

# A microanalysis of the opening three minutes of 'the royal tenenbaums'

[Business](#)



For this essay I have chosen the first three minutes of 'The Royal Tenebaums'. I have chosen this sequence because I think it is full of meaning and sets the audience up well for the rest of the film.

I will be focusing particularly on camerawork and mise-en-scene I will relate these two to meaning making and audience response. We begin the film with a bird's eye view of the book 'The Royal Tenebaums', it is being taken out of a library. This is the establishing shot for the film it's as if we are taking the book out of the library ourselves and reading it, except by reading it we are actually watching the film. This idea continues throughout the film, which is structured as a book with chapters and narration. The use of the bird's eye view shot is noticeable it places the book in the centre of the screen facing us we can see it and are then prepared to be absorbed by its contents. The next shot shows a layout of many copies of the book used a background in front of which production companies names are credited.

We jump forwards, to a much closer view of the layout. The way the layout makes a background looks as though this is the front cover for the whole film. In the fourth shot, significantly the cover of the book, a shot of a dinner table against dark green curtains with a dinner invitation on it and a Dalmatian mouse by the side, becomes a real scene. The way in which we were brought closer to the books and then the scene became real is as if we have started reading the book and are now beginning to get some imagery, we are brought into the world of fiction. The diner invitation further works to invite you into this world, the mouse works almost to put you off; you wouldn't want to eat at a table with a mouse on it? Perhaps you don't want to watch this film? The next shot opens the book it's the 'PROLOGUE' page.

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The writing on the page is the voice over. The book here is actually being read to us. The audience now knows to expect at introduction, a prologue. On the top left of the page there is a little drawing of the three children which are our main characters. They are presented as caricatures, which makes sense they each have their own individual style and wear the same thing most of the time.

This is significant because after the prologue the film skips 22 years so we can still recognise our characters by their clothes and style. As we cut to the next shot the voice over begins. It is a shot from the top of the Tenenbaum's house showing their tower flying from which is their own families pennant and the surrounding area. It's worth noting here that the film is set in New York City and that this isn't obvious from any of the shots in the film. The fact the family has a pennant and would display it at the top of their tower shows its upper-class nature. The pennant is a graphically matched as we cut to the next shot which is a low-angle shot looking to the flag.

The low-angle emphasises the grander of the architecture of the house again another point of their wealth; that they have such a nice house and in New York. We tilt and jib down the three story house and are introduced to the three child geniuses, our main characters, one on each level. Significantly the song ' Hey Jude' starts playing at this point and runs in the background linking together the whole ' Prologue' sequence. The our first genius is Margot, there is an orange pleasant glow coming from her room, she is reading out the window and we can see cases of books behind her. The

books are significant as she is a playwright. The next genius is Chas he is the oldest and is shown to hold more authority than his younger siblings.

He is reading a newspaper out of his window, probably the financial times. We get a glimpse into his room which expels a less warm yellow light, the light is still in keeping with the warm colour tones of the film but less so than Margot's room. This shows Chas as a business minded kid, he is wearing a suit as well. The audience will be curious about this child in a suit, looking and acting like a business man. Lastly we are introduced to Richie, he is too wearing a suit but with a tennis headband and doing a drawing out the window.

Read also CRASH MOVIE ANALYSIS ESSAY The tennis headband is a reference to what makes him a 'genius' he becomes a professional tennis player and the drawing is important to the character it shows his aspirations to be an artist which didn't pan out. Further on in the film we see that all his drawings are of Margot and his love for her is a key element to the film we are being introduced to this, although we don't know it, in our first sighting of him here. The camera pans out to the street we see Royal (the father) walking up the steps to the house. The camera pans to the street symbolising his separation from the family and his rejection to the street.

The movement of the camera also gives pace to the shot which works well in accordance with the massive amount of information we are being introduced to. In the next scene Royal is facing his children at the dinner table, he is telling them he's leaving. They are shown in a low-angle shot united at the end of the table; there are two symmetrically placed candles behind them.

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This symmetry continues in later shots and represents the controlled environment the children live in, not oppressive but ordered. The low - angle shot shows the children to be imposing especially Chas who sits middle of shot with his arms crossed.

Royal is seen at the other end of the table he is further away and looks small in comparison with Chas this shows Chas's defiance of his father. There are empty chairs symmetrically either side of Royal, pointing out he is alone. He is wearing sunglasses in doors, his hair is slicked back, there is an ash tray with a cigarette in it next to him and his moustache give him the appearance of a wild character. Royal is first playing with his ring - he is nervous. Margot has her arms under the table and is looking down - she is upset. Royal has his fingers crossed.

In this scene the characters are revealed to the audience, first impressions are made and we form opinions of them. Chas is superior, Margot is sad but hiding it, Richie is openly upset and Royal seems like a bastard. This room in particular with its oak panelling, patterned wall paper, red velvet large chairs, the highly polished large dining table and Margot's la-cost T-shirt further the sense that this is certainly a family who don't worry about money. At the end of the scene we jump back to an over head shot of the children to see Royal brought a martini by a servant. The next shot pans down from the stairs to a phone booth type area under the stairs, on the way we see many many framed pictures which have been drawn by the children. The children are prized and displayed by the mother.

In the cut Royal is graphically matched to a boars head in amongst the kids pictures hung on the wall. The wild boars head is his and comes up in association with him later. He is already being matched with it. It could also represent his wild character. The scene we pan down to is one of Margot reading Chekhov, this another slightly more obvious connection to her being a playwright, Chas standing straight as he asks his mother for some money and Richie is his mother's lap.

The money is given without question. She trusts and facilitates her children. We cut to a detail shot of the cheque being written. Then back to mother then to a detail shot of an activities board which is altered. The children are prized and facilitated.

Cut to another background layout this time of the book; 'Family of Geniuses' which has been written by Ethal. She has written a book about her children, they are her life. The picture on the cover is the scene in the next shot so again we are shown a cover which then comes to life. The children are seen in the middle of the shot swamped by journalists, the cut is executed with a flash from a camera. Sound and light help the viewer go unconsciously from one to the other.

The press conference is a major event, there are big TV cameras and many journalists, this is another point where the children handle themselves like adults. The next series of shots are a montage to introduce Chas's character properly. We start with a shot of his open door. We can see a desk, files, Dalmatian mice and signs on the door reading; 'UPS PICK UP' and 'ALL DELIEVRIES RECEIVED HERE' his room is introduced by a caption; 'CHAS'

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ROOM (2nd FLOOR)'. Following this we track in to Chas eating breakfast standing up at his desk, on his desk there is a coffee machine, angle poised lamp, a computer, two telephones and a tray with a bowl of cereal, a glass of milk and the financial times. All this relates to the audience his business character yet he's still a boy.

The next shot is a low – angle shot showing power yet Chas is far away and appears small whilst looking through receipts, again a domineering business character but still a boy. The shot is of his room and the caption reads; 'WORK CENTER'. Next we have a close up of his collection of Fobes magazine. Then he is putting money into a safe, he is wearing a grey suit, his bunk bed is grey and so are most of the things in his room. We jib down his wall of six mice cages, he is feeding them using pipits and test tubes, they are his business, to be sold, not his pets.

When he is getting dressed we can see in his closet he has many of the same suit and shirt and tie. We tilt down from an eye-level view of detailed exercise plans to see Chas bench pressing still in shirt and done up tie. All of this mix of typically business things going on in such a young person's bed room the audience will find comical. It is important because this is how Chas is a 'genius'. Establishing shot of the family's country house on Eagles Island, which Chas negotiated the buying of.

The house has a turret similar to the tower on their main house. The fact they can afford two houses again shows their wealth. It is late afternoon, shadows are long. We cut to a POV of Chas looking out from a bush at his brother and brother's friend they are playing a gun game. The camera zooms

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in from the bush to the two boys as if they've been spotted. Chas get's ready to shot, we have a mid-length shot and can see the bush he's behind.

Royal at this point tells Chas to stop and aims at him from the roof of the house, we see Royal from a low-angle view. We view Chas's reaction shot from a high-angle these two work together. Behind Royal on the turret we can see the families pennant. Royal shots Chas with a BB gun.