kids" out of trouble. This calm, plus the methodical way he goes about cleaning up the scene and getting a handle on the situation, gives the audience a hint of the dark things Sydney has seen and done in his past. Sydney even gets his hands dirty by knocking

the hostage out when he begins to gain consciousness. This is an important scene because it shows how Sydney slides into the role of a protective father.

Early on in the film, Sydney tells John that "my reasons for doing this are not selfish." As the audience will soon find out, Sydney's reasons may have something to do with attempting to make amends for a guilty conscience. The powerful and dangerous knowledge that Jimmy possesses is that back in the day when Sydney was steeped in the criminal world in Atlantic City, he killed John's father. The specifics of Sydney's past are mostly left unknown, but the details the audience is given shed some light on why Sydney decided to form this surrogate family relationship with John and Clementine. During a conversation with Clementine, Sydney reveals that he had a family, but after his divorce he has lost contact with his adult children. This breakdown of his family is most likely due to the criminal activity. This information sheds some light on the opening scene where the two men first met. Here two lonely men, who had lost everyone, that form a friendship in which they filled the father/son roles that were lacking in their lives.

Jimmy's knowledge threatened to destroy that relationship, which is why Sydney decides to pay him off. During their tense conversations, Jimmy delivers what might be one of the most important lines in the film when he says, "Bottom line Sydney, no matter how hard you try, you're not his father."<sup>11</sup> This line perfectly captures Sydney's motivation and the reason he approached John in the first place. The theme of *Hard Eight* ultimately becomes about how the creation of this surrogate family acts in part as a means of redemption for the character of Sydney. It is also this surrogate family that proves the motivator for Sydney to sink back to his criminal ways and shoot Jimmy to keep this secret from destroying what he has spent the film

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<sup>11</sup> Anderson, Paul Thomas, "Hard Eight," DVD.

creating, a family. This new surrogate family is so important to Sydney that he is willing to return to his violent ways in order to protect it. The importance of surrogate families is a theme that Anderson will return to in his next film with a bigger cast of characters.

### A Phone Call for Maggie

*Boogie Nights* does for the porn industry what the *Godfather* and *Goodfellas* did for the mob. They both take a shady subset of American culture and use it to explore themes of loneliness, loyalty, and most importantly family. *Boogie Nights* is a sprawling look at the San Fernando Valley porn industry from the glorious peak of the mid to late Seventies to the brutal hangover of the Eighties. Paul Thomas Anderson will use this setting to tell the story of how a surrogate family was created through a group of individuals who are tied to the making of pornography.

As he did with his previous film, Anderson decided to make his second feature an expanded version of a short film that he made as a teenager. The original film was a *Spinal Tap*-style mockumentary about the rise and fall of a porn legend by the name of Dirk Diggler, which Anderson had made when he was seventeen.<sup>12</sup> Following the positive critical reception of *Hard Eight*, Anderson was able to secure a budget of \$15 Million for *Boogie Nights*. Even with only one feature film to his name, Anderson was already building up a roster of collaborators including John C. Reilly, Phillip Baker Hall, and Phillip Seymour Hoffman, who had a scene stealing role as an obnoxious gambler in *Hard Eight*. He actually wrote the part of Amber Waves, the surrogate mother figure for the porn company, with actress Julianne Moore in mind. Anderson originally wanted Leonardo DiCaprio for the role of Dirk Diggler; DiCaprio passed to

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<sup>12</sup> Anderson, Paul Thomas, "Boogie Nights Audio Commentary," DVD.

go work on *Titanic*. Anderson decided to go with Leo's co-star from *The Basketball Diaries*, Mark Wahlberg. The role of Jack Horner, the porn producer and surrogate father figure, was first offered to Warren Beatty. However, that deal fell through when Anderson realized that the aging Hollywood playboy was more interested in the role of Dirk Diggler.<sup>13</sup> The role eventually went to Burt Reynolds, who would receive an Oscar nomination for his performance.

This film was also a very personal project for Anderson, which is especially noticeable in the character of Dirk's mother. Anderson's relationship with his own mother was not a particularly happy one. According to many of Anderson's friends, Anderson's mother was often cold and dismissive of her son's budding talents. Anderson doesn't really mention her often in interviews but has stated that their relationship has improved over the years.<sup>14</sup> The audience's first glimpse of Dirk's mother is one of her standing over a sink washing dishes. She shrinks away from her husband's embrace, scolding him for not shaving. She then goes on to chide her son about his nightclub job. It is telling that when Dirk gets up to leave, he only says goodbye to his father. The second scene with Dirk and his mother really shows the coldness and animosity in their relationship. It starts with her calling his girlfriend a "little whore" and ends with her calling him a loser who won't do anything with his life.. This second scene shows just how important it is for Dirk to find a loving family, which he does in a way with the porn company. There is a great cut at the end of this fight where the mother slams the door on him, which then immediately cuts to Jack opening up his door. In a fun use of music as commentary, the song that plays over the beginning of the next scene is "Mama Told Me Not to Come " by Three Dog Night. It is up to Amber Waves to provide the nurturing maternal role that Dirk so desperately

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Thomas Anderson, interview by Charlie Rose, The Charlie Rose Show "Paul Thomas Anderson: Charlie Rose Interview," Television, 1997, , <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHQ44-0535w>.\

<sup>14</sup> Sharon Waxman, *Rebels on the Backlot*, (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2005), 85.

needs.

Amber herself has a troubled family life, with a child that she neglects to see. She takes whatever maternal instincts she has and applies them to Dirk and Rollergirl. We see this neglectfulness during a moment at Jack's party. When a phone rings and is picked up by Maurice (Luis Guizman), the unheard voice on the other line asks for his mother, who is someone named Maggie. Maurice proceeds to run around the party asking for Maggie, but doesn't find her and so proceeds to tell the caller that there is nobody here who goes by that name. The audience doesn't know who this Maggie is, but Anderson makes it known visually when he cuts to Amber snorting coke. In another clever use of music as commentary the song playing over this scene is "Lonely Boy" by Andrew Gold.

This phone call will come into play during a scene later in the film. The movie has shifted firmly into the Eighties and the audience is shown a custody hearing between Amber and her ex-husband. This scene shows just how broken up Amber's family life is. Her ex won't let her see her son because he sees her as a purveyor of smut surrounded by drugs and sex. This, in his opinion, is not an ideal place for a child to be. As the Maggie phone call scene showed, drugs played a major part in Amber's neglect of her own child. Due to Amber losing this family that she had, she throws herself into the role of mom for people like Rollergirl and Dirk.

A very important scene occurs between Amber and Rollergirl when they are sitting in a bedroom snorting cocaine. Anderson shows us two people who came from broken households who have found a connection and are creating a mother/daughter relationship. This is made even more obvious with the dialogue, when Rollergirl asks Amber if she will play the role of mom.

Rollergirl pleads with Amber, telling her to "Say yes, are you my mom".<sup>15</sup> Amber of course responds with yes. There is one shot in the film that neatly sums up Amber's maternal relationship with Dirk. After Dirk has hit rock bottom, he returns to Jack, hat in hand, the prodigal son returned. After Dirk tells Jack that he "need[s] help"<sup>16</sup>, Anderson cuts to a shot of Amber comforting a weeping Dirk, his head resting on her lap. This image brings to mind a mother comforting a crying child and neatly sums up the maternal relationship Amber has with Dirk. Since she has no visitation rights with her biological son, she will provide comfort to her surrogate son.

On the DVD commentary track for *Boogie Nights*, Anderson explains his reasoning for using "God Only Knows" by the Beach Boys to score the film's big montage near the end. He felt that the phrase "God only knows" neatly summed up his views on the random nature of fame in the porn world and how families are formed in these environments. It also works because the song is essentially about how people need to form lasting bonds and relationships in order to make it through life. As Brian Wilson puts it, "God only knows what I'd be without you".<sup>17</sup> Before the infamous final scene, Anderson gives us another tracking shot through Jack's house, in which all of the major characters are seen and the big, happy, surrogate family has been reunited.

With *Boogie Nights*, Paul Thomas Anderson shows how a cast of diverse characters come together to form a kind of surrogate family. Many of these people are deeply hurt and broken; lacking a close knit family, they form one of their own. The result is that they are often happier and have these bonds that they have been yearning for all their lives. Some people were hurt

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<sup>15</sup> Anderson, Paul Thomas, "Boogie Nights," DVD.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, Brian, "God Only Knows,". In *Pet Sounds*, sung by The Beach Boys, recorded 1966. Compact Disc

along the way (Little Bill's New Year's murder/suicide),but P.T. Anderson presented a group of porn stars and filmmakers, who through forces that God only knows about, created a family out of their damaged lives.

### One is the Loneliest Number

The theme of family in his work was not lost on Anderson, who in an interview with the *Village Voice* noted how he had become the "family guy" saying " It's the simplest, most direct way I can say it: My movies are about family."<sup>18</sup> This is particularly true of 1999's *Magnolia*, which is both Anderson's most epic and intimate film. Going back to the quotation from Anderson about how his first three films had plenty of his father in them, *Magnolia* was shaped in part by the passing of Ernie Anderson while the film was in pre-production *Magnolia* is an Altmanesque sprawling look at the lives of nine individuals over the course of one day in the San Fernando Valley. The production company that appears in the credits is called Ghouardi films, which is a reference to the late-night TV character created by Ernie Anderson. The company would appear in the credits for all of Anderson's future projects. In many ways *Magnolia* is a reaction to events occurring in Anderson's life as the film was being made.

Following the critical success of *Boogie Nights*, New Line Cinema gave Anderson complete creative control over his next film. At the start Anderson wanted to make a small and intimate film, however the result was a 3 hour and 8 minute intimate epic. The cut that Anderson produced was even longer, but following a small general audience screening and constant clashes with the studio heads, the film was cut down to the length that it exists in today. The constant

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<sup>18</sup> Stevens , Chuck. "P.T. Anderson Let's It All Hang Out." *The Village Voice*, December 1999.

clashes with the studio heads, combined with the poor box office performance, led to a severing of the business ties between Anderson and New Line Cinema.<sup>19</sup>

This film is an intensely personal one for the director. According to Philip Seymour Hoffman, who plays Phil the male nurse who tends to the dying Earl Partridge, when he watches the film he "sees Paul in all of these characters". He sees " the selfish Paul, the caretaking Paul, the little-kid Paul, the mature Paul - he is all those things at a given time, and I see him telling a story about all aspects of himself."<sup>20</sup> One of those major aspects is the complicated relationship between Anderson and his father, shown in the story of the dying Earl Partridge portrayed by Jason Robards, who just before he accepted the role was recovering from a near fatal staph infection. Robards felt that the role was "prophetic" and "something he couldn't turn down."<sup>21</sup> The cast was rounded out with actors who had worked with Anderson previously, including Julianne Moore, Philip Seymour Hoffman, William H. Macy, Philip Baker Hall and John C. Reilly. The biggest addition to the cast was Tom Cruise, who signed on for the role of Frank T.J. Mackey, the misogynistic pick-up artist/ motivational speaker. The actor jumped into the role with enthusiasm and gusto. One example of Cruise's enthusiasm occurred during the filming of the interview scene. Cruise came up with the idea of changing his shirt to intimidate the female reporter, to which Anderson decided to improved on the idea by suggesting that Cruise change his pants as well , which Cruise embraced and can be seen in the film.<sup>22</sup>

The two biggest family elements in *Magnolia* are a pair of fractured (to an irreparable degree) parent/child relationships. The first one exists between Frank Mackey and Earl Partridge.

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<sup>19</sup> Sharon Waxman, *Rebels on the Backlot*, (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2005),284-291.

<sup>20</sup> Udovitch, Mim. "The Epic Obsessions of P.T. Anderson." Rolling Stone, Feb 3, 2000.  
<http://cigsandredvines.blogspot.com/2000/02/interview-rolling-stone.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Rance, Mark, "The Making of Magnolia," DVD

<sup>22</sup> Sharon Waxman, *Rebels on the Backlot*, (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2005), 198.

In the first major scene for the character Frank is introduced as a hyper masculine misogynist who sees women as conquerable objects. This is exemplified by his repulsive opening line "Respect the Cock and Tame the Cunt." As the film goes on and the big confrontation scene begins, this swaggering ladies man persona is revealed to be a façade that Frank puts on to hide the hurt young man he is on the inside.

On his deathbed, Earl experiences guilt from all of the wrongs he has performed in his life and so he entrusts his nurse Phil with the task of finding his son and bringing him to the house for a final goodbye. The character of Phil provides a sort of surrogate son figure for the dying Earl, whose only companion is his trophy wife. This surrogate father/son relationship is shown in a small scene near the beginning of the film before Earl tells Phil about his son. In this scene Earl imparts some fatherly advice to the young man about how he needs to find a good girl and settle down. This is the type of conversation that he never got to have with his biological son, whom he neglected.

The confrontation scene begins with Frank slowly approaching his father's deathbed. He sits down and the first thing he says is "Earl, you don't look that bad". This innocuous statement is followed by Frank calling Earl a "prick" and "cocksucker". He then seems to enjoy the state his father is in because he gloats and says "I bet it hurts, doesn't it."<sup>23</sup> Even with Frank constantly saying that he was not going to cry; his tough guy front starts to crack. It is here that the audience learns about how Earl abandoned his son. Apparently Frank's mother died a painful death from what might have been cancer and Earl wasn't there. Frank continues to berate Earl

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<sup>23</sup> Anderson, Paul Thomas, "Magnolia," DVD.

while simultaneously breaking down into tears. This scene gets at the heart of this complicated father/son relationship where hurt and resentment commingle with grief and loss.

The second major fractured parent/child relationship is between game show host Jimmy Gator and his daughter Claudia. In the opening montage Anderson shows Claudia taking home a one night stand, and also reveals her cocaine addiction to the audience. Contrasting what is being said with what the audience sees, Anderson has audio from a news report on Jimmy Gator, which has the announcer talking about Jimmy's loving family. While the audio of this profile is playing on the soundtrack, Anderson presents the audience with an image of Jimmy sleeping with a woman who is not his wife. This masterfully sets up the fractured nature of the Gator household. In Jimmy and Claudia's first scene together, the animosity is so thick it could be cut with a knife. Jimmy visits his daughter's apartment to tell her the news that he has been diagnosed with terminal cancer. She responds with a string of f-bombs and yelling at him to get out of her house. The cause of this anger is not yet known to the audience. Like Frank, Claudia hides from her feelings, often disappearing into a hazy combination of drug use and one night stands. She shuts herself out from emotional connections with others, until a noise complaint brings a potential connection, the kindly police officer Jim Kurring. Apparently smitten with the young woman, Jim asks Claudia out for a date. During their date they both reveal their inner torment and the worries they have kept hidden from other people. Claudia reveals her fear that if Jim knew of her issues, he would reject her. Jim reveals his own personal issues of feeling incompetent as an officer and how he hasn't really made any new personal connections since his divorce three years prior. This date shows just how much these two people need a real human connection and it is these personal connections that are at the root of the surrogate families that Anderson creates in his films.

Anderson manifests the extent of the divide between Jimmy and Claudia in a scene where Jimmy reveals the cause of the father-daughter schism to his wife, Rose. It is here where the audience finds out that Claudia accuses Jimmy of molesting her as a child. When asked by his wife if these accusations are true, he responds by telling her that he does not know. After hearing this devastating confession, Rose leaves Jimmy. This also leads to a reconciliation between mother and daughter. Jimmy is left alone and contemplating suicide, when all of a sudden it rains frogs. This moment of magic realism is one of the most frequently talked about parts of *Magnolia*. The frogs symbolize an eruption of the pent-up emotions that afflict all of the other characters transformed into a freak weather occurrence.

The parent/child relationships turn up in smaller parts of the film, especially between the characters of Stanley, a brilliant young boy who is currently a crowd favorite contestant on Jimmy Gator's quiz show, and his father. The father/son relationship has all the makings of future animosity. Stanley's father is shown in many scenes to be more interested in the celebrity that comes from his son's prominence on a popular TV show and the prize money that comes from winning the game show than he is in how his son feels about this newfound fame. Stanley is a very lonely boy who is seen as a sort of freak by his peers. He doesn't seem to have any friends to speak of and spends all of his free time sitting in the school library with the four bags of books he brought with him. The pressure from his father combined with the demeaning attitude of those around him cause Stanley to freeze up during the game and wet his pants. Following this incident his father berates him and it appears as if another Earl/Frank relationship is in the making.

Another character whose life is a warning to Stanley is Quiz Kid Donnie Smith, a lonely middle aged man, who peaked after winning the same quiz show as a teen. Of all the lonely and

sad characters that populate the film, Donnie Smith might just be the loneliest. Anderson introduces the character while he is at an orthodontist appointment. He makes a comment to the dental assistant about how this office probably does not get many patients his age. It turns out that Donnie is getting a very expensive procedure not because his teeth are crooked and need to be fixed, but because the attractive male bartender he has a crush on wears braces. Ultimately, like all of the characters in the film, Donnie is looking for some form of companionship and an emotional connection. As he put it himself, "I am Quiz Kid Donnie Smith and I have plenty of love to give".<sup>24</sup>

Besides the frogs, one of the most memorable flourishes that Anderson adds to *Magnolia* is how he chose to use music. This choice extends back to an event from when the film was beginning to form in Anderson's mind. One day he invited his editor Dylan Tichenor over to his apartment. When Tichenor asked Anderson how the writing was going on his upcoming project, Anderson responded by putting on Aimee Mann's cover of the song "One" and describing the opening eight minutes that introduce the main cast.<sup>25</sup> The music of singer-songwriter Aimee Mann would thus become inseparable from "Magnolia."

Anderson's use of the song "One" over the opening montage is useful in setting up the major theme of loneliness in the film. The key lyric in the song is the line "One is the loneliest number that you'll ever do". What follows is a montage of characters who are all lonely in their own way. Anderson shows Jimmy calling what appears to be a call-in TV program and giving a dating profile of himself. This is followed by a scene where Claudia takes home an anonymous one-night stand. Anderson then presents a scene where Donnie Smith is getting a mold fitting

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<sup>24</sup> Anderson, Paul Thomas, "Magnolia," DVD.

<sup>25</sup> Sharon Waxman, *Rebels on the Backlot*, (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2005), 194.

for braces. This desire to get braces gives the audience an insight into the yearning and loneliness at his core, once Anderson reveals Donnie's reasons for getting braces.

One of the greatest moments in the film comes near the end where all the characters appear to be at their lowest point. Anderson makes great use of Aimee Mann's song "Wise Up" by having the characters sing along diegetically to the non-diegetic soundtrack. "Wise Up" is a powerful song about coming to terms with one's life and how it was not "what you want, when you first began it".<sup>26</sup> Many of the characters in *Magnolia* wanted something out of their lives but ends up disappointed. Donnie Smith wanted the fame that came with being a minor celebrity, but he ended up a pathetic has-been who is recognized on the street, but ultimately ignored by everyone who could see past his fifteen minutes of fame. Jimmy Gator is a famous television personality with a seemingly picture perfect family, but he is forced to hide the demons of his past while his family crumbles around him. Earl's wife Linda is living the life of a rich man's trophy wife who, when faced with the prospect of her husband's death, starts to realize that once he's gone, she will be left alone in this world. All the characters at this moment are starting to face the loneliness that infests their lives. As the song lyrics point out, this loneliness is "not going to stop." That is why these characters need to "wise up" and try to turn over a new leaf, which hopefully leads to a new, happier path in their lives. That is why the song ends with the line "so just give up."<sup>27</sup> While this could be taken as a dark and cynical thought, it could mean that Anderson's characters need to stop their current actions and find a new way to live.

The musical number features all of the major characters singing along to this song and they are all framed in a way to emphasize their loneliness. Many of the characters are staged by

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<sup>26</sup> Mann, Aimee, "Wise Up". In *Magnolia: Music from the Motion Picture*, recorded 1999. Compact Disc.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

themselves and are obviously shown in a state of sadness and introspection. This is even true of Phil and Earl, despite being in the same shot. The way that Anderson frames them is used to emphasize their isolation with Phil occupying the foreground, while Earl is isolated and trapped in his bed in the background. This tender and caring relationship is still fraught with sadness and loneliness. Earl will not be the last dying patient that Phil has to care for, yet the loss of the bond is palpable. Phil's job is to care for these dying patients who often have no one else around. This is a job that he puts his heart into, and the death of Earl will hurt Phil immensely. Despite having a doting young wife, Earl is especially lonely due to the distance that the emotionally fraught Linda places between them and his own fractured and decayed relationship with the son he ignored and practically abandoned. All Earl has left is this nurse whose job is to see him off in his last moments.

Despite the sadness and loneliness that pervades throughout the film, Anderson chose to end the film on a quiet moment of hope, which he accomplishes through the use of Mann's song "Save Me", which plays over the final scene and into the credits. This song was actually written by Mann for the film and garnered her an Oscar nomination. That glimmer of hope is found in the budding romance between Jim, the shy awkward police officer, and Claudia. The last shot of the film focuses on Claudia as she sits up on a bed. She has recently reconciled with her mother and now she is staring at someone off screen. Quietly the audience is able to make out a voice which is unmistakably that of Jim, who tells Claudia that "he just came here to say something". He tells Claudia that "You're a good person. You're a good and beautiful person and I won't let you walk out on me. And I won't let you say those things...those things about how stupid you are and this and that. I won't stand for that. You want to be with me...then you be with me. You

see?"<sup>28</sup> Jim expresses his love for Claudia and he also offers her what is quite possibly the first major healthy relationship in her life. Jim offers Claudia a close and comforting relationship that was denied by her actual family. These relationships have taken the place of the strained family bonds and help to heal the broken spirits of these characters.

Anderson chose to drown out Jim's words to Claudia with the song "Save Me". In many ways the song works well on its own to show the glimmer of hope represented by this budding relationship. The song begins with the line "You look like a perfect fit, for a girl in need of a tourniquet".<sup>29</sup> This line perfectly sums up the importance of Jim to Claudia as a person to whom she can confide in and who will guide her through the healing process that will make her a happier person. The song also gets to the heart of all of the other characters who are in dire need of some form of saving. It is not just Claudia; every character needs someone to come and save them. They do not want to become a member of "the ranks of the freaks... who could never love anyone". They don't want to continue to be these lonely individuals who have sheltered themselves from any sort of human connection. Frank is just one such individual who uses this façade of arrogance and machismo to mask sadness and hurt. To Claudia, Jim represents the savior who will give her a real human connection. *Magnolia* is a film about broken people who have lost the human connection that represents a family. As shown in the previous films, families do not need to be biological in nature, they just need to give one some sort of real connection to another person.

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<sup>28</sup> Anderson, Paul Thomas, "Magnolia," DVD

<sup>29</sup> Mann, Aimee, "Save Me,". In *Magnolia: Music from the Motion Picture*, recorded 1999. Compact Disc.

## "I'm Finished"

With his next three films, Anderson continues to explore this theme in interesting ways. There is the sour relationship between Barry and his sisters in *Punch Drunk Love*. There is the destruction of the relationship between Daniel Plainview and his adopted son H.W in *There Will Be Blood*, an event that shows the tragic nature of Daniel, a rich oilman living alone in his massive house with no one but his servants. Lastly there is Freddie Quell in *The Master*, a traumatized war veteran whose drunken wanderings and search for any human relationship lead him to a charismatic cult leader. These films will continue the themes that are shown in Anderson's first three films, his most personal works. These are the films that contain the shades of Ernie Anderson and feature surrogate families being created from the rubble of broken lives. There is the surrogate father/son relationship of *Hard Eight*, the surrogate family of pornographers in *Boogie Nights*, and the multiple characters of *Magnolia*, who in their own ways represent different aspects of Paul. Paul Thomas Anderson's films are great, not just because of his obvious talents as a filmmaker, but because he explores themes that get at the heart of the human condition. Everybody needs someone with whom to connect, and many find that in their own families. However, many come from strained and broken homes, so they must find those relationships with other people. Anderson is currently at work on a film adaptation of the Thomas Pynchon novel *Inherent Vice*, and it will be exciting to see how this theme of family will crop up in that 2014 film.

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