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psychiatry in the movies

Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel*

Roxanne Keynejad

I never lost my childhood awe of the author's creative power to craft characters from pure imagination. Perhaps this is why I chose psychiatry: the personalities and experiences of each patient remain far more vivid than anything I could think up. Wes Anderson, often lauded for his novel approach to film-making, challenges the perceived originality of creative genius in his latest film, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. Speaking of his success as the fictional Republic of Zubrowka's national hero, Tom Wilkinson's 'The Author' confesses at the outset that his much-loved classic is pinched from mundane reality.

So begins an exhilarating cinematic adventure, told through chapters of The Author's famed novel, inspired by the tale related to his younger self (Jude Law), of immigrant lobby boy Zero Moustafa (the twinklingly melancholy F. Murray Abraham, eternally the Salieri of 1984's *Amadeus* for most of us).

Wes Anderson is not for everyone. His ensemble cast set pieces, from *The Royal Tenenbaums* to *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, can seem self-satisfied. Cramping in so many famous faces can detract from the interest invested in each character, decorated with superficial quirks, rather than developing their stories in depth. With the right screenplay, however, this approach can be his films' greatest success. Never was this truer than in *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, whose doll's house set design and chaptered plot lend themselves to relating brief, transient episodes in multiple characters' intertwining lives.

Despite the brevity of each star actor's turn, Anderson succeeds in challenging many cinematic clichés. He transforms one of our most reserved thespians, Ralph Fiennes, into campily comic concierge, M. Gustave. Filming on a tight schedule, with the entire cast staying together, coupled with his characteristic cinematography and set design, achieves the sense of attending a theatre company production. By casting well-known actors against type, from Willem Defoe to Tilda Swinton, Anderson seems to suggest that we may all be playing temporary roles and might just as easily wake up one morning being someone else entirely.

The 80-year-old aristocrat Madame Céline Villeneuve Desgoffe und Taxis' romance, murder and contested legacy, a stolen painting, prison break and high-speed ski chase are set against the backdrop of impending war, threatening the tranquil alpine state's future. The once-grand hotel's sad decline into matt browns and oranges against which solitary guests dine, forms an allegory for the lost magic of post-war Europe.

The Author credits his fortune to a tale told by a lonely hotelier, alluding to the inspiration of Anderson's own screenplay by the writings of Austrian playwright and novelist Stefan Zweig (1881–1942). This charmingly escapist film offers a message that for all *The Grand Budapest Hotel's* apparent creativity, it too is pinched from reality – like, perhaps, all other works of fiction. So as we leave the cinema, returning to more mundane surroundings, we may take comfort from Anderson's proposition: that the real magic is where we are, right now.

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