Connected to Places and Objects: Family, Loss and Belonging in Wes Anderson's Rushmore, The Darjeeling Limited, and Moonrise Kingdom

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Family, Loss and Belonging in Wes Anderson's *Rushmore*, *The Darjeeling Limited*, and *Moonrise Kingdom*

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Introduction

American director Wes Anderson (1969-) has made a series of films which incorporate the themes of family, loss and belonging. He was born in Houston, Texas, and was the middle child of three brothers – himself, Eric, and Mel. His parents divorced when he was eight years old: "Anderson has said in interviews that the trauma of the divorce was a crucial turning point in his childhood for him and his two brothers, and that his parents' divorce affected him deeply" (Dilley, 13). The families we see in Anderson's films reflect his own home-life: they are families who have been disrupted in some way, and are anything but the standard 'nuclear family'. The families in Anderson's films are either ones on the brink of divorce (for example Herman Blume and his family in *Rushmore* (1998)), families who have suffered a kind of loss (for example Max having lost his mother in *Rushmore*), families who've lost touch with one another and themselves (the three brothers in *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007)), or some combination of all three of these possibilities. His films are filled with characters looking for a place or way to belong – within or without the family structure. As Dilley says: "He returns again and again to the motif of familial dysfunction, conflict and pain" (12).

This thesis aims to explore the themes of family, loss and belonging in three of Wes Anderson's most significant and successful films – *Rushmore* (1998), *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007) and *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012) – and to examine how Anderson relates physical objects and spaces within the films to these themes. The thesis attests that the objects within the films have a multiplicity of functions: characters in the film use objects to mark their relation to another person, living or dead, or to a specific family, institution or class. Objects are used as a means of communicating, and a means of self-expression. Wes Anderson's films also make use of places such as schools, hotels, trains and a beach to signify belonging, or in some cases, a lack of it. These spaces are each not stable or permanent, but transitory: a school is something you graduate from, a hotel and train are not places you can stay in indefinitely, and a beach can be washed away in a storm – though it may also be preserved in a picture.

In his article "The American Dream of Family in Film: From Decline to a Comeback", Emanuel Levy identifies multiple trends (or cycles) in the portrayal of family in American film, from "the decline

of the family in the late 1960s" (190) to what was then "the most recent trend, a return to traditional family values and structures in the late 1980s" (190). Levy identifies the loosening of societal norms in the 60s as a reason for the "range of permissible film topics" (190) being widened, leading to more accuracy and specificity in family drama's – the 80s however, saw "a more right-wing, conservative mood" (198) in relation to Ronald Reagan's electoral victory, which shifted many films back to more traditional depictions of family. Though the depiction of family hasn't been stable in American film, the idea of family as being important has remained:

> Films have depicted tormented, troubled or ineffectual families, without, however, changing the validity of the family as a center of stability of the social order. True some films have shown family structures that do not function well, as a result of internal or external problems, but this in no way detracted from the nuclea[r famil]y's indispensability. (200)

Even if a family is dysfunctional, the family may nonetheless provide support and succour for its members, and the idea of having a family might still be an ideal to strive for. This is also the case for Anderson's films: while they portray families which are dysfunctional, they simultaneously stress the importance of family and family relations, such as those between brothers, or between a father, a mother and son. These films assert the importance of finding a place to belong, the value of having people you belong to. His characters search for a sense of family, and often find it.

Anderson's first full length feature, *Bottle Rocket* (1996), already manifests this sentiment. The film centres on three men who are outsiders, and whose family is dysfunctional in different ways: we do not learn much of Dignan's family, yet we know that Bob Mapplethorpe and his brother do not have the best relationship. Meanwhile Anthony's sister is ashamed of his having been in a mental hospital, for she lies about this to her friend, saying he is a pilot. The three men try to find a kind of belonging in each other, as they form part of a gang of robbers, wearing identical yellow jumpsuits during the heist. A large portion of this film takes place at a motel – a place which is not a home, but is instead a transitory locale which is meant for passing through rather than being a place to stay or truly belong.

Whether these characters are successful in finding a place to belong is another question, for Dignan ends up in prison, wearing another kind of jumpsuit.

After *Bottle Rocket* came *Rushmore* (1998), another film in which characters are seeking for a place to belong: a boy without a mother, a widow, and a man disillusioned with his family – each try to find a belonging in the other. Then came *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), which centres on another dysfunctional family who reunites when they believe the father of the family to be dying. *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004) concerns a man who has lost a dear friend and who seeks to find his killer – a giant sea-creature – as his supposed estranged son joins him on board. He later loses his son again, yet makes sure he is remembered and honoured by his crew by incorporating him on the new emblem of the Steve Zissou society. *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007) follows three brothers who seek to reconnect with their mother and each other a year after the death of their father, while *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012) follows two twelve year-olds – one of whom is an orphan – as they try to find a sense of belonging together by running away to walk a trail on an island, and find a special beach together. *The Grand Budapest Hote*l (2014) and *The French Dispatch* (2021) move away from the more traditional family narratives and focus on people within the communal space of a hotel and within a magazine. Yet these working communities, like Zissou's crew, are another kind of family. Though perhaps not related by blood, they each have a kind of father figure at its head: Zissou being the father of his crew, Monsieur Gustave acting as a kind of father to Zero, and the magazine editor being the patriarch of the magazine. The people within these communities form connections to one another, and find a kind of belonging within the structure of their work environment. Levy discusses the emergence of work-place families in films: "But if the celluloid nuclear family declined as an institution, the functions performed by the family (intimacy, emotional and social support, a source of identity) were not. […] American cinema presented two structural alternatives: collectivism (or communal life) and professionalism (for peer group camaraderie)" (191).

The term ‘belonging’ is one which is hard to define, yet it is vital to do so within the context of this thesis. ‘Belonging’ is here taken to mean a sense of being in a place or with the people you are supposed to be with, and a sense of wholeness and a feeling that you ‘fit’ with a certain person, place or group. When you belong, your relation to that person or place feels permanent, fulfilling and stable even though it might only be temporary. It is this feeling which the characters in Anderson’s films are seeking. In the end, his characters find this sense of stability and realisation. In complex ways, the end of each film captures this moment of integration forever, being the last thing the audience sees of the characters – thus, their positive ending achieves permanency in the closure of narrative.

Having established that many of Anderson’s films incorporate the themes of family, loss and belonging, it is right to turn to another crucial element aspect of Anderson’s movies: that is, his use of objects and places in relation to these themes of connection and relatedness. Objects fill Anderson’s films: uniforms, typewriters, books, enamel pins, brooches, hats, car keys, suitcases, and others. We’ve already seen that clothing, such as the yellow jumpsuits in *Bottle Rocket*, marks a sense of belonging to one another, and that this film uses the space of the motel to signify a lack of solid belonging. Moreover, the way that Anderson's films explore communal zones and shared spaces similarly draws attention to a conflict between a longed-for stability and a threatening ephemerality. Although the house is also an important motif in Anderson’s films, the spaces in the films are often somehow transient: modes of transport such as trains and boats, schools, and motels or hotels – each are temporary dwellings rather than places to stay. It is in moving through these spaces that characters try to find their belonging, often within another. They recognize something in the other, and find belonging together. The prevalence of physical objects is striking, as is the use of space.

This thesis particularly draws on insights from three prominent critics of Anderson, that is, Whitney Crothers Dilley, Matz Zoller Seitz and Donna Kornhaber. Kornhaber has previously examined the role of objects within Anderson’s films, yet her focus is on Anderson and his characters as collectors, rather than on the specific objects in themselves (though she does, of course, discuss quite

a few objects that are also analysed in this thesis). She draws on theories of Walter Benjamin, and speaks of the collection as "a mechanism achieving some small measure of control in a world that one has long recognized as decidedly lacking in purpose" (14). She further argues that "[i]n fact, Benjamin argues, each collected object alone often has little to do with the purpose of collecting" (15). My aim is precisely to focus on the resonances of specific objects and places in the films, and to show their significance. Stefano Baschiera is another critic who has written on objects and space in Anderson, and who argues for their importance and integrality to the plot of films such as *The Royal Tenenbaums* and *The Darjeeling Limited*: "objects are not a mere element of décor in his films; they are central to the development of the narrative, and consequently, to the meaning of the film" (118). It then becomes interesting to examine these objects, and their meaning within the context of these films.

Anderson's films draw attention to the objects within his films not just by dialogue concerning these objects, but also in the way they are framed: "A framing can stress a narratively important detail" (Bordwell 191). In *Rushmore*, for example, Max Fischer gives one of his two Rushmore pins to Herman Blume. What we then get is a close-up shot of the two pins in their little box – this emphasizes their importance and centrality. As Stanley Cavell argues in his book, *The World Viewed*: "Early in its history the cinema discovered the possibility of *calling* attention to persons and parts of persons and objects" (25). Anderson draws attention in a similar way to Max's typewriter, inherited from his mother, and to a quote in the book that Max reads, which belongs to Miss Cross and was a gift from her deceased husband.

Cavell also declares that: "the general answer to the common question, 'In what ways do movies differ from novels or from theater?' ought to be: 'In every way'" (73). This is a rather strong statement, but it holds some merit. Films incorporate sound, image, movement – they are vastly different from the written word. (Although it must be noted that books play a large role in Anderson's filmmaking – from adapting Roald Dahl's *Fantastic Mr. Fox* to film, to making use of physical books and book structures within his films (for example, *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001))). Though novels and films

differ, theories concerning objects in George Eliot's novel *Mill on the Floss* chime in with the use of objects in Anderson's films, and I wish to connect these theories to Anderson's films to support my argument concerning the functions of objects. John Kucich's article on objects within this novel makes points about the multiplicity of meaning which objects carry within the novel, as well as various functions of objects within the novel.

Kucich opens his article as follows: "It is a commonplace to observe that George Eliot's early novels cherish a world of objects. It is equally well understood that these objects are never purely natural, or 'noumenal', but that they are always embedded in human centers of meaning" (319). This is likewise, I would argue, certainly the case for Wes Anderson's films as well, where objects have layers of significance beyond the objects they are in itself. In *The Mill on the Floss*, objects take on a multiplicity of meaning: "Eliot presents us, partly through Maggie, with the actual plurality of every object human's significance" (328). An object (which can be as large as a place, such as a mill) may then mean something different to one person than to another: "the mill has many specific kinds of significance, which are different for each character, and […] these differences even reveal some of the incompatibilities between them" (332). In our discussion of Anderson's films, we will see that this idea again shows itself it to be pertinent. Kucich also speaks of objects as reminders of the past, means of communication, a means for characters to "master each other, to aggressively assert their own identities" (325), and, for women, to "achieve their place in the world only through their control of domestic objects" (325). Each of these claims about objects in the novel *The Mill on the Floss* can be related to the use of objects in Wes Anderson's films. Characters in his films use objects (which have a past) as markers of identity, as a way to communicate relationships, and as a way to find a place within the world. Sometimes, they are indeed perceived as means of mastery over the other, as we will see in our discussion of *The Darjeeling Limited* later on.

The films I want to focus on in the following chapters are *Rushmore* (1998), *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007), and *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012), with one chapter on each, in chronological order. These

films each include characters who have suffered a loss, and whose familial structures are shaky as a result. Firstly, *Rushmore*'s Max Fischer has lost his mother, while Rosemary Cross has lost her husband and Herman Blume is on the brink of divorcing his wife. Secondly, *The Darjeeling Limited* concerns three brothers who are dealing with the loss of their father as they search for their mother in India. Lastly, *Moonrise Kingdom* concerns an orphan boy who runs away with the girl he is in love with. These films are also spread out timewise over Anderson's career, being Anderson's second, fifth and seventh features. Donna Kornhaber places Wes Anderson's films in three categories: those of faux families, those about family heirlooms, and those that concern matched pairs. I have chosen one film from each category. This might ensure that I have the best possible variety of Wes Anderson's films from which to draw on, and to show that my claims hold across these categories. *Rushmore* falls into the faux families category; *The Darjeeling Limited* under the family heirlooms category; and *Moonrise Kingdom* belongs to the pairings category. When it comes to *The Darjeeling Limited*, I shall take the events of short film *Hotel Chevalier* (2007) into account as well, for this short film takes place before the events of *The Darjeeling Limited*.

The methodology of this thesis involves then a close-reading of each of these films, in which themes of family, loss and belonging are explored in relation to the objects and places within the films, connecting them to literature on Wes Anderson, and to the claims Kucich makes about objects in *The Mill on the Floss*. Each chapter examines specific objects and locations and their significance. In the second chapter I will touch on relevant insights from Erwin Panofsky's writing on film, and will also bring into the discussion theories of the gift as developed by Marcel Mauss. In the third chapter I shall make use of ideas from Simone Weil's *The Need For Roots* in relation to private property, and ideas from André Bazin and Walter Benjamin concerning the use of paintings in film. I explore the objects and their significance using insights from theories of material culture, while the idea of examining one director's work for common trends derives from auteur theory. The thesis also shows an interest in space in connection to cinema, particularly with regard to the transience involved in the locales of Anderson's films, yet my arguments do not derive from any specific set of concepts related to the

spatial turn in film theory. Rather the thesis adopts a strategy of reading Anderson's own concern with spaces, backdrops and settings, placing these in relation to the tensions and possibilities inherent in each film's complex characters.

Material culture theory concerns itself with the study of objects and meanings which can be found in them: it interprets and places description of objects, their contents, and how they function within a culture: "It embraces the class of objects known as artifacts – objects made by man or modified by man. It excludes natural objects." (Prown, 2). And indeed, the objects in the films which I examine are all man-made. Once an object and its contents have been described, deductions can take place concerning "the relationship between the object and the perceiver. It involves the empathetic linking of the material (actual) or represented world of the object with the perceiver's world of existence and experience" (8). One can look at the 'sensory engagement', 'intellectual engagement' and 'emotional response' of a person interacting with an object (9). This thesis is most interested in a more symbolic engagement with the object: rather than examining direct emotional reactions an object might elucidate, ways in which the object can be handled, or ways in which they function within a culture, this thesis focuses on those deeper emotional significances that the objects within the films hold – on what they mean to the characters, what they represent, and how they are used to represent relations between characters within the films.

This thesis adheres in part the auteur theory of cinema: that is, the thesis focuses on the work of one specific director with the idea in mind that their films reflect "their distinctive personality, vision, point of view, and aesthetic style" (Daniel Chandler & Rod Munday). According to Chandler and Munday, the theory looks at films from one director "for evidence of similar thematic concerns, iconography, mise-en-scène, technique, and/or stylistic choices". This thesis does precisely this: it takes films from Wes Anderson and examines the use of objects and places within these films, in relation to the over-arching thematic concerns of family, loss and belonging. This thesis should make clear that there are indeed many undeniable similarities to be found within Anderson's films, and that

it is thus useful to look at the work of one director in this manner. Yet auteur theory does have its flaws: a film is never made in isolation, and Wes Anderson is not the sole mind from which these films have sprung. The films I am discussing here were made by a large team of people, shifting with every film, including the actors who each bring something distinctive to the films as individuals. In favour of auteur theory here, Anderson does have a close-knit, almost familial circle of actors with whom he works: Bill Murray, for example, features in nearly all of his films. Yet it is still important to reflect on the authorship of the films this thesis discusses.

It must then shortly be noted that these films were not written by Wes Anderson alone: *Rushmore* was written together with Owen Wilson, while *The Darjeeling Limited* and *Moonrise Kingdom* were co-written with Roman Coppola, and *The Darjeeling Limited* also has Jason Schwartzman as a co-author. Before I conclude this introduction, I wish to shortly touch upon their collaborations with Anderson, as background to the films. Owen Wilson and Wes Anderson first met at the University of Texas, where Wilson majored in English and Anderson in philosophy (Dilley, 15). The two started working on theatre together, became roommates, and eventually wrote and made the film *Bottle Rocket* together, both a short and a long version (15-16). Wilson played Dignan in both films, and not only did Wilson later co-write *Rushmore*, he also stars as one of the three brothers in *The Darjeeling Limited*. For this film, Anderson knew he wanted to co-write with Roman Coppola and Jason Schwartzman before he knew anything else: "my main idea was not the train, not India, not the brothers […] [m]y main idea was, *I want to write with Roman and Jason*" (Anderson interview as quoted in Dilley, 19). Schwartzman had already starred as main character Max Fischer in *Rushmore*, and would also play one of the three brothers in *The Darjeeling Limited*. Coppola would not only co-write this film, but also *Moonrise Kingdom*.

As Wes Anderson's life influences these films, so must the experiences of Wilson, Schwartzman and Coppola inform their writing on these films as well. In *Moonrise Kingdom*, for example, Suzy finds a book about 'the troubled child', something which happened to Anderson himself: he knew the book

was referring to him – meanwhile Coppola drew on his own experience of his mother using a bullhorn in the house for Francis McDormand's character, who does the same (Miller). In *Rushmore*, both Anderson and Wilson's school experiences influenced the film: the school was shot at St. John's, which Anderson attended; both the character Max Fischer and Owen Wilson were expelled from a private school (Rushmore and St. Mark's) and had to enrol in a public one (Thomas Jefferson and Grover Cleveland, the one modelled after the other) (Seitz, 76). Thus, while Anderson's cinema may be very distinctive in style and subject matter, I find it important to remember that film is never a solo venture, especially when films are co-written. And so, while this thesis is about Wes Anderson and his films, it is in a way also about everyone who worked on the films with him. For some critics and theorists another weakness of auteur theory is its insistence on the 'author' as a singular creator, and not on the interweaving of discourses possible within a specific culture. Their idea is that a film is not just an individual's work, but rather comes from a culture and reflects that culture's fears and desires. While this is true, this does not mean that it is misguided to look at one person's work as being cohesive and original. The 'auteur' can also be seen as the gathering point for a set of interrelated themes and concerns. These thoughts can in this way coincide together. Moreover, a film can both express a certain culture while at the same time reflecting a person's individual style, life-experience, and personal thoughts and interests.

I hope that in examining the themes of family, loss and belonging in relation to objects and places within Anderson's films, we might gain a deeper understanding of the interpersonal relationships between the characters in these films, and how material objects relate to these relationships. By applying ideas about objects from an article on a novel to films, I hope this shows some kind of universality in meanings of objects, even if it is only ideas about one book being applied to films by one director. I also hope that this understanding might be interesting not just within the films but also without: to gain a deeper insight into the possible meanings of objects and places within our daily lives, and to explore ways of finding belonging. Whether one is part of a nuclear family or not,

everyone has to deal in some way with family and family structures in their lives, at some time everyone suffers a loss, and everyone, in the end, has to find a place to belong.

1. *Rushmore* (1998)

Rushmore (1998), Wes Anderson's second feature-length film, revolves around 15 year old Max (played by Jason Schwartzman) as he struggles to make sense of his family life, love life and school life. His mother is dead, while his father is a barber – something which embarrasses Max. He was accepted into Rushmore Academy for a play he wrote as a child, not because his family can afford to pay tuition fees. This sets him apart from the other children at the Academy. During his time at the Academy, he falls in love with teacher Rosemary (Olivia Williams) and finds Herman Blume (Bill Murray) as a substitute father, yet his 'faux family' (as Donna Kornhaber would label it) falls apart when Herman is the one whose advances Rosemary at first seems to reciprocate. Rosemary, like Max, has suffered a great loss – for her husband is also dead, and she still clings to his memory. Eventually, the characters in Rushmore learn to accept their familiar circumstances, and find their own place to belong. In this chapter, I will explore the themes of loss, family, and belonging as represented within this film. The chapter shows the link between these themes and the importance of physical objects and (liminal) spaces within the film, and connects ideas about objects in *The Mill on The Floss* to the use of objects in this film. The objects and places discussed in this chapter are: a painting; Rushmore Academy; a typewriter; a gravestone; a book; a house from a deceased husband; two pins; and various items of clothing.

The first frame of the film already depicts a physical object which relates to the theme of family, and (a lack of) belonging: a painting is shown of Herman Blume, his wife, and his two sons. Whitney Crothers Dilley says the following about this painting:

> Beginning with *Rushmore*, Anderson employed actual paintings as visual signifiers in his films. This is noticeable from the opening credits of *Rushmore*, which shows a formal portrait of Herman Blume with his family (the painting is also used in a flashback during a moment of Blume's psychological crisis in the swimming pool) – Blume is set apart and distant from the other three people in the portrait, his wife and two sons, who are all redheads. (51)

Blume is indeed disconnected from his family, and not just by looks. Talking to the main character of the film, Max Fischer, he says: “Never in my wildest imagination did I ever dream I would have sons like these.” He doesn’t see himself reflected in his sons, and would instead prefer Max Fischer as a son. This becomes clear through his failed efforts to have Max come to his sons’ birthday party, his offering Max a job at his company, and the activities he undertakes with Max, such as going to watch the wrestling match of his real sons with him. The flashback scene of which Dilley speaks occurs during the sons’ birthday party. A tarnished cake shows their rugged nature which Blume opposes, and Blume’s wife is being fed cake by another man. Blume and his wife’s marriage is then not as perfect as a portrait would have it seem. For though in the portrait Blume may stand out from his family, a family portrait signifies unity (and status). A portrait is a message you send out to the world to show the wealth (monetary as well as familiar) of your family. Here an object is then used as an outward way of communication, a way for Blume’s family to assert their identity as a family. Yet though Blume may have monetary wealth, he lacks a sense of belonging to his family, something which he tries to find elsewhere – in Max, and in Rosemary Cross.

Blume is played by Bill Murray, an actor who recurs in many of Anderson’s films, and eventually becomes a kind of motif himself. This was his first film with Anderson. Anderson says of Bill Murray’s acting in *Razor’s Edge* that it’s “not a comedy at all. That’s a dramatic role, but he’s very funny in it, too, and the fact that he played it with this kind of lightness – you know, he’s just very natural in that movie. So I thought, what could be better?” (Seitz, 83). *Rushmore* is a comedy, but each of the characters carry a kind of sadness with them too – yet this sadness is never overbearing. Comedy and drama are balanced in Bill’s performance. Bill Murray being an established actor alongside new actor Jason Schwartzman already gives him a kind of father figure status – and as we will see in *The Darjeeling Limited*, the Murray-father motive is no coincidence.

Max, in turn, then looks to Blume as a kind of father figure. He is ashamed of his father because his father is a barber, and Max wishes to rise above his father’s social class. When we first meet Max’s

father in the film, Max gets his hair cut by him. We only then learn that this man is not just a barber like any other, but also Max's father. This emphasizes his profession first, his role as a father second. Because Max holds shame for his current social status, he lies about his father's profession, telling everyone his father is a neurosurgeon. When Blume offers Max a job, he says: "my father may only be a doctor, but we manage." He at first goes out of his way to make sure Blume and his father do not cross paths. Perhaps it is the shame he holds for his father's profession which makes Peter Flynn, a man who Max sees threaten his desired relationship with Miss Cross, wearing OR scrubs that much more poignant. Peter Flynn holds the profession Max wished his father had. This fact makes him even more of a threat, for he is what Max wants his father, and himself, to be.

The film exemplifies the journey Max goes through concerning his father through his clothing. Max is a student at Rushmore Academy – just what Rushmore signifies to him will be discussed later in this chapter. It is important to note that Max stands out from other students at Rushmore by trying too hard to belong to it. He was sent there on scholarship, not thanks to monetary wealth. He is the only child at the Academy who dresses in full Rushmore attire – wearing a Rushmore jacket with two Rushmore pins above his blue shirt. The other children only wear the neutral blue shirt, and Donna Kornhaber says of Max's jacket that it "for all we know may be of his own original design" (80). While this is conjecture, Kornhaber makes an interesting point about Max's "fierce loyalty" (80) to Rushmore, namely that it "seems to be a transference of his attachment to his mother" (80). I agree with this statement, and will offer more insight into Rushmore and its relation to Max's mother later. Here I want to state that the Rushmore jacket not only signifies an attachment to his mother, but also a rejection of his father, and especially of his father's social class. By wearing the jacket, Max shows himself to belong to a different class from his father, a more intellectual class. Because of his scholarship, Max feels he has to prove something other children don't. The jacket signifies this. Even when first being kicked out of Rushmore, he keeps wearing the jacket – holding on to his mother, still rejecting his father. One interesting thing to note about clothing is that even in the opening club

montage, Max's clothes make him stand out. He not only wears his jacket in most shots, but is also the only one with a yellow belt in the Kung Fu Club.

Later in the film, Max changes his attire to a barber's attire. It is then that he accepts his father's class, yet also that he gives up his dreams, which he regains in the final act of the film. When his father asks him if he wouldn't consider going back to school because he used to want to become something more, Max says: "Pipe dreams dad. I'm a barber's son." Here Max's clothes signify him mirroring himself to his father. In other films by Anderson, such as *Bottle Rocket* (1996), *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) and *The Life Aquatic With Steve Zissou* (2004), families also dress the same to signify their unity – Dignan and his crew wearing yellow jumpsuits, Chas and his children all wearing red Adidas tracksuits, and Steve and his crew wearing red beanies.

Eventually, Max comes into his own and wears a third outfit: a green velvety suit. His clothing still makes him stand out from the other children, but in a different way than the Rushmore jacket or barbershop uniform did. Rather than belonging (or trying to belong) to a specific place or class, he becomes his own person. He no longer lies about his father but accepts him, saying to Rosemary Cross: "Miss Cross, I'd like you to meet my father, Bert Fischer. He's a barber." Max eventually gives one of his Rushmore pins to Herman Blume – which is a sign of his forgiveness after their falling out, and a sign of their relationship and belonging to each other. The act of giving and receiving gifts is an important way of communicating reconciliation in Anderson's films, Dirk Calloway also offers Max a gift of a Swiss Army knife when he aims to reconcile with him, and later we'll see in *The Darjeeling Limited* that a belt will be used in the same manner. As Kucich say about *The Mill on the Floss*: "Characters in the novel also communicate with each other through objects – in fact, they communicate more effectively through objects than they are able to without them" (326). So it is the case in Anderson's films: objects are a means of communication and an aid in communication. Margaret Yang tries to gift Max a plant when he is sad, yet he refuses to come to the door. This act was then not fully reciprocated, and they only make up later in the film. Max makes amends with

everyone near the end of the film, not only Yang and Blume but even his nemesis – by gifting him a role in his play and with it including him and giving him a sense of belonging. Like traditional 'best friend' bracelets, Blume and Max both wear their Rushmore pin at the same time, and this is the case at the end of the film. Max then keeps one of the Rushmore pins for his own, still holding an attachment to his mother though not as fiercely as before.

For, as already briefly mentioned, for Max, Rushmore and his mother are deeply intertwined. In the first real scene of the film, in which Max talks to the head of Rushmore, it becomes clear that it was thanks to his mother's initiative that Max was able to attend the prestigious school.

> Max: "Do you remember how I got into this school?"
>
> Dr. Guggenheim: "Yes, you wrote a play."
>
> Max: "That's right. Second grade. A little one act about Watergate. And my mother read it and felt I should go to Rushmore. And you read it and you gave me a scholarship, didn't you?"

Later in the film, we learn that Max's mother died when he was seven. This means that him going to Rushmore and his mother dying were not that far apart in time, as children of seven are usually in the second grade. The place of Rushmore is thus connected to the loss of his mother – and, as Kornhaber states, Max transfers his attachment to his mother to the school. When he loses Rushmore, he keeps the Rushmore jacket, until finally he lets go of it – this kind of symbolism when it comes to clothing or accessories, loss and letting go will be discussed extensively in the next chapter as well, for it recurs in *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007).

There are another place and object of significance when it comes to Max and his mother: Max's typewriter and the graveyard. On the black case of the typewriter it reads in golden lettering: "Bravo, Max! Love, Mom". We can then assume this was given to Max by his mother as a celebratory gift for him getting into Rushmore Academy. This object, like the Rushmore jacket, is then one which has a connection to the past. Kucich, in his article on *The Mill on the Floss*, says that "Tom's pocketful of

things are not just instruments of domination for him; they are also 'relics of the past' (II,1) through which he remembers life at the mill and Maggie when he is away at school" (327). So it is with Max in *Rushmore* – he remembers his mother through the object of the typewriter. Anderson says of the typewriter and the message: "That's the only reference to the mother. That's the only time we have anything from the mother. […] She gave him that typewriter. This is what she thinks he ought to do" (Seitz, 95). The plays that Max creates throughout the film are then also a kind of homage to his mother, the final play even being dedicated to her memory (and to that of Miss Cross's husband).

When Max writes on his typewriter, he is sitting next to the graveyard. In fact, Max's house is next to the graveyard. Kornhaber says of Max's loss of his mother that "this is a wound that for Max has never healed but only become fossilized. Whether by choice or circumstance, Max and his father live directly next door to the cemetery where his mother is buried, and Max visits her gravestone regularly" (80). She labels this place and object as: "the origin point to which all of Max's antics can be traced" (86). The gravestone and graveyard are then a physical representation in this film of the loss that Max suffers. This gravestone reads: "Eloise Fischer 1942-1989 / Beloved wife of Bert and mother of Max / The paths of glory lead but to the grave". This last sentence, which is a quote from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is striking, for the phrase "Sic Transit Gloria – Glory fades" is one which appears throughout the film. This is another reference to Max's mother, which Max also slips into his final play. And indeed glory does fade, for even if Max had not been kicked out of Rushmore, high school is a place of passing through and not of remaining, and eventually he would have to graduate and move on no matter what. Max's mother is then never present in the film as a person, yet is there through Rushmore, through Max's plays, his clothes, his belongings and even his vocabulary.

While Max's connection to Rushmore has to do with his deceased mother, Miss Cross has a similar relationship to Rushmore involving her deceased husband, Edward Appleby. When Max and her talk of her becoming a teacher at Rushmore, they have the following conversation:

Max: “How did you decide to teach at Rushmore?”

Miss Cross: “My husband went there.”

Max: “I er… I didn’t know you were married.”

Miss Cross: “Well, he’s dead now, so I’m not actually.”

Max: “When did he die?”

Miss Cross: “Last year.”

Max: “My mother’s dead.”

Miss Cross: “I’m sorry to hear that.”

Max: “She died when I was seven. So, we both have dead people in our families.”

Max and Miss Cross here present their trauma in a direct manner – by stating their losses so bluntly, it both seems as though they were not affected and deeply affected by them. Both Miss Cross and Max then have a family which has been disrupted by loss, and their departed loved ones are both tied to Rushmore. Miss Cross is a teacher at Rushmore in order to feel closer to him, and she too is not over the loss she’s suffered. As we saw in the introduction, when speaking of the mill in *The Mill on the Floss,* Kucich writes: “the mill has many specific kinds of significance, which are different for each character, and […] these differences even reveal some of the incompatibilities between them” (332). The school then too has a different significance for the characters in Rushmore: for Max it is intertwined with the memory of his mother, while for Miss Cross it is the place she feels closer to her husband and his past. Where Blume and Max are tied together because of their mutual rejection of sons and father, here Max and Cross are tied together because of their mutual loss and their need to find something to replace the loss with – and though their losses are different in nature (husband versus mother, which perhaps indeed reveals a kind of incompatibility between them in some way), this fact of their bereavement connects the two characters. Though it must shortly be noted that Blume’s life has also

become affected by loss. As Matt Zoller Zeits says: “You’ve got Mr. Blume with his Vietnam experience, Miss Cross with her late husband, and Max with his mother. And that’s, I think, the real bond between these three people” (95). It’s also important to note that Rushmore not only stands in for Max’s mother and Miss Cross’s husband – it has a larger plurality of meanings, which aligns with Kucich speaking of objects in *The Mill on the Floss* as “charged […] with divergent meanings” (333). Here Rushmore gains an extra metaphorical layer as it becomes a concept outside of being a school or reminder of the past: Rushmore is a place or person to belong to, a character’s central object in life, or as Max says: “I guess you've just gotta find something you love to do and then... do it for the rest of your life. For me, it's going to Rushmore”. At first Rushmore was Max’s Rushmore, then it was Miss Cross. For Blume it is Miss Cross as well: “She’s my Rushmore Max.” He replies: “I know, she was mine too.” A person can then be a kind of place to which you may belong.

Miss Cross and Max replace their losses not only with Rushmore, but also with each other. For, as Miss Cross says to Max: “You remind me of him, you know?”. Max’s interest in Miss Cross borders between romantic and familial – he both cannot bear the thought of Miss Cross loving Blume (which leads to him and Blume falling out), yet also has Blume and Miss Cross function as a substitute mother and father. “They’re almost like his other parents, in a way” (Seitz, 95), Max being “the gifted son she never got to have” (72). Kornhaber notes the scene where Blume and Miss Cross “sit together with “Max’s surrogate younger brother Dirk in the bleachers of a public school gymnasium and watch Max perform as a male cheerleader like proud (if somewhat bemused) parents” (83-4) as an example of them working as a kind of family unit. She also makes an interesting point about the dinner scene with Peter Flynn in the film: apart from being a romantic threat, Peter Flynn (whom she mistakenly calls John in her book) being there destroys the image Max has of them as a family:

> And if this were actually supposed to be a kind of date with Rosemary, one wonders what Herman was ever doing there. Rather, this was supposed to be a celebratory dinner with his surrogate parents – one to which his actual father was pointedly not invited – and John’s

> presence destroys the conceit. Hitting John with a spoon and pushing dinnerware at him, Max begins acting like a child, which in some ways was always exactly the point. (84)

Max's proclamation of love at this dinner shows that his romantic ideal is at least equally as strong as the filial one. Kornhaber suggests that Max's discovery of Blume and Rosemary shows his clinging to this romantic notion, with "Herman merely present to all their encounters and dates as some kind of neutral third-party witness" (86). Another suggestion put forward by Seitz is of Max as a kind of parent to his own little world: "His whole life is a state of extended mourning: he distracts himself from it by playing father and mother to his airless little world" (72). He then seeks a kind of family to compensate for his loss in multiple ways. And whether romantic or familiar, each of the characters – Blume, Miss Cross, and Max – seek something missing in the other: a son, a mother, a father, a partner.

In order to compensate for her great loss, Miss Cross surrounds herself with physical things which remind her of her husband: not just Max and the school, but also her husband's old house, the physical objects that he owned, and his hobbies. When Blume visits Miss Cross (whom he calls by her first name, Rosemary), she says of the house that she lives in: "It isn't mine, I'm just sort of housesitting". Housesitting is typically something you do when you expect the owner of the house to return, a place you are in temporarily to look after, and not a place to stay, nor a place you belong. This house, it becomes clear, belongs to her deceased husband. Her living in it, reading books he owned in it, is a testament of her inability to move on. Her refusal or inability to move on at first prevents her from entering into a new relationship with Herman Blume, as becomes clear in this scene:

> Max: "He thinks you dumped him because of Edward Appleby."
>
> Miss Cross: "What does that mean?"
>
> Max: "Well I mean you live in his room, with all his stuff, it's kind of…'
>
> Miss Cross: "I was married to him."
>
> Max: "I know you were."

Miss Cross: “Although I will say that Edward has more spark and character and imagination in one fingernail than Herman Blume has in his entire body.”

Max: “One dead fingernail.”

Miss Cross: “Right. One dead fingernail.”

At the end of this conversation, silent tears fall out of Miss Cross’s eyes. When she talked about Edward, she used present tense – has – as though he’s still alive. Yet he is not, for he drowned. We can deduce that Edward was a fan of diving, for a cherished book he gave Miss Cross as a gift was *Diving for Sunken Treasure* by Jacques-Yves Cousteau – whose work would later inspire Anderson to create the film *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004).

This book acts as another important object in the film, for reading it at Rushmore and finding the person who read it before him is what first brings Max to Miss Cross, and the object is linked to Edward Appleby and the loss Miss Cross suffered. Miss Cross holds fishes in her classroom, and both Max and Blume want to build her an aquarium. This hobby is then also a reminder of her husband, and Edward Appleby, like Max’s mother, is not present physically, but he is there: through Rushmore, through the aquarium theme, through his house, the book, and the objects in his house – and through Max. Crother’s Dilley says of this that: “[t]he presence of death is muted because Max’s mother Eloise and Miss Cross’s husband Edward Appleby have already passed away at the time of the narrative’s events, so Max’s bereavement is apparent only through his visits to his mother’s gravestone and Miss Cross’s through the beloved mementos she preserves in her deceased husband’s old bedroom”(84). While Max’s mother and Edward Appleby have already died, there are many places and objects which echo these characters, and the loss of these characters. Even if death might be muted – loss has a strong voice within this film.

Eventually, Miss Cross, like Max, is able to somewhat overcome her loss. She takes leave of Rushmore and she and Herman Blume reconcile at Max’s latest play, which is a sign that she has been able to move on. Kornhaber says of the dual dedication of this play – to Max’s mother and Edward

Appleby – that this both releases Miss Cross from her role as surrogate mother, and recognizes her "own trauma […], relinquishing the tacit claim [Max] held on taking over the position of her own figure of loss – whether as her lover, in Edward's adult manifestation, or as the child for whom she has clearly gone seeking in coming to Edward's childhood home" (86). In short, Max no longer uses Miss Cross to fill his loss, and no longer tries to be the one to fill hers. Kornhaber says of the dancing scene at the end of the film that: "the pairings are only temporary and can be changed. Most importantly, everyone has a place" (87).

For that is what the crux of this film is: three characters, seeking for a place to belong – or a person who can be that place, someone to belong to. Max lost his mother and felt ashamed of his father; Miss Cross lost her husband; Vietnam veteran Blume felt disillusioned with his sons and his marriage fell apart – they weren't happy with the way their families were. Max and Blume tried to find a father and son in each other, and both tried to replace something missing with Miss Cross. Max eventually accepts his father, and lets Blume and his father meet. Max and Miss Cross tried to hold onto the ones they lost through each other, through places and through objects, yet ultimately moved on. Objects and places are significant in this film in many ways, transitory places being where the characters search for belonging, and spaces such as the school, Edward's house and the graveyard being physical representations of characters which have passed. Objects signify relationships between characters, dead or alive, and are used as a means of communication and self-expression, as is the case with Max's green velvet suit, which he wears at the end of the film. Though Max's advances towards Miss Cross were unreciprocated, eventually he finds Margaret Yang as a girlfriend at his new school. Blume and Miss Cross have grown closer, yet Max and Miss Cross have reconciled as well, as have Blume and Max, communicating their friendship through the Rushmore pins they now wear. Even Max's father is given someone to dance with after the final play – "Max's public school mathematics teacher" (Kornhaber, 87). Even if Max is able to let go of his Rushmore – his old school, his mother, his desire to hold onto Miss Cross – he has found a new Rushmore in his new school, his new play, and

in reconciling the important people in his life – and with it, Max has found a place for himself, a place to belong.

2. *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007)

The Darjeeling Limited (2007) is a film concerning three brothers who travel through India together, a year after the death of their father and without having seen each other in the meantime. The eldest, Francis (portrayed by Owen Wilson), has organised the trip with the intent of bringing the brothers closer together: "I want us to be brothers again, like we used to be" is a quote chosen as the tagline for the film for a reason. Without brothers Peter (Adrian Brody) and Jack (Jason Schwartzman) knowing, Francis' trip has another motive: to find their mother, not seen since before their father's funeral. When their meeting with their mother ends with her deserting them again, the brothers have to find their own way of closure. They find a sense of belonging in each other, and start to heal from the prolonged grief of their father's death. The film takes place entirely in India, apart from one tracking shot which shows various characters (such as Peter's wife Alice) in different locations, and a long flashback to the day of the father's funeral in the United States. The film's prologue, or Part I, *Hotel Chevalier*, takes place in Paris. The transitory settings of the film and its prologue *Hotel Chevalier* fit perfectly with the characters' search for belonging, and objects in the film are continuously used to reflect and represent interpersonal relationships. The chapter will first shortly explore how Anderson's life impacted on this film and then examines the significance of spaces within the films - the hotel and the train. The chapter then investigates the following objects: the inside objects on the train, hotel chocolate, a hotel robe, perfume and a book, sunglasses, car keys and a razor, a belt, passports, a car, peacock feathers and luggage. The chapter also analyses the two funerals in the film - their parallels, differences and effects on the characters, and proposes a reading of the film that finds issue with the critique offered by Donna Kornhaber.

The film focuses on the relationship between the three brothers, Francis, Peter and Jack. Wes Anderson himself is the middle child of three brothers, Mel being the oldest and Eric the youngest. This establishes a parallel between real life and fiction. It is not the only time Anderson employs the theme of 'brothers' in his films. In *Bottle Rocket* (1996), Bob Mapplethorpe and his brother have a

somewhat strained relationship. Interestingly, Luke, Owen and Andrew Wilson, three brothers, each play in *Bottle Rocket*, yet not as brothers. Owen Wilson is the oldest of the Wilson brothers, and also plays the oldest of the Whitman brothers in *The Darjeeling Limited*. Even the writing of the film was undertaken by three people who felt like brothers: Jason Schwartzman, Roman Coppola, and Wes Anderson. Roman Coppola addresses their relationship: "right off the bat there was something that resembled three brothers and history and that was the beginning of the project" (Dilley, 140). The parents of the protagonists are implied to be divorced, which would also parallel Anderson's home life; middle brother Peter expected someday to get divorced, and when asked why he thought this he said: "I don't know. I love Alice. Maybe it's in the way we were raised." This implies that his upbringing was one in which the parents did not stay together.

Hotel Chevalier, the film's prologue, also deals with the idea of separation. This short film shows youngest brother Jack Whitman in a hotel in Paris, where he has a meeting with his ex-girlfriend. This hotel, like the motel where the characters stay in *Bottle Rocket*, is a place for Jack to stay when he has no other place to belong. A hotel is a kind of liminal space: it isn't a home, it's a place to sleep, and is nearly always a temporary place (except perhaps for the people who run the hotel, as in *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, and the few who do make a hotel into their home). Stefano Baschiera, in his article on the use of objects in Anderson's films says of hotels that "[h]otels are like homes but without the same personal feeling of intimacy as they are meant only for temporary dwelling, and do not allow the demarcation of a personal territory through decoration and reordering" (124). Yet from the film it becomes clear that Jack has been staying here for quite some time, as him and his unnamed ex have the following exchange:

Ex: How long have you been here?

Jack: I don't know.

Ex: More than a week?

Jack: More than a week.

Ex: More than a month?

Jack: More than a month.

Jack is then in a sense stuck in a kind of limbo: staying in a hotel in Paris, away from his home in the States, having run away from his ex and his reality there. Even though it is a temporary space, he does arrange personal objects into it: "a small porcelain statue of Winston Churchill, a set of three wind-up music boxes, a pinned butterfly and dragonfly in a shadow box […] retreating into a temporary and largely anonymous space onto which he has imposed whatever tokens of his interiority he can bring with him" (Kornhaber 62). Jack's objects then manifest his inner world and make the anonymous space of the hotel more personal or even home-like. Hotels recur in Anderson's films: both Herman Blume from *Rushmore* and Royal Tenenbaum from *The Royal Tenenbaums* have to move to the space of the hotel after their family becomes fragmented, and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, like *Hotel Chevalier*, is named after the hotel where it takes place. *Rushmore* and *Moonrise Kingdom* are named after places as well – the school and a beach. The fact that many of Anderson's films are named after places shows the importance of these spaces in his films – they are subject and key to his narrative.

The Darjeeling Limited is also named after a kind of place, or space, for it is the name of the train on which the Whitman brothers undertake their journey. Since they also sleep there, this train acts as another kind of hotel – though not a static one like Hotel Chevalier, but a moving locale. Unlike a static hotel, the train takes them on a journey, literally and figuratively, and without the train there would be no film. Anderson made the perhaps difficult technical and logistical choice of filming the movie on an actual moving train. Production designer Mark Friedberg said that this made everything more complicated, yet that in the end it was the right choice: "But what it did do in the end and he was right. What it did do is it made it real" (*The Darjeeling Limited* Featurette, "The Darjeeling Limited Walking Tour"). The moving train then gave the film a kind of verisimilitude, despite its heavy stylization. According to Erwin Panofsky, objects, especially moveable objects such as trains, possess human qualities, and can become the subject of a film:

> No object in creation, whether it be a house, a piano, a tree, or an alarm clock, lacks the faculties of organic, in fact anthropomorphic, movement, facial expression, and phonetic articulation. Incidentally, even in normal, "realistic" films the inanimate object, provided that it is dynamizable, can play the role of a leading character as do the ancient railroad engines in Buster Keaton's *The General* […] and *Niagra Falls.* (108)

In *The Darjeeling Limited* we then again have a train who plays a kind of leading role along with the three brothers. Stefano Baschiera says that: "the Darjeeling train recreates a peculiar condition of the family home. The protagonists are obliged to share the same living space under the supervision of an authority" (127) – here Baschiera refers to the train steward, who is the authority on the train, almost like a parental figure who would be the authority in a childhood home. The train is then not only a hotel and a catalyst for movement, but also a kind of temporary home, or at least a place where the brothers live together, sharing a living space as they must have had when being younger. Like the real family home, eventually they have to leave this space: "kicked out of this dwelling, and wandering on their own in a desolated Indian countryside" (127). Reminiscent of Max Fischer being cast out of Rushmore, the three Whitman brothers now have to find their own sense of belonging without the space of The Darjeeling Limited to rely on, and must make their own way.

Anderson took great care regarding the details on and in this train: practically everything in the train was handmade, and the train was hand-painted by Jodhpur truck painters – Indian artists, who painted locations from the film onto the train. Even if the film never focuses fully on these painted scenes, it shows the great care put into the physical details of this film. The train has hundreds of unique hand-painted elephants decorating it, and plates, chairs, even the wood near the train windows was made or changed for the film. Apart from the objects in the film which are highlighted through framing and narrative, physical objects which are not focused upon in the film are then also important in the sense that they have been made and placed deliberately, through great care: they are part of the film as a whole, adding detail to it.

There are several noticeable objects that are connected to *Hotel Chevalier*, Jack Whitman, and his ex: hotel chocolate, a hotel robe, a perfume bottle, and a book. Hotel Chevalier, like many hotels, has its own little pieces of chocolate for the guests. The hotel chocolate seems to carry no narrative significance, yet there is a close-up of the chocolate as Jack Whitman unfolds a piece for himself to eat. The chocolate has its own Hotel Chevalier design: this again shows Anderson's focus on objects, and his attention to detail in this area. Jack Whitman is seen to wear a yellow robe of the hotel not only in this prologue, but multiple times during part two of the film as well. Even though a hotel is generally not a place to belong, this shows Jack's ties to the hotel, or more specifically, to what the hotel means to him. The hotel is the place where he rendezvoused with his ex-girlfriend, and it is the place he ran away to as he escaped from his home in the States after his father's death. The robe then perhaps becomes a kind of signifier of Jack's longing back to this hotel, or his unwillingness to give up these bonds to both hotel and ex. He took the robe from the hotel, stealing a piece from this place for himself, as though the place really was his home in a sense. A clearer example of an object which signifies Jack's attachment to his ex is that of the perfume bottle. In *Hotel Chevalier*, Jack's ex slips the perfume bottle into his suitcase, which leads to the bottle resurfacing in *The Darjeeling Limited*. The fact that this object represents his ex, and his relationship to his ex, is made explicit in the film. Once the perfume is sprayed, he says: "It's her". Ex and scent have become synonymous, and the slipping of the perfume in the suitcase is an attempt from the ex to remind Jack of her. Yet, with the aid of his brothers, Jack refuses this bond by breaking the perfume bottle in an act of defiance. Ironically, this means the whole train carriage smells like his ex. Baschiera notes this as well, saying that "when he destroys it a new sensorial aspect of its materiality emerges, the scent, creating a peculiar smellscape in the train compartment; probably, the same that Jack found in the Hotel Chevalier in Paris" (128). We again see a representation of this perfume bottle in a flashback, when the cover of Jack's book, *Invisible Ink and other stories*, is show bearing a perfume bottle which reads "Voltaire #6 La Petite Mort Paris". This flashback is from the day of the father's funeral, the book an unread gift, dedicated to him: J.L.W. This book was then a message from Jack to his father, one which was not received. The book then has

multiple meanings: it shows both Jack's longstanding ties to his now ex-girlfriend, and tells us that Jack at least admired or respected his father in some regard – enough to dedicate his book to him.

This book was then a gift from Jack to his father, and the idea of the gift is one which is central to the film. In his work *The Gift* (1925, this edition 1990), Marcel Mauss speaks of the obligations that a gift brings: "to reciprocate […] to give presents […] and to receive them" (16-17). Jack's father did not receive the present fully, for he did not read the book. On the other hand, Jack unwillingly received the gift of the perfume bottle, having no formal exchange, and destroyed it. If the perfume represents Jack's ex, then there is another object representing Peter's wife Alice: her self-made pots. According to Dilley, "Alice's pots haunt the film, both in the train car and in the convent" (145). 'Haunt' is a strong word, yet Alice is certainly present through her pots: "Things sold still have a soul. They are still followed around by their former owner, and they follow him also" (Mauss, 84). This is the case not only for Alice's pots, but for many objects in this film and other films by Anderson: gifts and inherited objects still hold the sense of the one giving it, or the one to whom it belonged first. Alice's pots are once again a gift not properly received: Francis does not seem to recall the fact that he was given such a pot before the events of the film.

There are many objects in *The Darjeeling Limited* which reflect relationships between the Whitman brothers and their deceased father. Like Max's mother and Rosemary's husband in *Rushmore*, the brothers' father is never physically present in the films – he is present via his written name, words spoken about him, his remaining family members and the objects that he left behind. Three of these objects are sunglasses, car keys and a razor. Middle brother Peter has taken these objects for himself, something by which elder brother Francis feels threatened. This ties in with Kucich speaking of a use of objects as asserting dominance over another – while Peter might hold on to the objects because he wants to feel closer to their father after his death, to Francis it feels like a threat to his own relationship with his deceased father. When Peter is not around, Francis complains to Jack about Peter taking the sunglasses, and later he puts them on his own face, and touches the car keys. When he sees Peter

using their father's razor, Francis finally lets Peter know that this bothers him, saying: "You don't have permission to take his property that belongs to all of us and use it for yourself as if it's yours", and "Plus, Dad would have hated it." His true feelings of anxiety shine through when he says: "I just don't want you to get the feeling that you're better friends with him than we are or something weird like that", to which Peter replies vehemently: "I was his favorite. He told me that with blood all over him, laying in the street, right before he died." Later, he admits he didn't really hear their father say that. In his article on *The Darjeeling Limited*, Chris Norris strikingly used the phrase "their father, whose very memory they fight over" (32). Here, their father's old objects represent his memory and the brothers' relationship to him – in fighting over these objects, Francis and Peter indeed fight over his memory and this relationship which they want to hold on to, their grief manifesting in strife.

Objects in the film are also used to indicate relationships and tensions between the brothers. One example of this is Francis's belt. When Peter first borrows this belt without asking, Francis demands the belt back on the spot. Yet later Francis gives the belt to Peter as a gift, supposedly for his last birthday, saying it's from both him and Jack. When the belt becomes a gift, it becomes a sign of goodwill from Francis to Peter, and a sign that their relationship is on the mend rather than strained. Only the relationship does not stay stable, and Francis demands that Peter return the belt to him. Peter initially refuses, saying "there has been too much Indian giving over the years". According to Merriam-Webster, an Indian giver is a dated or offensive term for "a person who gives something to another and then takes it back or expects an equivalent in return". Francis gave Peter the belt, yet wanted to retract this when him and Peter became at ends again. Here the returning of the belt to Francis shows the strain on their relationship, especially in the way it is returned: Peter eventually flings the belt at Francis, hitting him with it. To give is to show oneself to be "giving and returning 'respects'" (Mauss, 59), and to give is also to be "giving *oneself*" (59). It is clear that the brothers here do not yet respect or trust the other, nor are they willing to give a part of themselves to the other. Near the end of the film, respect between the brothers finally is established in a stronger sense, and the belt returns to Peter for good: Francis gives the belt to him so that his future son may wear it, again saying that the

gift is from both him and Jack. He gives something of himself to Peter. Peter assumed a kind of free-giving spirit by taking Francis' belt, a "what's mine is yours" connection that they did not share at that present moment, and is only there later when the belt is gifted for good, to him and his future son. Incidentally, Peter had bought a vest for his future child, a child whose arrival he was first hesitant about – yet him having bought the vest shows his acceptance of the child arriving into his life.

In fact, more items of clothing play a role in this film: wearing shoes, or the lack of them is significant. Jack wears no shoes, which was done because of his not doing so in the prologue (Dilley, 150) - another tie to *Hotel Chevalier*. This also leads to Jack being a stand-in for Paul McCartney in an *Abbey Road* like shot (Dilley, 143). The Beatles are echoed in the film in Jason Schwartzman's looks – “his moustache makes him look like a Beatle” (143), and thanks to Schwartzman, the makers of the film went to Rishikesh, as The Beatles did in 1968 (143). Francis, on the other hand, wears expensive shoes, one of which is stolen - after this he wears one of Peter's freshly bought Indian shoes – as Dilley remarks, Francis here steals a shoe in the same vein as Peter did from him, which Francis got upset over (145). This one Indian, one American shoe situation could show that Francis “feels comfortable in neither place” (145). This points to his search for belonging, which Francis ultimately does start to find in India.

Another kind of object which reflects the relationship between the Whitman brothers are the brothers’ passports. The way these are handled signifies a kind of trust, or lack of trust, between the brothers. Jack’s passport is first stolen by Francis when he discovers that Jack has a ticket to Italy, in case he wants to leave their trip in India early. Afraid that Jack will indeed abandon their trip, Francis takes his passport to prevent him from doing so, supposedly for safekeeping. This shows that Francis does not trust his brother to stay. During a large part of the film, the brothers indeed do not trust each other, as is stated explicitly in the film. Francis finds out that Peter is expecting a child, and asks Jack: “Why doesn’t he want me to know?”, to which Jack replies: “Because we don’t trust each other”. In the scene in which Francis and Peter quarrel, Jack declares that he wants his passport back. At the end

of the film, however, the passports are used to indicate a newfound trust between the brothers. Francis, in the end, trusts his brothers not to turn away from their journey, and offers them their passports. The two brothers, in turn, reject this offer, saying “Why don’t you hang on to mine?” and “It’s safer if you keep them”. This shows that they do not even wish to have the option of bailing on their trip and wish to communicate their loyalty to Francis. Stealing an item from another is a way of enforcing a kind of connection, of snatching a gift not freely given - Francis forces the brotherly connection by taking the passports, yet only when these are freely given is the connection true. The brothers’ relationship has improved significantly over the course of the film.

The film centres on two funerals, two deaths, which both resemble each other as well as contrast. The first funeral day is that of the Whitmans’ father, the second is that of a young boy in an Indian village. The three brothers have almost abandoned their trip through India when they come across three boys on a kind of raft in a river. Yet a rope snaps, and the boys have to be saved from the currents and rocks in the water: the Whitman brothers dive into the water and are only able to save two of the three boys. These boys appear to be brothers like the Whitmans. It is when the three Whitman brothers are sitting together in a vehicle, dressed in light clothing for the boy’s funeral, when the flashback to the day of their father’s funeral occurs. In this flashback, the colours are darker, as it is the custom to wear dark clothing during American funerals. This dark and bright contrast mirrors the effects of the funeral: the first funeral day led to the brothers growing apart, to them separating and unable to cope properly with their father’s death alone. In the flashback scene, they are fixated upon bringing their father’s car to the funeral. Dilley says of this that they “try to jump-start their father’s car, clearly demonstrating a desire to bring their father back to life, and an inability to accept his death” (147). The father and his car are strongly linked. Seitz also says that “[t]hey’re hung up on the significance of objects and the significance of routines […] I get the sense they feel they will have failed if they don’t show up at the funeral in that car” (221). Their plan to pick up their father’s car and go to the funeral in it does indeed fail, and afterwards, the brothers don’t see each other again until the events of the film. Yet the second funeral brings the brothers closer together when they are on the

brink of leaving India and separating again, and allows them to support another together, and to nurture each other – Francis, in both flashback and present, puts an arm around younger brother Jack as a sign of comfort. Another contrast is the age of the deceased person: the first person to die was a father, the second was a son - one of three brothers, as they are. The village community coming together contrasts with the alienated individualism of the Whitmans (and perhaps shows a contrast between America and India as well), and it is from this communal place that their own healing truly begins. Peter even holds a baby in this village – a sign he is beginning to accept his future fatherhood. Kornhaber comments rather cynically on the Indian funeral, saying that the brothers "neither observe nor learn anything of substance" (66). Yet Anderson himself comments that this is "the one time in the whole story that they actually connect to these people, and they go through this experience with them" (Seitz 227, Dilley 148). This funeral then marks a turning point within the film, and after this tragic event the brothers eventually stay in India, and go back to find their mother.

The brothers seek to improve their relationship with their mother in the film, yet this turns out not to be fully possible. The mother, like her son Jack, has gone to another country after their father's death – only she did not stay for the funeral, and now that her sons are there, she refuses to speak about the past. She says: "I'm sorry we lost your father. We'll never get over it, but it's okay. There are greater forces at work. Yes, the past happened, but it's over, isn't it?" Francis replies: "Not for us". The mother then says: "I told you not to come here". This is a clear sign that the mother wishes to avoid and forget the past rather than process it. Although they do share a somewhat tender moment in which the brothers and mother express themselves to each other without words – only by looking at the other – the mother abandons them in the night, and the brothers have to find their own kind of closure, without their mother.

The brothers find this closure with the aid of a peacock feather. Earlier in the film, Francis had tried to get his brothers to perform a ritual with him in which they each buried a peacock feather. Yet Jack had let the feather blow away, and Peter had held onto his. They hadn't read the instructions

properly, and had instead done their own interpretation of the ritual, to Francis' dismay. The second ritual, however, is quite opposite of the first. They share Peter's peacock feather and properly perform the ritual together. Here this ritual and the peacock feather again symbolize the mending relationship between the brothers, and it acts as a kind of closure for their relationship with their mother. As Dilley states: "it is the acceptance of their mother that leads to a more peaceful performance of the feather ceremony at the film's resolution […] they know their mother will never change, so, to continue to heal, they must accept her as she is, with all of her faults and idiosyncrasies" (140). Then, even though the reunion with their mother might not be seen as ideal or joyful, it helps them in their healing.

The brothers also find a kind of closure when it comes to their father's death, and this is symbolised by the literal baggage they have of their father, which they discard near the end of the film. Throughout the film, the brothers carry bags with them which were especially made for their father and bear his JLW initials. The baggage is numbered, and only when the brothers come together is it complete. They carry their father and their loss with them, literally. The film starts with Peter running to get onto the train and overtaking Bill Murray's unnamed businessman character, of which Chris Norris says: "[Bill Murray is] the father we all wish we had. And in this story, Murray symbolizes the father without whom three arrested boy-men must find a way to live" (30). Close to the end of the film, the brothers have to run to catch another train. and Francis calls out: "Dad's bags aren't going to make it!" But rather than be downcast about this, the brothers chuckle and discard their father's bags as they continue their journey without them. Peter takes off his sunglasses, which he had been wearing even though (or perhaps because) they still carried his father's prescription. At the end of their journey, the boys have come a long way in healing: their relationship is mended, they have gotten closure from their father's death and mother's abandonment, and instead found their belonging with each other. Peter has accepted that he will be a father, and Jack has rejected his ex-girlfriend – "He would not be going to Italy". The end of the film is a positive one.

Kornhaber proffers a more pessimistic view of the film and its ending. Of Jack she says that "[h]e claims to his brothers that he will not be going to Italy to meet up with his ex-girlfriend as she had requested, but where else will he go that will offer him anything other than another luxurious and lonely retreat?" (70). When it comes to Peter, Kornhaber wonders "[w]hat guarantee do we have that Peter actually plans to go home to his wife and child at all and will not simply disappear on them for good the way his mother did to him?" (70). Earlier in her chapter, Kornhaber already cynically commented on the fact that Peter plans to stay in India longer after learning he is having a boy, instead of returning to his wife. However, Kornhaber overlooks Peter having purchased a vest for his child and proudly showing this to his brothers, something which, though not a guarantee, is a clear indication of him welcoming his son. Moreover, Peter holding the baby in the village is also overlooked. When it comes to Francis, Kornhaber is most pessimistic, stating that "[w]hat is to say that Francis with his brothers now gone will not attempt suicide again, especially since the grand plan to bring mother and children back together, hatched in the wake of his last suicide, has objectively failed?" (70). While the mother and child reunion was not what the brothers might have wished for initially, I would not say it was all for nothing: they at least met her, and the ritual which they held after meeting her, which Kornhaber somewhat fittingly, though mockingly, calls "a bizarre religious ritual of their own creation" (69) was a kind of closure, a form of acceptance. The whole experience certainly brought the brothers together. Kornhaber might not be convinced, saying that "[m]ostly they seem to be haphazardly physicalizing their own emotional pain and calling it release" (69). Nevertheless, she does write the following:

> Anderson allows the three men to finally achieve a kind of even balance in their framing, positioning them in a triangle in the frame as their mountaintop religious ceremony concludes – a rather intuitive blocking arrangement that has been used infrequently in the film and implies a level of physical and emotional calm that they have at last achieved. (69)

Despite her acknowledging this, and the returning of the passports, and the discarding of the baggage, she remains unconvinced: "[a]nd yet, any action so literal and clichéd as the discarding of baggage (and baggage inherited from their father, no less) should be viewed with a certain amount of skepticism" (69). Although it might be somewhat of a cliché, the discarding of the baggage provides a truly euphoric moment in the film, and the ending of the film is cast in a positive light. It's also important to note that the brothers don't pretend to be fully healed: this is not the end of their journey, and they are still on a train, moving together – closer together than before, and having progressed. A little earlier in the film, Francis removed his bandages yet was still damaged, saying: "I guess I've still got some more healing to do", to which Jack replied "You're getting there though". This embodies an images of Francis' progress, as well as the healing still to come. Though Kornhaber says of the brothers in their final train that "[i]f this is progress, it is baby steps only" (69) and that "[o]ne shudders to think of the destination to which this train is headed" (70), *The Darjeeling Limited* feels like a film not only sad but also euphoric, in which three brothers progress together. Where the train is headed is unclear, yet the brothers are together, and that is what matters, in the end.

The Darjeeling Limited is then a film in which themes of family, loss and belonging are not just an undercurrent but constitute the very core of the film. The Whitman brothers start to heal from their father's death and learn to accept their mother as she is. A multitude of objects appear within the film, many of which signify relationships between characters, and how these relationships develop. The idea of the gift is significant, as gifts are not always received, and may sometimes be retracted. The brothers show the renewal of their own relationship in the passport exchange and gifting of the belt – when things are freely given and received, they become a symbol of trust. The brothers have found closure from their mother in their peacock feather ritual, and found a more solid family foundation in each other. Facing the future, and discarding the past Peter buys a vest for his child. They let go of past baggage, and travel forward, together.

3. *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012)

Moonrise Kingdom (2012) is a film about two young teens, Sam and Suzy, who run away together to follow the Chickchaw trail, which ends at a beach labelled Mile 3.25 Tidal Inlet. Both children have a familial background which they struggle with: Sam's parents have died, while Suzy's parents see her as troubled, and have troubles of their own. When Sam and Suzy run away, they find belonging with each other on this beach, which they rename 'Moonrise Kingdom', a name which better befits the storybooks they read. This film is again one in which objects play a large role, and Anderson brings attention to objects in this film through extensive mentioning of them and in the way they are framed. This chapter discusses the objects in this film as well as both Suzy and Sam's familial backgrounds, and analyses in detail the scene on the beach in which they find a home in each other. Objects and places which will be discussed in this chapter include two paintings, binoculars, clothing, a brooch, books, letters, and the beach itself.

Moonrise Kingdom ends and starts with a painting. The idea of filming paintings is one which has been contested, and André Bazin explores both sides of the question in his book *What Is Cinema?*. For one, when one films a painting, it is radically different from seeing the painting in real life: "the viewer, believing he is seeing the picture as painted, is actually looking at it through the instrumentality of an art form which profoundly changes its nature" (165), and "[n]o one color is ever faithfully reproduced; still less, therefore, is any combination of colors" (165). This discrepancy between the actual painting and its representation on film might be a reason to reject films about paintings. However, films about paintings have the potential to bring art to the masses (167), and both paintings and films are works in their own right – the latter having the potential to "throw[…] a new light on the original" (169). This is for example the case in films such as *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), where the sequence in the art gallery allows the viewer of the film to gaze upon famous works of art along with the characters, and allows them to see the way in which these characters would look at the paintings.

In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935, this edition 1969), Walter Benjamin spoke of the unique ‘aura’ of a work of art. There are “traditional notions of the work of art as an autonomous object imbued with an ‘aura’ of authenticity and unchanging value” (Rachele Dini on Benjamin, 34). According to Benjamin, this aura is lost in reproductions of artwork, such as in films: “Benjamin argues that with the mass dissemination of images, the ‘aura’ attached to the work is eroded” (Dini, 34). Indeed, in his essay Benjamin writes that “[t]o pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose ‘sense of the universal equality of things’ has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction” (5-6). According to Benjamin it is then not only the reproductions which lose the aura of the original, but the original itself which loses it. Dini disagrees with this, arguing that:

> Benjamin’s analysis of the aura that withers around the work of art in an age of technological reproducibility seems unable to account for the blockbuster art exhibitions that tour the globe and attract millions of visitors. Such exhibitions successfully market the authenticity of a work of art as a literally unique selling point. (47)

Thus, even though a painting can now be mass reproduced, the original still holds its aura. In Anderson’s films, the paintings have been made especially for the films, and the way in which the paintings are shown on screen is the only way in which the viewers can access the paintings, for there is no place where they are exhibited. They are intertwined with the film, and though the original might still hold an aura, it is the film, the depiction in Anderson’s film, which has become the original way of viewing this particular painting. Though Dini points out in her analysis of Benjamin’s essay that “there is nothing to distinguish a film’s original “reel” from its copies” (35), one still gets a sense of the aura of the painting when watching the end of *Moonrise Kingdom*, it being the way in which Anderson wished to show the painting to the world. The painting is still there, and it still has an effect on the viewer despite being filmed through a lens.

The first painting we see in *Moonrise Kingdom* is the one of Suzy's house, a home where she doesn't feel at home. The second painting, which will be discussed in more detail later, is of a beach where she found a sense of belonging – the film is then framed by these paintings. The reasons why Suzy doesn't feel like she belongs in her home are manifold. One reason, already discussed briefly in the introduction of this thesis, is that she has found a book her parents kept, called *Coping With the Very Troubled Child*. Like Wes Anderson, who found a similar book in real life, Suzy knew this must be referring to her, and that her parents see her as troubled. Bill Murray is cast as her father; though Murray was a father figure for whom both Max in *Rushmore* and Peter in *The Darjeeling Limited* wished, he turns out to be not a very successful father to Suzy. He doesn't know how to help her, and he wallows in self-pity. Suzy, like her father, knows about her mother having an affair: through her binoculars, she's spotted her mother (Francis McDormand) and a police man (Bruce Willis) sharing a smoke.

These binoculars are a very important object to Suzy, and Anderson frames them as such: in the opening scene, we see them lie central on a table before Suzy picks them up an puts them around her neck. When, on their beach, Sam asks Suzy why she wears them, she says: "It helps me see things closer, even if they're not very far away. I pretend it's my magic power". After learning this, Sam is prepared to risk their whole running away operation to bring back these binoculars. He is urged to leave them, but says: "We can't, it's her magic power!" Sam then sees these binoculars as a part of Suzy. This fits with Simone Weil's ideas of private property: "Private property is a vital need of the soul. The soul feels isolated, lost, if it is not surrounded by objects which seem to it like an extension of the bodily members" (34). In Suzy's case, her binoculars are literally an extension of her eyes and eyesight. They help Suzy see that her mother is having an affair, and they help Sam see a ladder which can help them escape – they do enable them see things closer, even if they're not very far away. And they likewise help the audience see these things too: we get shots looking through the binoculars, and thus see what the characters who look through the binoculars are focusing on, and see these things framed in two half circles, bringing them into focus. Not only do we see the moment which signals the affair

and Sam's finding of the ladder, we also see Suzy looking at Sam – in the field where they meet, and at the end when he leaves for his new home - a moment which will be discussed later.

Suzy also carries around a suitcase of books, which are key to the film. These books were stolen by Suzy from the library: "I think I just took them to have a secret to keep". Stealing makes Suzy feel better in her home situation, where her parents see her as troubled. The content and looks of the books are even more important: each of the books has been designed especially for this film – they are not existing books. The book cover for *The Francine Odysseys* was designed by Wes Anderson's partner, Juman Malouf. This is Suzy's favourite book, and the film's dedication is also to Juman. The whole film is a kind of love story, and here Anderson connects his own love to the film and the film's depiction of love. The contents of the books are mostly adventure fairy tales, with female heroines. In fact, the whole film is like a fairy tale: "Anderson has claimed that he wanted the visuals to have a storybook feeling, a flat, two-dimensional quality, like a fable, and like a play." (Dilley, 168). Anderson connects the feeling of losing yourself in a book with the feeling of falling in love, and thus connects Suzy and Sam's love and journey with the stories she reads: "when I would read a book, the book would be my whole world, and I would sort of lose a sense of quite *what is reality* and *what is the book*, and it was the same thing with a romantic feeling at that age" (Anderson in Dilley, 169). The two connect through Suzy's books: "Suzy is shown reading to Sam from the *The Francine Odysseys*, which demonstrates how Suzy and Sam bond though sharing their imaginative worlds" (Dilley, 172). In fact, Anderson wrote the film as though it was a story that Suzy and Sam would read: "the film's narrative is written to mirror the style of the books Suzy Bishop is carrying" (Dilley 180). Anderson then made the film into a kind of storybook: "the movie is the sort of story that the two characters in it would want to read" (180). The charged colour palate, the two children (one of which an orphan) going on an adventure together to escape their reality, the storm and the happy end all contribute to this storybook-like feeling that the film carries.

In fact, the written word is an important aspect of the film in another regard: letters play a large role in the film. When Sam first runs away, he writes a letter to his head scout; Sam is also told of his foster family not wanting him any longer through a letter. Yet the most important letters in the film are those exchanged between Suzy and Sam. The audience only gets to hear snippets of them, and it feels almost as if the audience is intruding on something private. The audience also intruded when spying on Suzy's mom and the policeman through her binoculars, seeing their private moment from afar – yet there the 'secret' felt almost like something more meant to be discovered, perhaps because it was an event happening outside and not a letter from one person to another. Letters are generally private, and Sam and Suzy share their innermost feelings in them: about their parents and their troubles. It's almost like a diary that they share between them. It is in these letters that they eventually make their plan to run away and follow the trail together.

Apart from her binoculars and books, Suzy carries around many more objects when she runs away, which are made explicit in the film. When they camp together, Sam makes an inventory of them: a record player she's taken from her little brother, a record she received from her godmother, 'lefty scissors', rubber bands, extra batteries and a toothbrush. The latter three are purely practical, but it is clear the record has extra emotional value because of the person she received it from – or she would not have mentioned it. She also brings "a basket with her kitten in it" (Dilley) and cat food. In total, her inventory is then more sentimental rather than practical, "an unrealistic set of equipment to run away with" (172). Dilley says this inventory shows "Suzy's vulnerability" (172). Suzy's stealing of books and gathering of this inventory can be linked to Kucich's arguments concerning *The Mill on the Floss*, declaring that "the women in the novel achieve their place in the world only through their control of domestic objects" (325). While in this novel this is done by "establishing how men are allowed to use them" (325) or by "impressing each other with the value, or lack of it, of things" (325), Suzy's objects are dear to herself, and having them is one thing which she can control in a family and world where she cannot control much – not specifically as a woman, but also as a young girl, whose life is still dictated by her parents. She only shares them with ones she loves. A more practical inventory is

mentioned later in the film, when the scout boys try to rescue Sam and need supplies for this operation: chicken wire, newspapers and wheat-paste. Both inventories are shown in the film – the written or typed word again being emphasized. The second inventory is a non-sentimental inventory, in which the objects hold no significance beyond their practicality – not in the way Suzy's objects mean something to her.

Sam also carries around an object of great importance to him: a brooch which he inherited from his mother. He can be seen to always have it pinned on his clothing. While Sam asks Suzy about the binoculars on the beach, Suzy does the same about the brooch, which stands out from his other scouting badges: "What's that one for?". Sam answers: "It's not an accomplishment button. I inherited it from my mother. It's not actually meant for a male to wear but I don't give a damn." Sam then wears this brooch to feel closer to his mother, who is only present in the film through one easy to miss wedding picture and this brooch – like Max's mother, Rosemary's husband, and the Whitmans' father, we again only see objects that the deceased person (or persons) has left behind. Sam's parents are both deceased, something which is remarked upon again and again in the film. Speaking of the protagonists in Anderson's later films, Kornhaber points out that "the families from which they come are not just broken but obliterated, rendered utterly irretrievable" (108). Sam has not lost one parent, no, he has lost both – his whole family. It is a nameless tragedy which hangs over him, for we never learn when or how he actually lost his parents. In fact, apart from the brooch and the wedding picture, we do not know anything about them. It is clear he misses his parents, for Suzy writes in a letter to Sam that: "I do think you should think of their faces every day, even if it makes you sad. It is too bad they did not leave you more pictures of themselves". Sam was put in various foster homes yet sent away again each time for 'being emotionally disturbed'. As he speaks to Suzy on the beach he believes that he has finally found a foster home where he is welcome – yet the audience already knows his newest foster parents do not want him anymore. Suzy asks him if his foster parents are still mad at him for getting into trouble, but Sam thinks they are not and that they are getting to know each other better: "I feel like I'm in a real family now. Not like yours, but similar to one." It is not long after this

that he learns his foster family did not see things the same way, and this idea is shattered. Kornhaber states that: "[r]ather than try to restore or recreate the lost or broken family, Anderson's new protagonists utterly reject it as an institution or ideal" (108). On the one hand, Sam and Suzy going away together seems to support this claim, yet on the other hand, it is clear Sam does long for a family – he misses his parents, and writes to Suzy that "I know your parents hurt your feelings, but they still love you. That is more important". This stresses the fact that he does wish for parents, and still holds the family as an ideal in some regard – as does his line about the foster home, in which he thought to have found belonging, yet did not.

Sam indeed, like Suzy, at first seems not to truly belong anywhere. This is made clear not only through what is said about him, but also through clothing. Like Max in *Rushmore*'s opening club montage, in their letter exchange Sam and Suzy are seen to wear clothing different from their peers: Sam wears blue clothing while the other boys wear white, and Suzy's dress is the only checkered dress which has a hint of red in it. Uniforms are important in this film, and are emphasized early on when Scout Master Ward performs a uniform check. Sam wears the scout's uniform, which should mean that he belongs to this group, yet he is unpopular within this organization. One the first day of the search for Sam, Scout Master Ward says: "Morale is extremely low. In part, I suppose, because Sam is the least popular scout in the troop. By a significant margin." In the end, however, his fellow scouts turn around and wish to help Sam: "He's a fellow Khaki Scout, and he needs our help. Are we man enough to give that so that part of his brain doesn't get removed out of him?" At this point in the film, there is namely a risk of Sam being put in Juvenile Refuge by Social Services, where he might receive electroshock therapy or other similar treatment. (Ironically, Sam is accidentally shocked by lighting in the film). Social Services is a character in the film who bears the name of the institution she represents, something which Kornhaber notes as well (110). Cold and nameless, she is a threat rather than a help to Sam. She is in opposition with policeman Sharp and Master Ward, who are two paternal figures that actually have Sam's best interests at heart. Social Services labels both to be "incompetent custodial guardians", and on paper they might be seen as such for losing Sam. Yet Master Ward praises Sam's

campsite after he has run away and decides not to press Sam too hard on his parents' death, and Captain Sharp talks to Sam about love, and shares some beer with him in a paternal gesture. The colours in that scene seem less artificial than those in the rest of the film, and in the end it is Captain Sharp who gains custody of Sam. Sam then wears a police uniform, which signals that he belongs to Captain Sharp's family. He still wears his mother's brooch, which signals that he, like Max Fischer wearing the Rushmore pin, does not abandon his mother's memory. Kornhaber sees them wearing the same clothing as a warning sign:

> the fact that Sharp and Sam begin to dress alike at the very end of the film should raise alarms within Anderson's filmic world. Their shared attire is reminiscent of Chas's relationship with Ari and Uzi in *The Royal Tennenbaums* or Zissou's exercises of parental authority in The Life Aquatic, and one wonders what emotional issues might be worked out through this sudden semiparentage by the figure Suzy once described as 'that sad, dumb policeman'. (121)

Because of the fairy-tale like qualities of this film, and because of the heartfeltness of Captain Sharp (which Kornhaber does note), I lean to a more positive reading of Sam's change of clothes and continue to read this as him finding a new belonging with Captain Sharp.

Sam then finds a dual belonging in this film: both with Captain Sharp and with Suzy. The beach scene is the key scene of the film, in which Suzy and Sam's relationship culminates. Kornhaber labels their time on the beach as "their relationship in its most perfect instance" (121). Although the beach is public property, they claim it together, saying: "This is our land!" "Yes, it is!". It is in no legal way theirs, of course. But it is the beach they have sought at the end of their trail, and their shared experience with just the two of them here makes it feel as though it was theirs: "a gardener, after a certain time, feels that the garden belongs to him" (Weil, 34). For Sam and Suzy there is no need for "a long, uninterrupted period" (34) for this feeling to arise – they instantly feel that the beach is their beach. They wish to claim a space just for themselves, away from everyone, where they can exist together. Weil says of private property that "where the feeling of appropriation doesn't coincide with

any legally recognized proprietorship men are continually exposed to extremely painful spiritual wrenches" (34). For Sam and Suzy, this is not the case – whether they actually own the beach is of no concern to them, for the feeling remains, and even after it is swept away, the memory of it is enough for them. It is in this place that they share their feelings concerning the binoculars, the brooch, and Sam's foster family, and it is in this conversation that they first say that they love each other. On this beach they have their first kiss, and Anderson labels this beach scene as "the most important scene, the center of the film" (Kornhaber, 154). During Sam and Suzy's conversation, the camera is positioned in a way which emphasizes their increased intimacy:

> When Sam and Suzy first meet at Noye's Fludde, and when they reunite in the meadow, they are shot in Anderson's standard way. We get profile head-on views […]. As they get to know one another, the angles become more like the ¾ views we see in most films […]. When they declare their love for each other, they are shown in conventional over-the-shoulder angles […]. The stylistic development echoes Sam and Suzy's growing intimacy. (Bordwell et al, 419)

The pictures that Bordwell gives for the ¾ angles are ones from their conversation about Suzy's objects and the book she found from her parents – their conversations have brought them closer together, until the beach saw them truly find a sense of belonging together. Suzy here says she wished she was an orphan like the characters are in the books she reads because their lives are more special. In literature, the orphan's misery "has been made to appear magical, and has been rewarded with power and glory" (Karl Miller, 39). The orphan is both "at home and away" (45), and has been "envied" (43) despite their predicament: "[o]n the page, the unfortunate have tended to win" (43). Suzy knows orphans through her storybooks, and wishes to be like them – thinking it must be a romantic life. Yet their reality is hard, and Sam knows this while Suzy does not. With love, Sam in response lets her know that she doesn't know what being an orphan is really like. Though Suzy might not have understood what Sam felt like when she made this remark, it leads to their love confession: "I love you but you don't know what you are talking about." She responds: "I love you too."

Though at the end of the film the actual physical place of the beach may be destroyed, its memory remains clear in the mind of Sam: "For Sam, within Suzy's person is always carried the vision of that place and that moment, the knowledge and the memory of their relationship in its most perfect instance" (Kornhaber, 121). He looks at Suzy as he paints a picture, "supposedly painting a portrait of Suzy" (121) – yet "a pan to his canvas in the film's closing moments reveals that while looking at her he was actually painting a landscape of the beach they once inhabited together" (121). It is here that we see that the beach is now named *Moonrise Kingdom*, the title of the film, of which the meaning only now becomes clear through this painting. Though the first picture of the film might have been one of a literal home, this beach is home to Sam – for Suzy is a home to Sam. The painting fades into a shot of the real place, now a memory, a picture in his mind – where they must have laid the words Moonrise Kingdom on the beach together. Anderson drew on his own memories of being in the theatre for this film (Kornhaber, 156), and the film is "a childhood memory, minus the scouts" (156).

Moonrise Kingdom is then a film embedded in childhood memory: memories of losing yourself in literature, memories of falling in love, and the memories Sam and Suzy make together on their journey, most importantly during their time on the beach together. They carry around objects of importance to them on their journey, and communicated through letters before they ran away. Although the beach where Sam and Suzy connected has gone, its memory remains preserved in Sam's mind and in the painting he makes of their beach. Sam still has the brooch connecting him to his parents, and Suzy still has her binoculars, her magic power. In the semi-final moments of the films, Suzy gazes at Sam through her binoculars – as Bordwell points out "What was she looking for? Now we know it was Sam. Although their magical summer has ended, the princess in the tower has found her prince" (417). Yet rather than being a princess needing to be saved, Suzy has a mind of her own, like the female protagonists in the books she reads. Sam and Suzy found each other.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the themes of family, loss and belonging within three of Wes Anderson's most successful films, focusing on how these themes relate to objects and places within *Rushmore* (1998), *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007) and *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012). In each of these films, characters who have lost something, or who come from troubled families, are searching for belonging, for a sense of family. *Rushmore*'s Max Fischer lost his mother, Rosemary has lost her husband, and Blume felt disillusioned with his family. *The Darjeeling Limited*'s Whitman brothers lost their father and reconnected with each other. *Moonrise Kingdom*'s Sam Shakusky lost both his parents, and Suzy feels disconnected from hers. Each of these characters is connected through their displacement.

The thesis has attested that objects embody a multiplicity of functions within these films: characters in the film use objects to mark their relation or belonging to another person, living or dead, or to a specific family, institution or class. Objects are used as means of communication (for example, the passport exchange in *The Darjeeling Limited*, or the exchanging of Rushmore pins in *Rushmore*), they are a means of self-expression (Max's green velvet suit in *Rushmore*), and they are markers of grief (Max's typewriter, the Whitmans' inherited luggage, Sam's brooch). They are also a way for someone to mark their place in the world (Suzy and her stolen books), or, in a lesser degree, can be used as a more dominating form of self-expression (Francis perceiving Peter's use of their dad's razor as him claiming the superior relationship with their father), and objects have a history (the book which allows Max to find Rosemary was a gift from her husband first). Many of these uses of objects have been linked to Kucich's account of the uses of objects in *The Mill on the Floss*. Rushmore, which is both a large object and a place, has a history like the mill, and means something different to different people. Most importantly, the objects in the films signify bonds between characters. Many objects have a connotation with or connection to another person; very rarely do objects have no emotional value to them, or no history. Car keys are not just car keys, they are dad's car keys – they are inherited, an heirloom. Objects are both extensions of the self and a way to form a connection with another. They

are gifted, received, returned and sometimes even stolen. Through reading her stolen storybooks, Sam and Suzy express themselves and share a moment in which they belong together.

As the characters search for belonging, they move through transient spaces such as schools, hotels, a train and a beach. The fact that these spaces are often temporary signifies the characters' lack of belonging, and their quest for it. One usually does not stay in a hotel forever, and Herman Blume and Jack Whitman went there when they had no home to belong in. As is inevitable in our connection to a school, Max ultimately has to leave his beloved Rushmore Academy (which in itself might be a rather static place of tradition, with its own history), and must do so prematurely at that. The Whitman brothers have to leave the Darjeeling Limited train, and the beach in Moonrise Kingdom is swept away by a storm. Not only these places, but also the objects in the film are not always forever: Max is able to somewhat let go of his attachment to his deceased mother, and discards his Rushmore uniform, keeping only the pin, and the Whitman brothers are able to let go of their father's luggage. Sam, who seemed not overly attached to the deceased to begin with, keeps his mother's brooch on his new clothing. Sam keeps the memory of the place of the beach, and preserves it in a picture – in a similar way that a photograph could, or a film – and of course Anderson's films likewise preserve for us these narratives, places and objects as well. The beach is key to the film, yet ultimately what it represents is his relationship to Suzy – Suzy is where he belongs, and this lasts. The characters in the films then each find their sense of belonging, in another. Max accepts his father, gains a girlfriend, and makes amends with everyone in the film; the Whitman brothers start to move on from their father's death and learn to accept their mother's continued disappearing – the brothers instead find their belonging together. Sam and Suzy have found their belonging within each other and their relation to each other, and Sam has found a new foster parent. Ultimately, Anderson's films are about finding belonging when you've lost it, and about forming connections.

There are a few things not discussed within this thesis which would be interesting for further research. One is the space of the house or home in other of Anderson's movies, especially that of *The*

Royal Tenenbaums' home. This space is a kind of time-capsule, and the characters in the film return to this familial home, which is not a moving space such as the train or boat, but a static space. According to Baschiera, there is detailed criticism written about Anderson's choice of this home, and this could be an interesting avenue to explore. Another aspect of Anderson's films not explored in this thesis is the concept of the 'vintage', something Baschiera also addresses – his films often take place in the past, and if they don't then at least the objects in them are from long ago: old typewriters, record players… Baschiera says that the characters in Anderson's films are "characters whose identities are built by objects, clothes, tastes and technology belonging to past generations […] objectifications of the time of their childhood" (130). He argues that this is the characters' way of "recreating a lost home and a lost father" (130), and that they can only "be the fathers they never had" when they free themselves from these objects. This reading is interesting, and a discussion of this in future work could be fruitful. One thing which Baschiera also notes is that the music in these films is from the past, and multiple critics have written about Anderson's use of music in the films. It would be interesting to explore the central music pieces in *Moonrise Kingdom*, the British Invasion music of *Rushmore*, the French and Indian sounds of *The Darjeeling Limited* and the 60s and 70s-fuelled *The Royal Tenenbaums*, which has songs ranging from Nico to The Beatles. As has been remarked upon in *The Darjeeling Limited* chapter, The Beatles, in fact, have inspired Anderson's work, and more research on the relationship between Wes Anderson and this particular band could be rewarding to conduct as well. Another aspect which could be further explored is the cultural one: the colours of India and America, the significance of France. A lot has been said about Anderson's films, and there is still more which can be said. A similar analysis to the one here done for *Rushmore*, *The Darjeeling Limited* and *Moonrise Kingdom* can also be done for any other film of Anderson, for example for *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*.

To conclude, this thesis has shed light on the use of many objects and places in Anderson's films, in relation to the themes of family, loss and belonging. Parallels can be found between the use of objects in these films and the use of objects in *The Mill on the Floss*. This hints that there are some common threads concerning our relation to objects which are universal: they don't belong to just

literature, or just film – or just to 19th century England or contemporary America. Objects have meanings attached to them, and we encounter this in our daily lives. In fact, there are some things about Anderson's films which are universal: though we might not all lose a parent early on, we all are seeking for a place to belong, for family, and we all connect to others or need to do so. No matter if the space you move through is temporary or static, Anderson's films show that there is always a way to find belonging, when you find someone to whom you can belong.

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