

A profile of wes anderson

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“ I love the way that Wes Anderson has made his art his life. And you know, it’s a lesson to all of us, to take what you love and make it the way you live your life, and that way you bring love into the world”, said Bill Murray, the actor and a good friend of Wes Anderson. Wes Anderson has carved his name in the movie industry as a unique storyteller whose movies are easily recognizable due to a distinctive color scheme, a familiar cast of actors, and a detailed soundtrack that develops the storyline. His movies are set in a vague but nostalgic era, his stylized characters beautifully showcase the intended themes of Anderson’s movies, and he also reveals what he as an individual longs for in every movie that he creates.

Wesley “ Wes” Anderson was born on May 1, 1969 in Houston, Texas as the middle son of Melver Anderson and Texas Ann Burroughs. When he was eight, his parents divorced and he spent most of his childhood with his mom. His mother encouraged her boys to explore the unknown world and she frequently took her three boys to her work sites – archaeological digs. As a young boy, Anderson loved to read and found himself consumed with storytelling. He would direct and star in films that he created with his father’s Super 8mm camera. His schooling also influenced his movie making.

Anderson attended private schools for his elementary and middle school years, but went to a public high school. He was unhappy with the experience and ultimately, transferred and graduated from a private high school called Saint John’s School in Texas, where most of Rushmore was filmed. While he ends up criticizing the upper and bourgeois society in his later movies, it is evident that he longed to be part of that society just like the character, Max Fisher, in Rushmore (Brody). At the University of Texas in Austin, Anderson

met his long time friend and collaborator, Owen Wilson. From this friendship, Anderson and Wilson's first work, *Bottle Rocket*, was born.

Shown as a 13 minute short film at the 1993 Sundance Film Festival, it immediately caught the attention of Columbia Pictures' James L. Brooks, who offered to produce and create their short into a low-budget full length movie. While not a major hit, the "modest outcome of 'Bottle Rocket'" inevitably helped Anderson to create the 1998 hit, *Rushmore*. He was not very well known but now had the resources and experience he needed to create this first major success. Through *Rushmore*, Anderson met many actors that he would work with in almost all of his subsequent films (Brody). The next movie Anderson directed in 2001, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, was also a major success.

However, Anderson's next two movies were not received as well. *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004) and *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007), were too abstract and too avant-garde for most audiences and were considered to be failures in Anderson's career. Anderson was soon back on track and in 2009, he embarked on his first animation, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, using the hardest method of animating, stop-motion. The movie ended up being a huge success and all his hard work paid off as he received abundant praise and many awards for the movie.

His next two movies were even greater successes. *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012) was nominated for all the major American awards and *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) was nominated for 31 awards and won 19 of them (Brody). Wes Anderson uses his films to create a world where characters can safely work

on their conflicts. There is always abundant care that he showers on characters and their journeys through conflicts are supported with many details. Each of his movies focuses on a specific topic.

In *The Royal Tenenbaums*, Anderson examines the illusion of growing up in an all-American family. In *Moonrise Kingdom*, he delves into the “intense” emotion of the “on-the-cusp-of-adolescence” (Seitz [284]). Finally, in the *Grand Budapest Hotel*, Anderson lightheartedly criticizes the upper and bourgeoisie society using surrealism. Anderson reveals those themes through specific color scheme, intentional costume design, distinct soundtracks and particular casting. All of these aspects lend themselves into creating one clear vision that Wes Anderson wants all of the audience to understand. *The Royal Tenenbaums* is about a seemingly perfect yet dysfunctional family, that is brought back together by the impending death of their estranged father.

Upon the arrival of the three Tenenbaum children, it is evident that each of them, Chas, Richie and Margot, is still living in their respective glory days and is stuck in the past. Even though their father’s illness turns out to be a hoax, during the time the family is reunited, familial relationships between siblings, father and children, and husband and wife become resolved. Even though the Tenenbaum children seem to move on with their lives at the end of the movie, there is much evidence that they stay as their old selves (*The Royal Tenenbaums*). While Anderson today is known as a director with a strict and defined color scheme, his earlier movies like *The Royal Tenenbaums* do not actually exhibit a color format. Instead, he focuses on

detailed and consistent costumes, still making the movie evocative of a Wes Anderson film.

Each character has one or two outfits that eventually become synonymous with the characters. Margot's blue and white striped collared dress with her red pin, heavy eyeliner and long fur coat; Chas' bright red track suit and very curly hair; and Richie's white tennis shirt with blue stripes and collar, blue and red striped tennis head band, heavily tinted black aviators and a beige dress coat. Throughout the entire movie, the audience sees very few costume changes from the characters. Change of costume in an Anderson's film means that the character is going through a significant emotional metamorphosis (Browning 35). Richie changes from his tennis outfit into a hospital gown after a suicide attempt caused by his impossible and desperate love for Margot, but then quickly changes back into his tennis ensemble, the outfit he wears throughout the entire movie. Chas wears a suit, but after his wife dies he sports a bright red track suit.

Margot never once changes her outfit from her childhood blue and white striped dress expressing that she hasn't yet to break out of her childhood mold. While Anderson creates the illusion that the Tenenbaum children are able to move on from the happier periods of their lives in the storyline, the fact that they do not change clothes supports the claim that they are all still emotionally stuck in the past. This contributes to Anderson's analysis of growing up in an all-American family. They may seem perfect on the outside, but they are all tormented emotionally on the inside. Every Wes Anderson movie has a certain theme for the soundtrack.

In *The Royal Tenenbaums*, the theme of the soundtrack is melancholy and nostalgia. The music choices Anderson makes support the mood of each scene and a movie as a whole. The entire movie consists of characters regretting past actions with simplistic overtones. The audience cannot sense the characters' feelings of remorse just by the dialogue, thus the nostalgic music helps to evoke feelings. One specific example is the scene when Richie tries to commit suicide. *Needle in the Hay* by Elliott Smith overwhelms the scene and the audience is forced to focus on the action taking place on the screen.

This musical effect not only allows for the meaningful lyrics to be heard, but also dramatizes what is happening on the screen. Without the distraction of any unnecessary noises, the audience's attention is directed to witness Richie's blood pouring out from his arms into the sink. The song's lyrics also complement Richie's everlasting but devastating love for Margot, just like trying to find a needle in the hay. In *The Royal Tenenbaums*, Wes Anderson hardly uses any of the actors that we see in the majority of his movies. There are unique faces such as Gwyneth Paltrow, Ben Stiller, Gene Hackman and Danny Glover. Even though *The Royal Tenenbaums* was only the third movie in his career, Anderson already had built a troupe of actors that would appear in most of his subsequent films (Kunze 29).

He uses new faces in *The Royal Tenenbaums* to create one more level of chaos. The entire movie is a commentary on the illusion of the all-American family. The family may look perfect on the outside; three genius children, the parents are together and each family member is successful in their respective field. But in reality, the three children are emotionally tormented,

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the parents are only together legally and the children are not as successful as they grow older. Anderson uses the discordance of the actors to portray the distance of the family members.

For most of the actors, *The Royal Tenenbaums* was their first and only work together, which created a level of awkwardness and discomfort in the movie. That tension was very suitable for capturing the dynamic of the family; they have not seen or been in touch with each other for a long time and they do feel awkward around each other. Through the combination of these aspects in *The Royal Tenenbaums*, Anderson aims to bring forward the topic of growing up in an all-American family. The Tenenbaum family's situation is actually based off of his family. Anderson was the child of divorced parents, has two other siblings, grew up under the primary care of his mother who was an archaeologist – the vocation of Etheline Tenenbaum. While the rest of the story is a fiction and blown out of proportion, Anderson wants to emphasize that the picture perfect white family has many more issues than people perceive them as having.

Yet his wish to have a heroic dad who “died tragically rescuing his family from the wreckage of a destroyed sinking battleship” becomes visible on Royal Tenenbaum's epitaph (*The Royal Tenenbaums*). *Moonrise Kingdom* tells the story of a young and intense love between two twelve year olds, Suzy Bishop and Sam Shukusky, who feel alienated from the communities to which they belong. They eventually meet each other and instantly fall in love, experiencing feelings they have never felt before. As this is their first love, they experiment with feelings and actions that they think happen in adult romantic relationships. Finding a comfort in each other and the fact

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that they both feel as though no one understands what they are going through, they decide to run away together. Groups of adults look for them and their search reveals why Sam and Suzy feel marginalized.

Suzy's parents are so wrapped up in their own individual lives and personal dramas that they have had little time or energy to expend on figuring out their daughter and her struggles and are quick to assume that she is mentally unstable. Sam, on the other hand, deals with adoptive parents and siblings who constantly remind him that he does not fit in with their family. While they are eventually forced back home, Sam and Suzy are consoled by the fact that they now have each other (Moonrise Kingdom). The color scheme in Moonrise Kingdom is pastel yellow, light blue, and green. These three colors represent the majority of the scenery in the movie – the woods.

The woods and their colors signify the space in which Sam and Suzy are accepted for who they are and where they can escape from the adults who do not understand them. Coloring the movie with this palette reveals that Anderson empathizes with the young characters who are alone and misunderstood. By creating a comforting environment for them in the woods, they not only have each other to lean on, but also nature itself. Even though the adults around Sam and Suzy disregard their young but serious feelings and struggles, Anderson warmly envelopes these two children and their story in the palette of the woods as if saying it is going to be all OK. In Moonrise Kingdom, each character goes through one permanent costume change. In the beginning of the movie Sam Shukusky, one of the main characters, sports a boy scout uniform with a raccoon hat and beige knee high socks and Suzy Bishop, the other main character, is dressed in a pastel pink dress with <https://assignbuster.com/a-profile-of-wes-anderson/>

a white collar, a burgundy barrette, white knee high socks, church shoes and binoculars.

As their love for each other grows during their journey through the woods, their costumes do not change; Suzy is still in her pink dress and church shoes, and Sam is still in his boy scout uniform. The strength of their love is revealed during the climax of their journey, when they would rather commit suicide together than have Sam be taken away by social services to be placed in juvenile refuge to treat him with electroshock therapy. Only in the last five minutes of the movie do Sam and Suzy's costumes change. Sam, who ends up being adopted and gets placed under the care of Captain Sharp, the island's police, changes his boy scout uniform for a police uniform. Suzy switches out her pastel pink dress for a pastel yellow dress of the same cut and design. While there is a costume change for the both of the characters, this transformation, unlike the costume changes in *The Royal Tenenbaums*, does not seem to signify an emotional change, rather a change in their circumstances.

Sam, who is adopted by a policeman now sports a police uniform; before he wore a boy scout uniform because he was under the care of a boy scout leader, indicating that he is just wearing the clothes that represents the adult in charge of him. For Suzy, the color of her dress changes from pink to yellow after she and her mother start to communicate. After Suzy is forcibly brought home by her parents, Laura Bishop, Suzy's mother, gives Suzy a bath, during which Suzy reveals that she knows about her mother's affair and that she hates her mother. In that scene, Laura learns more about her own daughter

and starts to understand what she is going through. “ I do know what you are feeling Suzy babe.” “ Poor Suzy why is everything so hard for you.

” (Moonrise Kingdom). The mere color change of Suzy’s dress hints the possibility of resolution between Suzy and her mother. “ Dear Lionel, I need to use your record player. I will give it back in ten days or less. Do not tell mom (or dad).

I will replace the batteries when I return. Signed Suzy Bishop” (Moonrise Kingdom). In the opening scene of the movie, Lionel, Suzy’s younger brother, carries out a record player and listens to The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra by Benjamin Britten. The youthful classical piece that showcases each part of the orchestra seems to convey many colorful conflicts and struggles that the young characters go through and that eventually will resolve to create a beautiful harmony. All the music that follows sounds as if either coming from the record player or sung by fellow youngsters.

The soundtrack in Moonrise Kingdom marches together with the storyline like a cheerleader for the characters. Instead of drowning the young characters in their ever-so serious adolescent emotions, the music sympathizes and cheers them on so they can safely sail through their volcanic adolescence. The movie ends with Suzy’s brothers again listening to The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra on the same record player. By bringing back the opening scene, Anderson is able to accent the minimal changes that happen to Sam and Suzy’s life, which is the culmination of “ intense” “ on-the-cusp-of-adolescence” love (Seitz [284]). The Moonrise Kingdom cast is unique in the way that the two main actors are young children. Jared Gilman, who

plays Sam and Kara Hayward who plays Suzy were both only twelve years old and had never acted in any major films when they were cast for the parts (“ Moonrise Kingdom (2012)”).

As a result of this casting, Anderson successfully portrays the detached and misunderstood children and their adult like emotions such as love, hate and death. Anderson never seriously handles these emotions in his movies. Thus through his whimsical and stylized movie making, he narrowly escapes the gruesome truth of these raw emotions, but in Moonrise Kingdom, he lets his child actors present the emotional rollercoaster of romance and alienation to their fullest. The Grand Budapest Hotel is a story about the legendary concierge, Monsieur Gustave’s peculiar life at the luxury hotel that was frequented by wealthy clientele. Monsieur Gustave is very proud of the first-class service that he and the hotel staff provide, and he eventually becomes the recipient of the great inheritance.

The lobby boy, Zero who idolizes Monsieur Gustave becomes his confidant in stealing the inheritance against the family’s wish and eventually helps Gustave to escape the jail. The audience is introduced to Monsieur Gustave by a recollection of Zero told by the writer who encounters Zero at the rundown Grand Budapest Hotel decades later. By making the storyteller two degrees removed from the main character, Anderson could create a story almost like a fairytale. The death, the theft and the incarceration were chronicled like scenes from a children’s book. Keeping the distance from the reality gives Anderson a freedom to be as satirical as he wants to mock the behaviors of the upper class without damaging the aura of the class he cherishes (“ Wes Anderson”).

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Out of all Wes Anderson's movies, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* has the most surrealistic color scheme. The movie consists of pastel pink, purple and blue hues. During the hotel's peak, the employees are busying about in their purple uniforms, the building's facade welcoming the guest is pink, as are the interior walls, and all the small details from the hotel's rooftop to the ribbon ties of dessert boxes are all pastel blue. The repetition of these colors creates a fantastical universe. "The hotel itself is like a spread from a pop-up book; same with the mountains around it." (Seitz 34).

The color scheme of this movie paints the movie with a dreamlike brush. The biggest role of costumes in *The Grand Budapest Hotel* is to support the fairytale like storyline rather than emphasizing an emotional change within a character, as seen in *The Royal Tenenbaums*. While the costumes don't add emotional turbulence to the characters, details that were put into every costume certainly enrich and embellish the characters. For example, the costume of Madame D., who is played by Tilda Swinton, is a velvet yellow dress embellished with swirls and triangles pattern, a long pearl necklace and a full head of white hair.

The costume of Agatha, who is played by Saoirse Ronan, is a beige collared dress with a light beige fringe, a medal like necklace with a pair of crossed keys hanging by a blue ribbon, and a Mexico-shaped birthmark on her right cheek. With these heavy stylings, the characters' struggles become surreal and comedic. The soundtrack echoes the whimsical and surrealistic ambience of *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. The entire soundtrack consists of music by Alexandre Desplat composed just for *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. Almost every piece except one is instrumental music and the one piece that

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has voice is yodelling. Unusual instruments such as the zither, the cimbalom and balalaika were used to create the soundtracks (Southall).

By removing any conventional movie music instruments and singing, Anderson layers another element of surrealistic quality on the movie. The more removed and detached the movie becomes from the reality, the audience can safely laugh with Anderson about the mockery that he creates. Similarly to *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* features a unique group of actors and actresses such as Saoirse Ronan, Ralph Fiennes, Tony Revolori, and Jude Law (“*The Grand Budapest Hotel*”). Combination of Tilda Swinton as a heavily made-up old socialite, Ralph Fiennes as a melodramatic concierge and an unknown actor Tony Revolori as Zero gave the audience unfamiliar and surreal impression. Even though the movie had all of Wes Anderson’s signature elements, unexpected casting gave a twist to create a surreal and fantasy like movie.

Exaggerated but loving characterization mastered by these actors becomes the silly caricature of the upper bourgeoisie class and Anderson gleefully delivers the mockery to the audience. All of Wes Anderson’s movies seem to stem from one source, his childhood. During an interview about *Moonrise Kingdom*, the interviewer asks him if he had ever experience any love like the one Sam and Suzy have, and Anderson answers “...But for me, the story of *Moonrise Kingdom* is more or less what I was imagining at that age.

” (Seitz 284). Coming from a broken home, Anderson’s shared world was broken and his illusion of having a happy family was gone. Thus he created his own perfect world “...

I was a liar. I remember I was very dishonest, always trying to pretend to be rich. Drawing pictures of mansions, chateauxs in the Pyrenees. Page after page of fantasy – for myself.” (Schaefer). He wanted that perfect family that he saw his friends have and thus imagined it.

Within the same interview, he somewhat justifies his lying; “ It seems to me there is a lying which is just trying to bring fantasy into reality. Where you project an image of yourself that is false, maybe because you feel you are not exciting enough. The other is lying for deception. Where you want to cover your tracks, not get found out.” (Schaefer).